Helpdesk Research Report

Development outcomes of the political and social inclusion of young people

Becky Carter

17.07.2015

Question

What evidence is there on the development outcomes of the political and social inclusion of young people? Review the evidence in lower and middle income countries for including young people (10-25 years) in political processes, formal institutions and governance structures (political inclusion) and informal institutions such as household and community structures (social inclusion). What development outcomes (positive and negative / costs and benefits) are associated with these forms of inclusion, both for the youth cohort as well as wider society?

Contents

1. Overview

There is a consensus among development organisations that the political and social inclusion[1] of young people[2] will result in positive outcomes for the young people themselves and for society in general. This is part of a broader focus by donors on social inclusion which first gained prominence at the World Summit

---

[1] Large related literatures on the economic and service (education and health) inclusion of young people are not covered by this review.
[2] This review looks at evidence on young people from the ages of 10 to 25. To be concise this report uses the terms children and young people, young people, and youth interchangeably, and repeats the terminology used in source materials without explaining the age range being used by each source. Youth refers to both young men and young women.

for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 and is a central theme in the post-2015 development agenda. Many commentators highlight the demographic imperative of ensuring young people's ownership and involvement in any development effort, with youth aged 10-24 years old accounting for nearly a third of the world's population and just under 90 per cent living in poorer countries (Pereznieto and Hamilton Harding, 2013: 1).

There is a lot of literature on children and young people and development, including a large theoretical literature on why development should involve children and young people. There is a smaller empirical evidence base for the development outcomes of the political and social inclusion of young people, largely based on qualitative case study material and some secondary analyses. Many reviews emphasise the findings of positive outcomes (Asker and Giro 2012; Pereznieto and Hamilton-Harding 2013; Save the Children 2008; Walker et al 2014). However, a literature review by Balcoso et al (2015 forthcoming) concludes that the impact of youth participation remains contested. There is some discussion in the literature on the limitations of the evidence, in particular its variable quality, a tendency not to critique outcomes in-depth, and methodological and data constraints. There is more on outcomes of processes (participation levels in processes, policies approved etc.) and less exploration of the more intangible and longer-term impacts.[3] Some experts highlight that it may be premature to try to measure broad-based change, as many initiatives are in the early stages (Asker and Gero 2012).

The findings refer to outcomes of an extensive range of initiatives:

- In the **formal political sphere and in social structures**. This rapid review found relevant evidence on the outcomes of political inclusion through searching literature on young people's political participation. There appears to be less of a focus in the academic literature on social participation and its outcomes (Bacalso et al 2015 forthcoming). Some of the literature reviews on young people's inclusion, however, cover both political and social initiatives.

- Covering a **variety of forms**: at different points in a programme cycle (from planning to monitoring and evaluation); different roles undertaken by youth (as beneficiaries, partners, leaders); different forms of engagement (from legal frameworks to policy processes to setting up organisations); and different levels (local, national and global).

The key findings are:

- There is evidence – albeit limited, mixed and context-specific – from qualitative case studies of **a wide range of development outcomes** from the political and social inclusion of youth. These include dividends for the young people themselves and their communities, as well as society more generally.

- Some development actors see youth participation as an end in itself – children and young people's enjoyment of meaningful participation is an **intrinsic human right**.

- Historical events show young people can be a positive force for **transformative social change**, such as in the transition to democracy and economic openness in Latin American countries, the political reforms in Eastern and Central Europe, and the adoption of new information technologies everywhere (World Bank 2006: 167).

---

[3] These limitations to the evidence base echo conclusions of reviews of the broader literature on voice, empowerment and accountability approaches (Combaz and Mcloughlin 2014) and inclusive societies approaches (see for example Carter 2015).

- In addition, case study evidence shows how, under the right conditions, inclusive social initiatives – such as peer groups and peer educators – can **help change harmful practices** such as child marriage.

- Young people report the benefits from greater civic engagement of increased social capital through **enhanced skills, confidence and self esteem**, and greater awareness of their rights. In turn parents report improved capacities and the **positive benefits to local communities**. (SWP and DFID CSO-YWP 2010: 19)

- The literature highlights the **potential costs for social stability** of not involving young people in political and social processes. There is a small literature on the positive contribution of children and young people to **peacebuilding**, although findings tend to be mixed and context specific.

- The literature links child and youth participation, and **development and aid effectiveness**. There are success stories of participation leading to better informed and more effective policy and planning, budgeting and programme management. There is also evidence from cases where young people's political and social inclusion has improved the quality of education and health services.

- The literature reviewed consistently highlights that the desired impacts of youth inclusion are not automatic. There are significant barriers to meaningful participation. Outcomes can be negatively affected in particular if support for inclusive initiatives do not actively seek and support the participation of **marginalised and excluded young people** – in particular girls and young women, ethnic minorities, young people with disabilities, youth affected by HIV/AIDS, youth slum dwellers, or other excluded groups.

The literature points to the following **research gaps**: longitudinal research in low and middle income countries on the impact of young people's political and social inclusion; the outcomes of young people's inclusion in social structures and processes; and young people's inclusion in peacebuilding efforts. There appears to be little empirical evidence from low and middle income countries on the link between greater civic engagement and young people's future political engagement, or on the economic outcomes of greater political and social participation. There is some literature focused on analysing the effects of including girls and young women. Other literature that covers young people's inclusion more generally does not always analyse potential gender dimensions and drivers of outcomes.

This rapid review found discussion of the costs of exclusion of young people but no discussion of the costs of inclusion. This review also did not find much mention of negative outcomes from including young people, although there is some discussion of potential risks. These include when raised expectations are unfulfilled by tokenistic initiatives, or when undertaking participation in conflict-affected contexts.

2. Evidence on development outcomes

Intrinsic human right

A rights-based approach sees inclusion as a fundamental right. Several international conventions and declarations (including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the World Programme of Action for Youth, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) set out the framework for children's and young people's right to participate in society and in political and social decision-making (UNDP 2013 and UN-Habitat 2013). In addition, another common argument is that the right to participation is a prerequisite for the realisation of all rights for children and young people, such as in health, education or protection (Bacalso et al 2015 forthcoming).

Transformative social change

Another dividend of youth participation is their contribution to **defining and achieving positive change** (World Bank 2006: 167). UN agencies and the World Bank highlight the importance of youth "as a positive force for transformative social change" (UNDP 2013; World Bank 2006). Policy and research papers talk of numerous examples of powerful youth-led protest movements and successful youth advocacy for greater respect of their rights (UNDP 2013: 15; Lansdown 2004). Young people have been involved in a diverse range of political and social movements, from street movements to school-based clubs, advocating on broad values (e.g. pro-democracy) or issues (e.g. avoiding early marriage, access to education, ending discriminatory practices and exploitative conditions of work) (World Bank 2006; Lansdown 2004). These findings tend to be stated with either a brief list of historical examples (see World Bank 2006 for a list spanning the past century and multiple continents) or without further detail on the supporting evidence base (UNDP 2013; Lansdown 2004).

There are evaluations of interventions to promote **changing harmful traditional practices** that involve supporting young people's social inclusion. There is evidence of some positive – though not automatic – outcomes from these interventions. It is not always possible to separate the impact of the social inclusion support from the whole package of activities involved. For example, a systematic review of child marriage prevention programmes finds that strategies focusing on girls' empowerment, community mobilization, enhanced schooling, economic incentives and policy changes have improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour related to child marriage prevention (Malhotra 2011: 2). The review finds that the strongest, most consistent results are shown in a subset of programmes fostering information, skills, and networks for girls in combination with community mobilization (ibid.).

Evaluations of youth participation interventions find that young people can be important **peer role models**. They can introduce adolescents to new ways of thinking and doing things, letting them challenge traditional practices as they become better able to communicate with their peers (Ghimire and Samuels 2014; SWP and DFID CSO-YWG 2010). They can become important agents for change when they take up positions as local leaders, heads of peer groups, government representatives or local teachers, according to research on social norms and adolescent girls in Nepal (Ghimire and Samuels 2014).

Social capital

When questioned on the benefits of civic engagement, younger people consistently cite the acquisition of skills, enhanced confidence and self-esteem, and greater awareness of their rights, according to the literature review by SWP and DFID CSO-YWP (2010: 19). In turn parents report improved capacities and positive benefits to local communities. Another evidence review concludes that, "common outcomes of child and youth participation include increased access to decision-making and increased influence, advocacy and voice, which can all lead to better development outcomes" (Aske and Gero 2012: 15).

One case study examines the USAID-funded USD 55 million programme in Kenya to empower young people. An independent mixed-method impact evaluation found that young people's participation in community groups – *bunges* – increased participants' self-confidence and self-esteem. It also fostered their civic engagement, facilitating engagement with political leaders in some cases. However, quantitative measures of engagement with political actors and the political process did not show a significant impact of the programme, and youths continued to report that politicians were generally unresponsive to their needs. The experience of coming together and working towards a common goal also led to important benefits for the youth who participated, while the specific purpose or activities of the *bunge* did not have a strong impact on outcomes.

There is a related body of evidence on the outcomes of women's involvement – including young women – in small community groups set up around economic programmes, such as cooperatives or self-help groups. This kind of social inclusion has been credited with creating new or strengthened forms of social capital. In turn, this has increased awareness of community politics, avenues to discuss community-related issues around social norms (such as gender-based violence), and contact with local officials (Domingo et al 2015: 85). The literature tends to refer to women in general, and does not often analyse the findings for young women. The review by Domingo et al found only a handful of studies focusing on social accountability and young women (ibid.). There is also limited evidence on the relationship between individual empowerment outcomes and benefits for the broader society, for empowerment more generally as well as youth empowerment (Combaz and Mcloughlin 2014). For example, there is little empirical evidence on how household-level changes in economic decision-making roles directly translate into collective voice and political action (Domingo et al 2015).

Social cohesion and peacebuilding

Donor and academic literature highlight **the potential costs for social stability** when young people are not involved in political and social processes (World Bank 2006; UN-Habitat 2013). The World Bank (2013: 2) posits that "The Arab Spring may have been the most costly recent reaction to the exclusion of educated youth—from labour markets but also, and perhaps mainly, from political decision making and accountability". UNDP cautions that excluding youth from new formal decision-making is likely to create significant frustration and have a potential destabilising effect on democratisation, in countries where youth-led protests have contributed to forcing authoritarian regimes from power (UNDP 2013: 15).

Children and young people have tended to be excluded from processes of peace and security, but there is a **growing awareness of their critical role in promoting peace**, with vocal advocates including the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (2013). Their engagement has taken myriad forms, as described in Save the Children's global thematic evaluation on children's participation in armed conflict, post-conflict and peacebuilding (Save the Children 2008). Political participation has commonly involved the development of national youth councils/parliaments or forums. Social programmes to train youth in leadership, social responsibility and advocacy and to support them in establishing their own community development projects have also been popular (Haider 2011).

Case studies provide details of outcomes. One example in a synthesis by UN Volunteers lists the positive impacts of supporting young women returnees in Northern Uganda through peer support groups that provided them with counselling and helped them return to school (UN Volunteers 2011: 70). For children, Save the Children's (2008) global thematic evaluation provides in-depth case studies from Uganda, Guatemala, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Nepal. The evaluation provides a long list of outcomes. These include individual benefits to the children, and in some cases, concrete actions taken by communities, school authorities, local authorities, or NGOs to address protection issues affecting girls and boys in their local communities or schools (Save the Children 2008: 120-121). In her review of peacebuilding interventions involving youth, Haider (2011) cautions that evidence on the impact of political participation is mixed and is context specific.

Policy and programme outcomes

The literature links child and youth participation and development and aid effectiveness (Asker and Gero 2012; Walker et al 2014). Involving young people in development activities helps tailor programmes to their strategic needs, making them more likely to lead to effective development, according to a guide on

youth participation by the Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW) and the DFID-CSO Youth Working Group (YWG) (2010). Young people are important stakeholders in government and other development actors' policy and programme processes, as they make up the majority of the population in developing countries, and are disproportionately affected by development issues (ibid.: 37).

A rapid review of a selection of case studies finds some positive outcomes but also mixed findings and context specific drivers and challenges affecting impact. Here is an illustrative selection of case studies:

Informed policy and planning

A review for Plan UK of children and young people's participation in government decision-making spaces and processes, prioritising the Global South but also including richer countries, highlights a series of positive case studies. It finds that children were able to influence final statements at conferences (War Affected Children conference) or develop a programme of future action (Millennium Young People's Congress). At other events (Zimbabwe Child Parliament) child delegates were present and actively engaged in developing recommendations. (Kirby and Kwast 2009)

UNESCO's analysis of Lebanon's National Youth Policy (adopted in 2012) and the participative process reports a number of factors constraining effectiveness. These include the extent of youth participation (as it excluded the average youth with no political affiliations and not involved in civil society) and political changes affecting implementation. (UNESCO 2013)

Informed budgeting

Various case studies highlight positive outcomes from participatory budgetary experiences. For example, the Municipality of Rosario in Argentina undertakes a participatory youth budget which engages 1,000 youth annually from across its six districts to select representatives and decide upon budget allocations for youth services. Outcomes have included identification of gaps in provision and funding allocated for new community initiatives, and Development of new democratic skills, knowledge and attitudes among the young people involved (SWP and DFID CSO-YWP 2010: 67).

The World Bank (2006: 53) highlights the experience of the municipality of Fortaleza, Brazil, which improved budget processes and outcomes by including young people in the deliberations and providing them with training. The NGO involved – CEDECA-Ceará – says that their efforts resulted in an additional allocation of $400,000 to children and young people in 2004 and $760,000 in 2005.

More effective programme management

UN-Habitat (2013) finds growing examples of meaningful youth participation in various stages of programme-cycle management, from youth-led participatory situational analysis to youth-led programme monitoring and evaluation. For example, the youth Tribal Liaison Office in Afghanistan facilitated district participatory rural development assessments, helping USAID and the provincial governor conduct development projects in some of the most unstable areas (UNDP 2013: 46).

From their case study review, SWP and DFID CSO-YWG (2010: 77) find that: "Youth-led monitoring and evaluation (M&E) facilitates the design of realistic and practical tools, as well as building transferable skills and ensuring that young people's input to decision-making is informed and consistent". They cite the example of a youth empowerment programme in Uganda which has young people leading field-based M&E

as part of their activities on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Results have included better targeting of beneficiaries, and increased voice, influence and agency of young people (ibid.: 78).

Improved services

There is evidence that young people's political and social inclusion can improve service quality, through participating in the governance of services or through collective action to pressure governments to improve performance (World Bank 2006).

Save the Children Ecuador supports adolescents in several provinces in Ecuador to create and strengthen school student councils. According to UNICEF (2010: 21), these councils have helped monitor new policies and practices implemented in the schools as well as serving as a space for capacity building as the adolescents involved have been able to advocate for their rights to education and protection.

A review of young people's involvement with National AIDS Authorities (NAAs) across Southern Africa highlights that the benefits from youth participation to NAAs and to young people are inextricably linked (Drury 2010). There are direct, tangible benefits to NAAs such as increased access to valuable human resources. There are also many benefits to young people as a result of their participation, such as an increased sense of value and ownership. This in turn provides further benefits to NAAs such as being able to better fulfil their objectives through more effective programmes and policies. (Drury 2010: 10)

Future political participation

Moreover a common statement in donor policies and other research is that investing in youth citizenship will influence the future patterns (extent and kind) of political participation (World Bank 2006: 167; also UN-Habitat 2013, UNDP 2013, Pereznieto and Hamilton Harding 2013). The World Bank (2006) finds that the formative nature of early political behaviour is generally stronger for symbolic attachments (party affiliation) and the extent of participation than for other political variables, such as location on the left-right political scale or attitudes toward specific policies (World Bank 2006: 164-165).

The empirical evidence for these conclusions on future political participation appears to be based on research from the United States, including longitudinal studies tracking civic participation among youth cohorts into adulthood (for example see studies cited in World Bank 2006). This brief review could not find similar longitudinal empirical research from poorer countries on the impact of youth participation on adult civic behaviour. There is however case study evidence from middle and low income countries that opportunities to participate in political and social decision-making can help build young people's commitment to the democratic process and a human rights culture (Golombek 2002; UN-Habitat 2013).

Economic outcomes

The positive impact of political and social inclusion, essential for good governance, **on private investment and growth**, is spelt out in the 2006 World Development Report on development and the next generation (World Bank 2006: 9). This brief review has not, however, been able to find empirical evidence on the relationship between young people's political and social participation, and a broader economic impact.

Turning to individual economic outcomes, the 2006 World Development Report also reported that active citizenship can broaden the **access of previously excluded groups** to opportunities for growth and higher living standards, particularly in the case of women and young people. Women's groups in Nepal are

mentioned as giving women[4] more influence on household expenditures, and making them more likely to support their daughters' schooling (ibid.: 165).[5]

3. Challenges that affect outcomes

The literature highlights some common challenges that affect the outcomes of youth inclusion in political and social processes. Despite the rise in child and youth participation structures and spaces, experts conclude that there remain challenges in converting these opportunities into the wide-spread and effective participation of young people – and therefore in achieving the desired development outcomes (Bacalso et al 2015 forthcoming). In some contexts, youth political participation achieves genuine and influential participation; in others, the entry point of establishing processes and structures requires further work with both adults and youth, government and civil society, to increase participation beyond the level of tokenism (Haider 2011). Common barriers to achieving outcomes include:

- The risk that activities are **tokenistic and do not give effective voice and influence** in decision-making (UNDP 2013; UNICEF 2010).

- **Technical capacity and systemic constraints**: Individual young people may lack technical skills, knowledge, economic resources and motivation to participate in new, often formal and adult-led, processes. Organisationally, youth-led groups typically face capacity and economic constraints.

- **Discriminatory social norms**: these drivers of inequality and social exclusion may inhibit young people from participating. Significant inequalities marginalise many youth – such as young women, rural and ethnic minority young people, young people with disabilities, youth affected by HIV/AIDS, youth slum dwellers, and other excluded groups – from established mechanisms of participation. Their contributions need to be actively sought and supported (Pereznieto and Hamilton-Harding 2013: 23; UN-Habitat 2013: 29; Walker et al 2014).

- **Formal political rules and procedures**: these often do not support inclusion of youth. Moreover most interventions to support youth participation in government programmes and policies are scattered, far from being institutionalised. Successful youth programmes require supportive, co-ordinated legal and policy frameworks, and need to be understood as a process not a one-off (SPW and DFID CSO-YWG 2010: 11-13; UN-Habitat 2013: 29; UNICEF 2010: 19; Walker et al 2014).

4. References

Asker, S. & Gero, A. (2012). *The role of child and youth participation in development effectiveness a literature review*. Surrey Hills: Child Fund Australia.
http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/files/Role_of_Child_and_Youth_Participation_in_Development_Effectiveness.pdf

Bacalso, C., Farrow, A. & Karsten, A. (2015). *The case for space: Research brief*. Youth Policy Labs, Unpublished working paper.

---

[4] The World Bank's (2006: 165) brief summary does not state the age of the women involved in this initiative.
[5] Other studies highlight that in certain cases young people mobilise around economic rights; the literature on young people's economic empowerment is a large, separate body of research and is not covered by this review.

Carter, B. (2015). *Benefits to society of an inclusive societies approach* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1232). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. To be published.

Drury, G. (2010). *Youth participation and leadership: an effective tool in combating HIV / AIDS in Southern Africa*. London: Student Partnerships Worldwide. http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/youth-participation-and-leadership-pdf

Combaz, E. & Mcloughlin, C., (2014). *Voice, empowerment and accountability: Topic guide*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/GSDRC_VEA_topic_guide.pdf

Domingo, P., Holmes, R., O'Neil, T., Jones, N., Bird, K., Larson, A., Presler-Marshall, E. & Valters, C. (2015). *Women's voice and leadership in decision-making. Assessing the evidence*. London: ODI. http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9627.pdf

Ghimire, A. & Samuels, F. (2014). *Continuity and change in social norms for Nepali adolescent girls: the drivers and inhibitors of early marriage and education*. London: ODI. http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9482.pdf

Golombek, S. (Ed.) (2002). *What works in youth participation: Case studies from around the world*. International Youth Foundation. http://www.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/WW_Youth_Participation.pdf

Haider, H. (2011). *Helpdesk Research Report: Youth statebuilding and peacebuilding interventions.* Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham. http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Helpdesk&id=771

Kirby, P. & Kwast, E. (2009). *Literature review: youth participation in decision-making processes*. Plan UK: London. http://www.plan-uk.org/resources/documents/40221/

Lansdown, G. (2004). *Programming strategy with and for adolescents in East Asia and Pacific*. Bangkok: UNICEF.

Malhotra, A., Warner, A., McGonagle, A. & Lee-Rife, S. (2011). *Solutions to end child marriage. What the evidence shows*. International Center for Research for Women. http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Solutions-to-End-Child-Marriage.pdf

Pereznieto, P. & Hamilton Harding, J. (2013). *Investing in youth in international development policy. Making the case*. London: ODI. http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8413.pdf

Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW) and DFID-CSO Youth Working Group (YWG) (2010). *Youth participation in development. A guide for development agencies and policy makers*. London: DFID–CSO Youth Working Group. http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/youth-participation-in-development-pdf

UN-Habitat (2013). *Advancing youth civic engagement and human rights with young women and young men.* Nairobi: UN-Habitat. http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2013_Advancing_Youth_Civic_Engagement_Human_Rights_Eng.pdf

UN Volunteers (2011). *Chapter 6 volunteerism, cohesion and conflict management. State of the world's volunteerism report 2011.* http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/SWVR/English/SWVR2011_full_%5B09%5D_chapter6.pdf

UNDP (2013). *Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle*. New York: UNDP. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG_UN-Youth_Guide-LR.pdf

UNESCO (2013). *Social inclusion, democracy and youth in the Arab Region*. Beirut: UNESCO. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Beirut/images/SHS/Social_Inclusion_Democracy_Youth_Background_Paper.pdf

United Network of Young Peacebuilders (2013). *A Space for Peace: Inclusion of Youth and Peacebuilding in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. The Hague: United Network of Young Peacebuilders. http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/UNOY_Post-2015Report_Revised.pdf

Unsworth, S. (2010). *An upside down view of governance*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/AnUpside-downViewofGovernance.pdf

USAID (2014). *Evaluation yes youth can! Impact evaluation final report*. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00jzqx.pdf

Walker, D. & Pereznieto, P. with Bergh, G. & Smith, K. (2014). *Partners for change: Young people and governance in a post- 2015 world*. ODI, Plan and Restless Development. http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/partners-for-change-light-pdf

World Bank (2006). *World Development Report 2007. Development and the next generation*. Washington D.C.: World Bank. http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/09/13/000112742_20060913111024/Rendered/PDF/359990WDR0complete.pdf

World Bank (2013). *Inclusion matters*. Washington D.C.: World Bank. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1265299949041/6766328-1329943729735/8460924-1381272444276/InclusionMatters_AdvanceEdition.pdf

Expert contributors

Suggested citation

About this report