



Department  
for International  
Development



## Putting young people at the heart of development: The Department for International Development's Youth Agenda



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## Introduction

We are in the midst of a unique youth bulge where 1.8 billion people<sup>i</sup> are between the ages of 10-24. This is particularly acute in developing countries where 90% of all young people live<sup>ii</sup>, with 42% of them in DFID countries<sup>iii</sup>.

At the Department for International Development we are committed to putting these young people at the heart of our work. Our programming will support young people to make successful **transitions** to adulthood, and we will work with young people as **agents** of social change and as passionate **advocates** seeking to shape and influence the world that they will inherit.

### Youth and the UK Aid Strategy

In November 2015, the Chancellor and Secretary of State for International Development launched the [UK Aid Strategy](#). The strategy has four strategic objectives:

- Strengthening global peace, security and governance: the government will invest more to tackle the causes of instability, insecurity and conflict, and to tackle crime and corruption.
- Strengthening resilience and response to crises: more support for ongoing crises, more science and technology spend on global public health risks, and support for efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Promoting global prosperity: the government will use Official Development Assistance (ODA) to promote economic development and prosperity in the developing world.
- Tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable: the government will strive to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030 and lead the world in [leaving no one behind](#).

It will simply not be possible to deliver on these objectives without engaging young people seriously:

- More than 600 million young people live in fragile or conflict afflicted areas<sup>iv</sup> and at least 25% of those affected by the Syria Crisis are aged 10-24<sup>v</sup>.
- 75% of young people in developing countries are underutilized, either unemployed or in irregular or informal employment: youth unemployment globally is three times the rate of adults<sup>vi</sup>.
- Over 500 million young people live on less than \$2 per day<sup>vii</sup>, in 2015 it is estimated that there are nearly 126 million young people, aged 15 -24, who are illiterate<sup>viii</sup>.

Pushed aside and marginalised young people can struggle to break out of deep rooted cycles of poverty and their deepening grievances can fuel instability - half of all lifetime mental health disorders start by the age of 14<sup>ix</sup>. But we want to work with young people as a force for positive change – as engines of growth, deliverers of development and changers of social norms.

*"I believe in the power of young people to be a force for good in the world. I see this all the time; in my constituency in Putney, in communities across the UK and around the world - young people are stepping up to really make a difference. That's why last year I committed that the Department for International Development would change the way that we do things, by putting young people at the heart of our development approach.*

*In September, we opened our doors to 300 young people for our first ever Youth Summit - designed and delivered by young people, for young people. The Youth Summit brought together a diverse group of young people from across the UK and developing countries, providing a platform for young people to call on the development sector to take their voices seriously. We listened. And so 6 months on, we'd like to share our progress and plans towards putting young people in the centre of our work." Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development.*



## Why does youth matter?



Young people make up a quarter of the world's population. They have the potential to be the answer to many of the world's problems. But the challenges are huge:

- 200 million young people have not completed primary school. About 60% of those are women<sup>x</sup>.
- Young people make up a third of those affected by conflict and disasters<sup>xi</sup>.
- Globally, 600 million jobs will be needed over the next 15 years<sup>xii</sup>.

We must face these challenges, working with young people to deliver better development.

### Agenda 2030

In September 2015 the world adopted a new set of Global Goals for sustainable development – aimed at eradicating extreme poverty, combatting climate change and fighting injustice and inequality. But Agenda 2030 is ambitious - everyone will need to play their part to ensure the Global Goals become a reality by 2030, and that no one is left behind.

For Agenda 2030 to be successfully realised, young people must be at the heart of implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Global Goals – without the full participation of young people we will not achieve sustainable development.

#### **Who are youth?**

*DFID takes a 'lifecycle approach' to youth, defining it as 'the period of time during which a young person goes through a formative transition into adulthood'. DFID mostly considers the 10-24 age range, but recognises that young people outside of this bracket will also be transitioning from childhood to adulthood.*

*Taking a lifecycle approach is valuable because it allows us to go beyond defining young people by age when identifying what it means to become an adult. It allows us to factor in those young people who are likely to be most excluded because they experience multiple discrimination – for instance young people with disabilities, LGBT people, girls and women and youth with mental health impairments.*

*It also enables us to take into consideration cultural and country contexts, and to examine the broader social, economic, political, physical, emotional and cultural changes that the transition to adulthood involves. DFID uses youth and young people interchangeably.*

DFID has developed a framework for our youth work, with young people at the heart of development as change makers, helping deliver development outcomes for all.



### Positive transitions

DFID has identified two transitions that are critical in determining whether girls and boys are put on a positive trajectory for the future, or whether poverty, negative social norms and lack of access to rights are reinforced, resulting in potentially irreversible losses.

#### i) Early adolescence

DFID will work to ensure that girls and boys are enabled to make safe, healthy and informed choices as they transition through puberty into their reproductive years. We will work to empower young people, giving them the best opportunity to fulfil their potential. Some key areas for focus are education, sexual and reproductive health rights and challenging the social norms that form a barrier to a successful transition to adulthood.

#### ii) From adolescence to adulthood

DFID will support young people to become equipped with the requisite education, skills, networks and opportunities to transition from adolescent to adult. This will include transitioning from education into productive work as well as wider societal, cultural and social changes. This will include considering our wider Economic Development work, ensuring that this meets the needs of young people in our priority countries.

DFID will focus on these two pivotal periods, working to ensure that our influencing and investments better support young people to make a positive transition into adulthood.

## Agents: young people delivering development

Around the world young people are driving social, political and economic transformations in their communities and countries. DFID wants to play a role in further unlocking the power of young people as development actors, delivering on the frontline and driving changes in harmful social norms.

We will look for opportunities to support **youth-led development agencies, youth movements and young individuals** who are bringing about local, regional and national change. We will work towards a DFID where young people are central to all aspects of our work. In the UK we will support young people to network and collaborate with peers overseas.

DFID has identified three areas which it will start to explore with young people to build their agency:

- 1) Integrating young people into DFID programmes – ensuring they are involved in design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation
- 2) Enabling young people to deliver development programmes on the ground
- 3) Supporting young people to fulfil their potential to shift social norms and change behaviour both of young people and the wider population

### **Youth as agents in humanitarian response**

*In 2015 young people demonstrated their role both as 'first responders' and in building the long term resilience of communities.*

*In Sierra Leone, DFID's social mobilisation response and focus on community behaviour change represented a critical pillar in getting Ebola to zero. Over an 18 month period, 2,000 young mobilisers worked in partnership with community leaders to trigger communities to take their own measures to protect themselves.*

*In Nepal, young people drove community-led disaster response in the aftermath of the earthquake of April 2015. Thousands of volunteers helped set up camps and distribute food, tents, and medicine.*

*In Syrian communities where effective government structures are absent, early accounts suggest young people are playing an active role in community life, in building resilience, and in resolving conflict, both inside Syria and with Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.*



Mohamed Rogers stands in Waterloo cemetery – one of Freetown's safe burial areas for the victims of Ebola. Mohamed had been a student before Ebola hit Sierra Leone - but the terrible impact of the disease drove him to take action. He stopped his studies to join a roving burial team in Freetown as a stretcher bearer.  
Picture: Simon Davis/DFID

## **Advocates: young people making their voices heard**

We aim to **amplify young peoples' voices** in decision making, **strengthen their participation** in political and development processes. At a local, national and international level, DFID will look for opportunities to provide a **platform for young voices**, enabling them to contribute to the decisions that will affect them, and supporting them to advocate for delivery of Agenda 2030.

DFID has identified four areas which it will start to explore for engaging young people as advocates:

- 1) Young people making their voices heard by decision makers, with young people contributing to service delivery and political processes at a local and national level
- 2) Young people holding governments to account for delivering better quality services and improved development outcomes
- 3) Young people having access to and the capacity to use data and information to hold decision makers to account
- 4) Young peoples' voices being heard on the international stage to influence the implementation of the Global Goals

### ***Using ICT and mobile technology to improve accountability***

*In Uganda, uReport (supported by UNICEF) is a mobile phone, text based service designed to give young people a chance to voice their opinions on issues they consider important for their communities, encourage citizen-led development and create positive change.*

*Young "social monitors" are sent regular polls on issues such as health concerns, employment opportunities, available services in their communities, and receive useful facts for action and advocacy. Answers are analysed and displayed on a public dashboard which are then mapped according to district and collated at a national level.*

*uReport is considered a simple, inexpensive, and effective way to get real-time feedback on projects in the field and to ensure that aid programs are being targeted correctly (UNICEF, 2015).*

### ***Global Advocates for development***

*In September 2015, DFID opened its doors to 300 young people for its first ever Youth Summit. Designed by young people, for young people, the Youth Summit provided a platform for young people's voices to be heard by decision makers.*

*Following the Youth Summit, two Youth Delegates went to the UN General Assembly with the Secretary of State, to represent the views of young people.*

*DFID wants to support young people to be global citizens – young people who are passionate about development and advocate for the delivery of the Global Goals. Through International Citizen Service, we have supported over 20,000 18-25 year olds to volunteer overseas, and our Connecting Classrooms and Global Learning Programme bring development into the classroom, linking young people in the UK and overseas.*

*We will continue to support global citizenship, amplifying young people's voices and helping them to be heard at a local, national and international level.*

## DFID's Approach

To successfully put young people at the heart of development DFID is making changes to the way it works in our headquarters and across our priority countries. These changes are being shaped by young people across diverse contexts.

### At the centre

DFID's Youth Team will drive the youth agenda forwards from the centre as a focal and coordinating body. Working closely with policy teams across DFID, we will:

- **Build the evidence base:** the Youth Team is commissioning research and synthesising the evidence on what works. We will move towards youth-led research, aiming to involve young people in the process of developing our policy.
- **Build partnerships:** the Youth Team is building strategic partnerships across UN organisations, the World Bank, Civil Society, the Private Sector and other donors, to further the global commitment towards amplifying young people's voices, and putting young people at the heart of development.
- **Link up with colleagues:** across DFID policy areas, we will work to embed the youth agenda into DFID's work.
- **Evolve organisational systems:** the Youth Team will work to enable young people to participate in our work.
- **Support young leaders and global citizens:** DFID will work to support young people to be leaders at a local, national and international level, and help those who are passionate about development to advocate for the delivery of the Global Goals.

### In country offices

The youth agenda is taking root across DFID country offices, with approximately half of our priority countries already addressing the youth agenda. Country offices will take on the youth agenda in a way that makes sense for their specific context, but some common themes are:

- **Youth Advisory Panels:** country offices are setting up formal youth advisory panels to consult on DFID country strategy; design, delivery and evaluation of programmes; and DFID's ways of working with young people.
- **Young staff:** some country offices are setting up graduate and internship schemes to ensure that young people are represented in the DFID work force.
- **Programming:** country offices are looking at their programming through a youth lens, ensuring that they are adequately meeting the needs of young people.
- **Youth strategies:** working closely with young people, country offices are developing youth strategies, setting them on course for increasing and improving their youth participation.

#### **DFID Nigeria Youth Consultations**

*DFID Nigeria set-up focal youth group discussions across six states. They discussed what young people think are the main challenges facing Nigeria, which included insecurity, poverty, drug abuse, unemployment, bribery, corruption and education. The reports from each of these consultations will inform DFID Nigeria's youth position paper.*



Some of the girls that took part in the DFID Nigeria youth consultation.  
Picture: DFID

## Conclusion

DFID has made good progress towards our commitment to put young people at the heart of development. We have developed a clear policy approach and are seeing the youth agenda take root across the DFID network.

Our vision is one where:

- The **opportunities and challenges** of the youth demographic are taken seriously and integrated into the analysis and decision making which shapes how DFID influences and delivers the global development agenda.
- The **voices of young people** are more systematically incorporated into the design and delivery of our interventions and in the monitoring and evaluation of their impact.
- DFID supports the potential of young people to be a **powerful force for good** – amplifying their voice, enabling them to be partners in delivering development and supporting them to drive solutions to some of the world's most intractable problems.

**We will continue to embed this agenda within DFID, working to empower young people locally, nationally and internationally to be agents and advocates for change, at the centre of Agenda 2030.**



We would welcome your feedback. If you would like to share your views and comments, or ask any questions, please email [youth@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:youth@dfid.gov.uk) to join the conversation.

### Front cover photos (clockwise from top left):

- Education is the strongest predictor of marriage age so staying in school is key for Bayush (far left) and her friends. In partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, the DFID-funded Finote Hiwot programme is helping at least 37,500 adolescent girls, and indirectly many more, to avoid child marriage in Ethiopia. Photo: Jessica Lea/DFID
- FGM/C is a powerful social norm that has been carried out for thousands of years. To try and break the cycle, the Burkina Faso government have included FGM/C in the curriculum to teach both boys and girls about the consequences of cutting when they're at school. Photo: Jessica Lea/DFID
- #YouthForChange was an event for youth, by youth to help take action on girls' rights. It was a one-day conference that took place on Saturday 19th July 2014, at the headquarters of the Department For International Development in London. Photo: Russell Watkins/Department for International Development

### References:

<sup>i</sup> Estimated figure as of 1 July 2015, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, DVD Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> UNFPA (2014) State of the World's population [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report\\_FINAL-web.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> DFID Statistics

<sup>iv</sup> UNDP (2016) Practice Note: Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/practice-note--young-people-s-participation-in-peacebuilding.html>

<sup>v</sup> UNICEF (2014) [http://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF\\_Syria\\_Crisis\\_Situation\\_Report\\_13Oct2014\\_.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Syria_Crisis_Situation_Report_13Oct2014_.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> S4YE (2015) Toward Solutions for Youth Employment: A 2015 Baseline Report

[https://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/Toward\\_Solutions\\_for\\_Youth\\_Employment\\_Full.pdf](https://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/Toward_Solutions_for_Youth_Employment_Full.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> UNFPA (2014) State of the World's population [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report\\_FINAL-web.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> UNESCO (2014) Adult and youth literacy <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Documents/fs-29-2014-literacy-en.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2009) Treatment of Children with Mental Illness: Frequently Asked Questions about the Treatment of Mental Illness in Children <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED507899>

<sup>x</sup> UNDP, Empowered Youth Sustainable Future, <http://bit.ly/1NgLyLt>

<sup>xi</sup> UNFPA (2015) <http://esaro.unfpa.org/news/frontlines-humanitarian-response>

<sup>xii</sup> ILO, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1pFBrFw>