



A joint working paper by ActKnowledge and Oxfam

**SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO MAKE
CHANGE HAPPEN
A REVIEW OF THEORIES OF CHANGE**

**SYNTHESIS REPORT
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Supported By



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1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2012, ActKnowledge, a social enterprise based in New York City, was commissioned by Oxfam International Youth Partnerships (OIYP) to undertake a brief “Theory of Change” research exercise as one of a number of inputs into its organizational planning and change process.

The purpose of this research is to: “provide a synthesis of the international learning and evidence regarding how best to support young people to create positive, equitable and sustainable change in different contexts”. In doing this, OIYP specified that the synthesis should focus in particular on:

- What theories of change have been employed by a whole range of actors to support young people in the pursuit of change? These actors include government and non-governmental agencies, institutes and movements operating at international, regional or national levels.
- Synthesizing the available evidence on the efficacy of the theories of change employed in supporting young people.

The results of the study on these questions is set out as follows, beginning with the consultants understanding of the brief and approach to the research. It then goes on to analyze some of the main outcomes that various interventions and strategies to support young people are working to and the theories of change underpinning the achievement of these outcomes and how they relate to one another. From this it draws out a set of summary conclusions.

2. UNDERSTANDING OF AND APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH BRIEF

2.1 Theory of Change: Defining the Concept

Before embarking on a review of theories of change, it is worth defining precisely what is meant by ‘theory of change’ as a concept. Although the term is somewhat ubiquitous in the international development arena, there can be some confusion as to what it means and what constitute its essential components.

In its simplest definition, a theory of change is a theory about how and why a time-bound intervention in a prevailing situation or context is likely to work¹. To develop a robust theory in this respect requires the development and articulation of a number of essential elements. In particular:

- The theory should clearly specify the long-term goal that a particular strategy is working towards – if the goal is vague then so too will any analysis of how and whether it will be achieved.
- Based on all available evidence, the preconditions hypothesized as necessary for the achievement of this long-term goal should be fully articulated in a causal pathway

¹ For a comprehensive review of the concept and application of “Theory of Change” in an international development context see Cathy James (2011) *Theory of Change Review: Report Commissioned by Comic Relief* and also Isabel Vogel (2012) *Review of the Use of ‘Theory of Change’ in International Development*. See also publications, guides and tools on www.theoryofchange.org, established by ActKnowledge.



over time. This is crucial for a project, program or movement in analyzing and testing their core beliefs and understanding of the necessary conditions and preconditions for change. For example, a precondition for civic engagement of young people may be that young people have self-esteem and a precondition for that may be that young people feel empowered. As agencies deliver various interventions to support these outcomes, it may find that these preconditions are not sufficient or are not even the most important for the young people concerned.

- The various assumptions underpinning the theory should be explicit – or even incorporated into its causal analysis. For example, an assumption might be made in a theory relating to young people’s civic engagement that they will be safe in doing so – an assumption that might not be valid in different contexts (for example in dictatorships) or for particular young people (for example, for young women in societies with considerable gender oppression).

The greater the evidence base underpinning a theory of change, the greater its predictive power for effecting change and for capturing lessons. A worked out theory also enhances the capacity of those using one to test whether they are on the right track. For example, in a paper on monitoring and evaluating engagement with policy and political processes, the Developmental Leadership Program (Roche and Kelly, 2012) note the importance of having theories that are informed by a robust analysis of political and social relations and processes as well as a careful analysis of who are the influential stakeholders and the relations between them.

2.2 Framing the Research

In line with a theory of change approach, it has been important from the outset to clarify precisely what is meant in the statement on the purpose of the research (in the Terms of Reference) by “young people creating positive, equitable and sustainable change in different contexts”. We make a number of working assumptions in this respect:

- Our focus is on young people between the ages of 18 and 25, the age group targeted by OIYP.
- Our working understanding of what is meant by “positive, equitable and sustainable change” is that it relates to the core goals of Oxfam, including addressing poverty, promoting human rights and promoting social justice across a whole range of inter-related domains, including the socio-economic, political and cultural. ‘Equitable change’ also relates to a whole set of grounds, encompassing the socio-economic but also relating to gender equality and equality relating to grounds such as ethnicity, national background, disability and sexual orientation.

With this focus and understanding, the aims of the research were to:

- Identify some of the main outcomes or goals that international, regional and national agencies, movements and institutes are working towards in the various strategies and interventions they employ to support young people to create positive, equitable and sustainable change.
- Identify the explicit (or infer the implicit) theories of change underpinning these strategies and interventions. In doing this, the focus is on identifying the preconditions posited as being necessary for the achievement of these broad

outcomes or goals, and in turn, drawing out the extent to which these outcomes relate to one another in realizing the overall objective of advancing progressive change.

- Make explicit some of the key assumptions behind the theories and the extent to which these assumptions differ in the context of developing countries as opposed to countries in the 'Global North', and between states with stable democratic institutions and those countries at more fragile stages of development, including for example, emerging democracies in the Middle-East.
- Draw out from available evaluation/impact analysis what has been learned of the validity of the theories adopted and the implications of these for youth support strategies for progressive change.

The intention therefore is not to quantify or list the approaches adopted by various agencies in supporting youth (some of this is being done in a parallel research exercise commissioned by Oxfam), but to draw out broad theoretical themes and meta-analyses that will assist Oxfam in framing its own strategic interventions for youth.

To deliver on this broad objective, the research has involved a number of elements. These included:

- Literature review based on references provided by OIYP, including a range of policy reports, research papers and directories of agencies working with young people across the world. Also material referenced from internet search and through ActKnowledge's own contacts, including academics and organization's working directly with young people
- Discussions with a number of stakeholders and practitioners on youth participation and engagement, including youth activists.
- References highlighted in the Community Engagement Literature Review, an associated piece of research commissioned by OIYP (undertaken in 2012 by May Diller-Dawkins). This provided valuable references on some of the meta-theories underpinning progressive change internationally. It also included important evaluative studies focused on the broad lessons for successful change at different levels (from the local to the international) and in different political contexts and under different social and economic conditions.
- On-going liaison with OIYP and with researchers working on parallel research to identify and categorize youth support interventions and strategies (Anna Powell and Geoff Hazell).

The results of the review are presented in the following sections.

3. THEORIES OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING SUPPORT FOR YOUTH TO CREATE CHANGE

Support to youth in effecting change can be seen as working towards a number of broad, inter-related outcomes. These include:

1. **That young people participate in formal policy and governance structures.** A range of strategies and interventions have this as a central goal, for example, youth wings of

political parties, youth forums convened by international institutions (for example, UNESCO, the World Bank, ASEAN, Council of Europe), youth councils and other participation mechanisms.

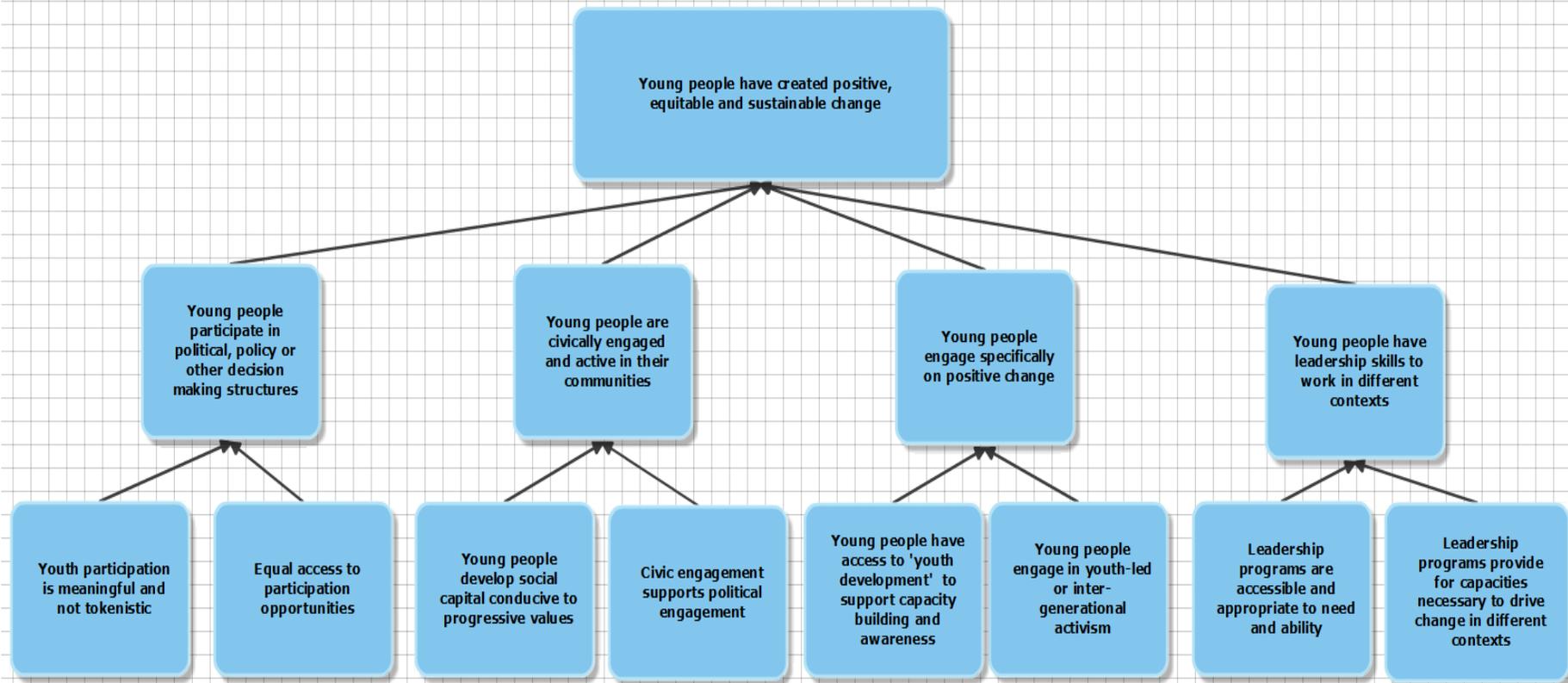
2. **That young people are civically engaged and active in their communities or societies.** Supports here are generally focused on equipping young people to engage in areas of civic society on issues of their choice. These include supports for basic civic engagement regardless of political direction or philosophy such as voter registration, engagement in any kind of voluntary effort, or social entrepreneurship programs focused more on engagement with others on specific issues such as employment generation rather on broader issues of human rights or social justice.
3. **Young People engage specifically on positive change through youth-led initiatives or through effective inter-generational partnerships.** This has been described as 'socio-political activism' as opposed to 'civic engagement' and is more closely linked to work on social justice, community organizing and "extra-institutional" action involving initiatives launched from outside of conventional institutions. A range of interventions have been employed with this as a key outcome, including supports for youth development linked to civic activism, youth-led initiatives, supporting youth engagement in global activism, linking local to global action (and a recognition that these can be mutually reinforcing) and the development of networks and coalitions for youth groups and for individual change agents (Powell, Brown and Hazell, 2012).
4. **Young people have leadership skills to work at local and global levels.** Initiatives focused on leadership development have included the provision of support across a spectrum of individual and collective models. It also includes a focus on working with emerging elites or focusing support on building the capacity of young people who are already highly engaged (for example, initiatives of the Global Youth Action Network and TakingITGlobal).

This is not an exhaustive or all-encompassing list, but it is a useful starting point in analyzing the theories of change explicitly or implicitly informing various approaches to supporting young people and identifying some of the necessary preconditions for these to be aligned with the broader goal of advancing positive, progressive and sustainable change.

The four outcome areas are **interlinked** and one can be an important precondition for the other. For example, establishing mechanisms for young people to participate in various levels of governance and policy making structures may not be effective if young people lack the capacity or leadership skills to participate. Equally, empowering young people to participate will not be effective if avenues for participation do not exist or if they are tokenistic.

These outcomes and the theories and preconditions underpinning each of them are illustrated in the 'Theory of Change' diagram overleaf. Each of the outcome areas and preconditions are then discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

Theory of Change for Supporting Young People to Effect Positive Change



3.1 Young People Participate in Political, Policy and Other Decision-Making Structures

Various theories, or at least various rationales, are notable in relation to supporting youth participation in decision making from the highest policy making levels (such as national parliaments or international multi-lateral bodies) to small local or issue based programs. UNICEF for example, has emphasized participation as an inalienable human right and an end itself. Within this understanding, participation matters for its own sake, regardless of measurable or demonstrated benefits for various groups or purposes (in other words, it is not a right that can be withdrawn if young people's participation does not lead to the 'right' outcomes). However, UNICEF does highlight some overarching functional benefits for society of youth participation – in particular its contribution to the development of the practice and culture of democracy by providing an informal education in democratic practice and norms (Rajani, 2001: 10).

The more functional value of youth participation in achieving specific ends has also been elaborated. This has entailed a shift in understanding of young people in terms of vulnerability, need or immaturity to concepts that view young people as assets, not least as having independent agency and understanding around their own needs and priorities (see for example, DFID-CSO Children and Youth Network, 2010). Development processes or organizations that have embraced youth participation believe it benefits young people, makes the program or policy more relevant and credible, and strengthens the ties of the development process to the larger community (USAID and Equip 3, 2011; Youthnet and Family Health International, 2011).

In line with these various rationales many mechanisms have been developed to facilitate the participation of young people in political, policy or other more formal decision making structures. This has been particularly evident in the 'Global North', for example in Europe, where a broad range of specialized institutional arrangements catering for young people emerged, from youth groups to students' councils and from youth wings in political parties, trade unions and other social organizations to networks at local, national and European levels (Forbrig, 2005). Participatory arrangements for youth are also increasingly evident at a transnational level (for example, youth forums established by large multi-lateral agencies such as the World Bank, ASEAN and the Council of Europe) and increasingly, although more limited and contingent on the wider political climate, in the 'Global South' (for example, youth councils operating at parish levels in Africa and in Asia (USAID and Equip 3, 2011).

Youth Participation is Meaningful and Not Tokenistic

The potential for these institutional mechanisms to facilitate or support young people in effecting positive, equitable and sustainable change are contingent on a number of factors or preconditions. One precondition, which has received considerable attention, is the 'quality' of the form of youth participation and whether it is authentic and meaningful. A range of publications and guides have focused on this question. For example, writing for UNICEF, Roger Hart illustrated his well-known 'ladder of participation', with 'manipulation' at the bottom rung and meaningful 'child initiated decision making with adults' at the top (Hart, 1992). The UN Youth Programme highlights four levels of participation; at the lowest level where young people are simply informed about the decisions made by adults and at the highest level where they have autonomy (ILO Youth Employment Network, 2011).

Young People have Equal Access to Participation Opportunities

A range of studies have highlighted the challenge in ensuring that youth participation mechanisms do not replicate societal inequalities, particularly racial or gender inequalities. For example, one major development agency notes the potential for reinforcing inequalities by targeting youth leaders from well-known visible groups (DFID-CSO Children and Youth Network, 2010). Like all other areas of development, it notes, understanding inequalities and power relationships is crucial, for example, in relation to gender dynamics. USAID highlighted the need for youth councils in Africa to represent the youth they purport to serve fairly; otherwise they risk losing legitimacy with non-member youth (USAID and Equip 3, 2009).

Whatever the barriers, it is clear that opening up new opportunities for participation in formal political or other decision-making structures does not automatically translate into increased participation. In fact some studies point to an opposite trend. For example, writing of youth participation in Western Europe, Forbrig (2005) notes that while arenas for youth involvement in political and, more broadly, public life appear to be more numerous than ever before, few would claim that these opportunities have resulted in the widespread and effective participation of young people. This may reflect the changing forms of youth political participation, away from involvement in conventional democratic institutions and towards novel patterns of youth engaging in public life (for example, increased engagement in social movements on global issues). Alternatively it may reflect broader factors whereby once a group or issue is integrated into democratic politics the public may consider the issue as being taken care of or that the institutionalization of a group or of an issue has a strong tendency to limit participation (Forbrig, 2005).

Opening up formal avenues for participation therefore, can be conceived as only one precondition for increased participation and many others will be necessary if that participation is to translate into creating the conditions whereby young people create “positive, equitable and sustainable change” as a result. In particular:

- The mechanisms for participation have to be real and meaningful – in other words, that political or other key institutions are open to hearing the views and perspectives of young people and act to include their perspectives in a more than tokenistic way.
- The ‘supply’ of meaningful mechanisms for participation then has to be matched with a ‘demand’ on the part of young people to bring positive change about and the necessary capacity on their part to engage in the mechanisms that are established. This necessitates measures to build the capacity of young people, especially young people who face social exclusion more generally.
- In the focus on young people as an ‘asset’ there can be an underlying assumption that the involvement of youth will inherently bring a progressive perspective to a policy or political process. However, young people, like adults, do not have uniform interests or uniform political or philosophical perspectives. Opening up political processes can include the participation of young people in political movements and processes in the pursuit of goals that do not contribute to positive or equitable change.

In line with these points, the opportunities for opening up and using formal political and policy structures to advance positive and equitable change suggest the importance of a whole other set of preconditions than just the form or quality of the structures for participation (although these are clearly essential as well). Preconditions include capacity building, but also the development of a civic culture that embraces core values around human rights and respect for others. The extent to which the other main outcomes described above contribute to capacity and values in this respect are explored in more detail below.

3.2 Young People are Civically Engaged and Active in their Communities

A broad number of strategies and approaches have been adopted to support general levels of civic engagement by young people, ranging from support for voter registration to participation in civic associations of any type, regardless of the issue or political orientation. Of particular relevance to supporting young people to effect positive change, has been the links posited between civic engagement and two key outcomes: increased political participation and the creation of 'social capital' that supports progressive values.

Civic Engagement Supports Political Participation

One theoretical proposition is that if young people are civically engaged then they will be more likely to be actively engaged in political life. This is based on the view that those who participate in civic activities develop skills that increase their capacity and sense of political efficacy. Important outcomes of civic engagement in this respect can include creating the conditions, values and relationships necessary for the functioning of democracy, especially in emerging democracies where some approaches to civic engagement have been constructed around refocusing youth energy around non-violent political engagement. For example, a recent study of political behavior in the Arab world found that people who are involved in civic associations are more likely to extend their involvement to the political realm, in both conventional (e.g. voting) and unconventional (e.g. rallying or protesting) forms of engagement (Tessler, 2008).

A similar link was found by the Mercy Corps in a study on youth engagement in the Middle-East and North Africa (2012: 17). They also tested the proposition that civic engagement by youth reduced the potential for young people to support or become involved in violence for political purposes. Such a link was evident in a Mercy Corps study focused on Kenya and Liberia (2011), but less evident in the study on the Middle-East and North Africa (2012). What did appear to influence Arab youth's attitudes toward political violence was their employment status and perceptions of their government's efforts to address unemployment (2012: 17).

Concern has been expressed that some forms of civic engagement can actually lead to lower levels of political engagement or the development of political values that are not conducive to positive change. For example, in a review of civic engagement by young people in East Asia and the Pacific, the authors note that in the absence of good governance (characterized by effective, transparent, participatory and accountable government), state programs to promote civic engagement often promoted conformity as opposed to creating an enabling environment for young people's creative, critical and democratic development (Innovations in Civic Participation, 2008). In the US, criticisms of

the trends in service learning² as a form of civic engagement in schools contend that direct service to communities in the absence of discussions about the underlying causes of public problems and policy options to address those problems, may divert youth toward charity and away from political action (Flanagan, 2008).

Other studies have highlighted inequalities in civic engagement by young people which reflect and reinforce inequalities in society more broadly. In the United States for example, those with a college education are far more likely than those with high school diplomas to participate in a wide range of civic activities linked to political participation or political involvement. (Flanagan, 2008). Rates of women's civic participation in many countries are also markedly lower than for men. Barriers to participation in this respect have been particularly acute in some regions (for example, countries in the Middle-East), yet in some cases young women are becoming more active, and often lead movements for social, environmental or political change as a result of new opportunities for civic engagement (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2011). One factor in creating such opportunities has been the advent of new forms of communication and social media technologies. Young Arab women for example, with access to these technologies, do not need to leave home or have male permission to become actively engaged in public discussion and opinion formation (2011: 17).

Civil Engagement Supports Social Capital Conducive to Progressive Values

Another major theory underpinning support for general civic engagement by young people (and particularly important for this current study with its focus on creating positive change) is that such engagement builds forms of 'social capital' that support progressive values and political action such as shared identity or respect for others (see for example, Putnam, 2000). Young people may be even more likely to develop forms of social capital along these lines, partly because, it has been hypothesized, the transition to adulthood is marked by greater self-determination and independence of thought on the part of younger people and hence an openness to new ideas that are different to those espoused by their elders (Flanagan, 2008).

Evidence of these links is mixed and suggests that on its own, civic engagement in some general sense would not appear to be sufficient to create forms of social capital conducive to progressive change. Mercy Corps for example, in their study on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), found no significant associations between levels of civic engagement among youth across seven MENA countries and forms of social capital such as levels of tolerance for others, shared identity, respect for pluralism and diversity, more approving or positive perceptions of democracy or support for gender equality or non-traditional roles for women (2012:19).

A recent Institute for Development Studies report did find substantial evidence of a positive link between citizen engagement and achieving developmental and democratic outcomes (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010). However, the authors note that while some approaches to citizen engagement attempt to draw a straight line from individual actions or behaviors to these outcomes, intermediate indices such as awareness of rights, knowledge, disposition

² Service learning is a method of teaching that combines formal instruction with a related service in the community.

towards action, organizing skills and the thickness of civic networks may be equally important (2010: 2).

Flanagan (2008) stresses two preconditions to align civic engagement with more progressive values: first, that such engagement exposes young people to alternative viewpoints and second, that there are certain pressures (whether historical or contextual) that motivate youth to grapple with social issues and take a stand (2008:2). The latter for example, may be the critical factor for the major role played by young people in actions to advance political reform in the Middle-East (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2011).

3.3 Young People Engage Specifically on Positive Change through Youth-led Initiatives or Effective Inter-generational Partnerships

Many strategies and initiatives have focused on supporting or resourcing young people to work more directly on promoting positive change across issues such as human rights, the environment, social justice and internal development. These approaches can complement as well as address some of the limitations of broad stroke measures to support political participation and civic engagement just described – that is, that establishing formal avenues for youth participation in political or policy structures and supporting civic engagement are not on their own sufficient for supporting young people to create “positive, equitable and sustainable change”.

A number of preconditions have been highlighted in supporting young people pursuing change along these lines. For example:

- The importance of ‘youth development’ approaches that attract young people towards the pursuit of change, but which also help them develop the skills to access information and analyze issues for themselves and to set their own priorities and areas on which they wish to commit themselves.
- The importance of ‘youth led’ initiatives, inter-generational partnerships and opportunities for participation in organizations or social movements through which young people can contribute to change and build the capacity and skills necessary to effect change moving forward.
- The need to take cognizance of more general ‘theories of change’ in pursuing social justice or other progressive goals, including taking account of new approaches to delivering change and emerging lessons from evaluations of social justice, environmental and other campaigns at local, national and international levels.

The relationship between these preconditions, as with the broader outcome areas outlined in this Paper, are not necessarily linear and there can be complex feedback loops between them. For example, youth development contributes to activism on a particular issue - but experiential learning from activism can in turn be critical for youth development.

Youth Development Supports Awareness and Capacity for Activism

Different forms of ‘youth development’ have been identified as an important step in the pathway for young people towards effecting positive change. These range from approaches to raising awareness of issues in schools (for example, coverage of human

rights and development issues in the UK second-level school curriculum), to “youth development” approaches with a strong focus on facilitating awareness and skills necessary for action. TakingITGlobal³, for example, works to a ‘theory of change’ that conceives of ‘youth development’ as encompassing a set of outcomes focused internally on young people including the development of a sense of social responsibility and awareness of global issues, as well as building capacity among youth, regardless of their placement across the spectrum of engagement . This is viewed as an important precondition for engagement on more collective, externally focused efforts to progress change through youth action and participation in various social movements (TakingITGlobal, 2009:133).

This form of youth development has been described as one element of “youth organizing”, which differs from “traditional” youth development in that it trains young people in community organizing and advocacy and helps them “analyze community and system-level issues, alter power relations, and create meaningful community change” (Shah, 2011). Others have defined it as a “civic activism” approach to youth development, an approach “that holds at its center a dual priority on individual and community change, while placing an emphasis on developing youth’s internal capacities to interface with the larger society” (Lewis-Charp, 2003).

The risk that initiatives linked to raising awareness or promoting values or an orientation among young people towards particular areas of social or political activism might involve some degree of control or manipulation of young people has been raised in some studies. For example, one study on development education in UK schools refers to critiques that some subject areas have become too dominated by academics or organizations trying to inculcate in young people very specific moral or political standpoints on development issues (Bourne and Brown, 2011). However, many youth development initiatives have been very cognizant of this risk and have emphasized in their programs the development of young people’s capacity to access and analyze information and come to their own conclusions, beginning with a focus on young people’s own, individual interests (DFID-CSO Children and Youth Network, 2010; Shah, 2011).

An important example of such an approach to youth development is what has been described as “identity support”, founded on the idea that a commitment to social change is rooted in a sense of pride for personal identity (Lewis-Charp et al, 2003). Such an approach has been particularly important in addressing the disadvantages faced by young people who face discrimination and low standing in society because of factors such as race, gender, disability or sexual orientation. A focus on considerations of the social, political and historical dimensions of identity can both attract marginalized young people and become a source of empowerment and of positive change in their lives. It can also be a critical step towards social or political engagement to effect positive change for the individual and the broader community or society (2003).

Initiatives around ‘identity support’ have been elaborated in the literature on theoretical perspectives around social mobilization and social change. For example, an Institute for Development Studies paper notes the importance of ‘theories of

³ TakingITGlobal is an organization that focuses on facilitating global education, social entrepreneurship, and civic engagement for young people worldwide.

movement identity', where 'new' movements around symbolic, informational and cultural struggles and human rights emerge (Leach and Scoones, 2007). Many feminists and others, it is noted, associate citizenship with group identities based on specific forms and experiences of difference – such as those related to gender, race, disability, locality and so on. Group political identity (and empowerment) is produced through identification with others who hold particular subject positions in common. Citizen action can draw upon particular political identities at particular moments (2007: 13).

Young People Engage in Youth-led or Inter-generational Activism

As young people move on to various arenas for change, the activism they engage in can take many forms and can encompass a broad typology of participation and decision-making structures. For example, young people can be active in youth-led organizations (i.e. those that are fully led, managed and coordinated by young people) or be engaged in youth-led projects within adult led organizations or programs. Equally, young people can be active in 'inter-generational' organizations or movements where decisions are made in collaboration with adults or be active in adult led organizations where young people have an input but where adults make the decisions (Lewis-Charp, 2003).

There are many opportunities and challenges for young people across each of these forms of organizing. Youth led organizations offer huge opportunities for the autonomous expression of youth priorities and for the development of new approaches to conceiving and achieving progressive change. However, developing and maintaining a 'youth-led' project requires the skills and capacity to strategize, target and engage with key actors and stakeholders relating to the change that young people are trying to bring about. Equally, young leaders will need to be able to marshal the skills necessary to develop the organization itself, including targeting resources, engaging with funders as well undertaking the more prosaic aspects of organizational maintenance.

Youth led organizations also face some unique challenges, for example, higher levels of transition and turnover as staff and members "age out", in other words, that young people reach an age in which they must move on if the organization is to remain genuinely "youth-led" (Advocates for Youth, 2011). This can be particularly problematic for youth organizations focused on policy change which can in many cases be a long-term process of action and engagement. Transition and turnover of key people can lead to the loss of skills honed through experience in a campaign or in running an organization.

Kress (2006) highlights what she sees as a delicate balance between actively engaging youth at their experience level and overwhelming them with too much responsibility. In her view, youth autonomy can in some cases be nothing more than abandonment by adults who are unsure how to partner effectively with young leaders (2006: 52). On the other hand, when intergenerational partnerships do strike the right balance (for example, in social movements), the benefits of youth autonomy can be garnered at the same time as allowing for a level of support from adults that can be of significant benefit to young people (and to the social movements themselves). At the core of successful youth adult-partnerships it has been noted, is a transference and creation of shared power, an implied equality of responsibility, accountability and control (Libby et al, 2006: 22).

The potential benefits of inter-generational partnership therefore, will be constrained if mechanisms for participation of young people are tokenistic – and there is no guarantee that mechanisms for youth participation in social movements will be any more meaningful than those that pertain in more formal policy or political structures described earlier, which is presumably why an organization such as TakingITGlobal has focused part of its activities on working with global social movements to ensure that youth participate and become key stakeholders in their efforts (TakingITGlobal, 2009:133).

Young People Are Aware of Broader Theories of Change Linked to Successful Change

As young people move more directly into action, or participate in political and policy processes or in social movements (whether at a local, regional or global level) a broader set of learning around how change happens can impinge, which have implications for the kind of strategies and skills necessary to advance progressive change. Three examples are presented here as having implications for the forms of youth support just described, although clearly many more strategic lessons on how change takes place in different contexts are likely to be equally relevant to young people.

Radical vs. Incremental Approaches

An interesting focus in recent evaluations of campaigns for social and political change has been on the efficacy of what have been termed ‘radical’ as opposed to ‘incremental’ strategies for change. For example, Brendan Cox in a recent review of international justice campaigns notes that ‘incrementalist’ campaigns willing to balance ideal policy objectives with political strategy were often the most successful (2011: 50). Nevertheless, radical approaches did play a significant role in a number of ways. For example, while not achieving the ideal objectives they set for themselves, radical positions can act as a useful way of shifting the center of gravity within a political space. Radical organizations were also often to the forefront in working on more controversial areas where others feared to tread (2011: 51).

Findings around incremental as opposed to radical strategies may have particular relevance for young people. Radical approaches that emphasize ideal objectives may provide a space for empowerment, by allowing young people to articulate their broad ideals, or in the case of identity formation (discussed above), to have a space in which to understand the social or political forces that have impinged on their identity. Organizations taking an incremental approach that focuses more on political strategy and the articulation of achievable goals may be less effective in creating such spaces. Equally, campaigning based on direct action or protest may have greater power in exciting and empowering young people around an issue than more “insider” campaigns focused on lobbying with policy makers around incrementalist policy objectives.

On the other hand, for young people who do feel empowered and skilled, participation in organizations focused on political strategy and processes for change can be crucial to further empowerment and the building of personal capacity. For more activist youth, such participation and scoring real policy or other ‘wins’ can be a key motivational factor for staying involved in ‘youth organizing’ projects or organizations (Lewis-Charp, 2003).

'Framing' or 'Reframing' an Issue to Win Wider Support

How a political or social change objective is framed can also be critical to its achievement. As the Development Leadership Programme Report puts it: “leaders, supporters and coalitions in any sector or issue area need to frame their objectives carefully, taking account of the social, cultural and political space in which they operate, and depending on how broad a coalition they are seeking to establish and for what purpose” ((Leftwich and Wheeler, 2011). Examples of “reframing” include the way in which the “business case” for equality or diversity has been highlighted as a way of building wider support and clout for the achievement of certain equality goals. For example, in the US, making the “business case” for progressive immigration reform or equality issues such as gay marriage, has widened the constituency of support for such progress to include a number of major corporations.⁴

All of this can have implications for young people, similar to those raised in relation to “radicalism versus incrementalism”. ‘Reframing’ an issue to build support for the achievement of positive change objectives can involve a level of compromise that some young people might feel uncomfortable in supporting. Marginalized or disadvantaged young people who have felt empowered by finding common cause between their own experience and wider struggles for civil rights may not feel so engaged or empowered with strategies that link these justice goals to economic or business objectives. What compromise young people are prepared to countenance in this respect is likely to depend on their background and circumstances and their own personal and political priorities and how they are directly affected by an issue.

Linking Local to Global Action and the Need for “Cultural Sensitivity”

Many of the challenges with which youth (particularly those in lower-income countries) grapple, transcend national borders (e.g., education, employment, AIDS, youth participation, gender equality). Thus, along with the burgeoning development of youth councils, regional and global scale organizations and networks have emerged in recent years. These organizations serve as intermediary agencies to promote information exchange, build leadership, foster civic engagement and create opportunities for young people to see and understand their issues in a broader context (USAID and Equip 3, 2011).

The need for action at different levels has been increasingly evident. For example, improvements to international human rights instruments as a result of actions by global social movements may have limited impact if not matched by local or regional initiatives to implement them on the ground. Equally, without a local or regional link to developing countries on a whole range of anti-poverty, development and human rights issues, a global initiative can have less weight and legitimacy.

A number of emerging theoretical perspectives may be of significance to young people in this context, especially for building the confidence of young people from those developing countries which are viewed as somehow irredeemably ‘unprogressive’. For

⁴ For example, *Partnership for New York City*, representing a broad range of major New York based corporations has consistently advocated for positive reform of the US immigration system. See www.pfnyc.org.

example, greater attention is now being paid to the concept of ‘cultural sensitivity’ to ensure that the potential for “indigenously” driven positive change is not discounted due to cultural generalizations about particular countries or regions. “Cultural sensitivity” in this respect has been defined as an approach to change based on working within the reality of a local cultural context. Rather than being a form of ‘relativist’ acceptance of harmful traditional practices (as characterized by some critics), the UNFPA states that embracing cultural realities can reveal the most effective ways to challenge harmful cultural practices and strengthen positive ones (UNFPA, 2008:4).

An example cited by the Development Research Centre of such a ‘culturally sensitive’ approach in action is the reform of religious law affecting women in Morocco, the success of which was deemed to be based on emphasizing local and national norms, as opposed to international human rights instruments (2011). Equally in the space of fifteen years, Ireland has moved from a position of criminalizing gay people to having in place marriage-based civil partnership and some of the most extensive legislative protections against sexual orientation discrimination in the world. Key lessons for advocacy highlighted in a study of GLEN, a group that contributed significantly to this change, include the need to understand the culture of the society you are working in and from this to appeal to its best and most progressive traditions. In this case the appeal was to traditions in Ireland of anti-colonialism and Republicanism (Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2012).

Lack of sufficient attention to local circumstances can also lead to inaccurate or simplistic analyses of change processes and the critical factors behind them. For example, according to Robinson (2011), the interwoven spheres for collective action by young people in Egypt which have resulted in massive civic movements (comprising a key element of the ‘Arab Spring’) do not appear overnight because of social networking facilitated by Facebook. The organizations and individuals highlighted in his report made it clear that the spaces for protest were being cultivated for at least a decade earlier (Robinson, 2011). In this sense, Arab youth were not passively waiting for social networking tools from developed countries but had agency, knowledge and methods of their own to advocate for political change in their countries, the lessons from which could be usefully shared in international youth networks.

“South-South” Exchange

An important development linked to this concept of cultural sensitivity and awareness has been the advent of greater ‘South-South’ exchanges and networks, based on the premise that developing countries facing similar development challenges have a good deal to learn from one another in progressing change (Talaat Abdel-Malek, 2011). This has been based to some extent on a sense that ‘North-South’ relations can in some cases be marked by power imbalances and tendencies towards viewing ‘what worked’ in developed countries as being the solution for all countries.

The report of a UNESCO conference on life-long learning for adults and young people in 2005 noted the views of participant countries that ‘South-South’ dialogue was relevant for promoting the idea of social diversity and “helped in avoiding discursive tendencies that look at developing countries as helpless, imprisoned and dependent societies. Rather, it ensured the opposite: respect for cultural, spiritual and social diversity” (UNESCO Institute for Life Long-Learning, et al, 2005).

This has implications for international youth networks also. For example, the ILO notes the importance of exchanges in its Youth Employment Network between young people from developing countries with high levels of youth unemployment and similar institutional deficits in framing responses (ILO Youth Employment Network, 2011).

3.4 Young People Have Leadership Skills to Work at Local and Global Levels

The acquisition of effective leadership skills has been identified as a key precondition for effecting change at different levels and many programs and supports for young people now exist under the broad heading of “leadership development”. These include Oxfam International Youth Partnerships itself and other Oxfam programs such as the CHANGE Program run by Oxfam America.

There has however, been many debates on the essential qualities of youth leadership (as there has been on the concept of leadership more generally) and how these qualities can be developed and nurtured. In line with the objective of tracing some of the key preconditions for supporting young people to create positive and equitable change, this section focuses on:

- The definitions and associated attributes of leadership that are most closely aligned with effecting positive change and with some of the theories and preconditions outlined in this Paper (for example, capacity to participate in formal policy structures or drive youth-led activism).
- The critical preconditions for developing or nurturing the acquisition of such leadership qualities.

Leadership Programs Relate to Capacities Necessary to Drive Positive Change

The Importance of Collaboration and Relationship Building

There is considerable debate about the meaning and nature of leadership in general and what qualities and skills are necessary for successful leadership in an increasingly diverse and complex world. Of particular significance has been a shift from “top-down” hierarchical forms of leadership towards “distributed” leadership that permeates all levels of an organization and leadership competencies that emphasize social and emotional competencies. These include self-awareness, collaboration, empathy, relationship building and the ability to lead and influence based on personal attributes rather than simply holding formal positions of authority (Kahn et al, 2009; MIT Leadership Center, 2005).

The importance of such capacities has been a theme threading through a range of publications and evaluations of social and political change internationally. Cox (2011) highlights the importance of what he describes as ‘internal’ and ‘external’ leadership, the latter relating to the capacity to manage or engage with coalitions or with other groups or organizations when necessary to maximize the potential for political or policy influence. Within coalition campaign he notes, finding consensus on a policy is often one of the most time-consuming and fraught exercises (2011: 47).

Others have noted that for civil society organizations to flourish in a world where power is becoming more diffuse, the key challenge will be interoperability: the capacity to

work with a radically diverse set of partners, from UN agency staff to multinational companies and from grass roots activists to government officials (Evans, 2012). This aligns with some of the perspectives mentioned earlier, such as the ability to “reframe” issues to garner wider support. Effective leadership support in these contexts it has been noted, should include giving participants the understanding, tools and experience to foster networks, form coalitions and work politically in a positive sense (de Ver and Kennedy, 2011: iv).

The Capacity to Adapt to a Situation or Context

An emerging focus in leadership-development literature is the successful leader’s ability to ‘read’ situations accurately. This, it has been noted, requires self-awareness and self-discipline, both needed for leaders to engage effectively with others in a variety of contexts and environments (Kahn et al, 2009: 13). Different skills and attributes will come to the fore in different situations. For example, the literature on leadership has increasingly focused on two forms of leadership, “transformational” and “transactional” leadership, either of which can be more or less important at different stages of a change process.

Transformational leadership has been conceived as a process of mobilizing individual needs into group goals and a transformational project to bring about radical change for these needs to be met. On the other hand, a transactional leader engages in bargaining and negotiating the achievement of results (de Ver and Kennedy, 2011: 10). These are not mutually exclusive, but the differences will be familiar to many organizations where the skill of the founder in mobilizing and organizing around an issue may no longer be appropriate in a context where the organization is engaged in negotiation with government on the delivery of its aims.

These different forms of leadership link back to discussions earlier on the different routes followed by young people in effecting change. For example, “transformational” leadership qualities may be particularly important for young people in organizing themselves and others around a particular issue or around a common identity (for example young women or gay people) to effect change. On the other hand, certain “transactional leadership” qualities may come to the fore when participating in formal political or policy structures or in negotiating political or campaigning strategies.

The importance of being able to develop effective strategies has been highlighted by Cox in his review of campaigns for international social justice. Political strategy, he says, has two components: first, defining the ‘ask’ and second, defining the tactics necessary to achieve it. However, he notes that: “It is surprising how many campaigns focus only on the ‘ask’. They take positions regardless of the scope and scale of the campaign and adopt asks that they have no analysis of how to implement. In some cases, those behind such campaigns believe adopting the ‘right position’ is the only thing that matters, regardless of the impact the campaign ultimately has” (2011: 45).

Elements of “transactional” leadership such as negotiating and bargaining skills may be important in moving a project or campaign beyond the articulation of a vision in this respect (which may have been crucial in organizing and building support) towards negotiating feasible strategies for its achievement. Equally, aspects of transformational leadership, in particular the capacity to inspire others, will continue to be important in keeping people on board and ensuring that the vision is not lost.

In line with this, one study has noted that an overarching precondition for successful leadership to effect policy change will be the ability to choose strategies appropriate to the context and issue, identify opportunities for progress, develop relationships, make mid-course corrections and communicate effectively (Stachowiak, 2010). More broadly, the World Bank Institute (2007) has emphasized three core building blocks of leadership, namely: (i) the capacity to develop and mobilize stakeholders around a shared vision; (ii) The ability to ensure effective translation of that vision into concrete outcomes; and (iii) A commitment to integrity and ethics and the practice of accountability (2007: 2).

Leadership Programs are Accessible and Appropriate to Need and Ability

Balancing Support for Exceptional Leaders and Leadership Skills for All

Debates on whether the capacity for leadership is something that one is born with or acquires with support and experience have been particularly relevant to approaches that have been developed to support youth leadership. Some have argued that leadership is essentially an acquired trait and that the focus of youth leadership programs should be on developing and honing the leadership skills of all young people. Others have argued that some young people are predisposed to be leaders, and that a focus on making leaders of all young people has led to the 'watering-down' of youth leadership programs. Kress (2006) argues for example, that forcing youth leadership to be seen through a lens that insists nearly everyone can be a leader leads to difficulties in defining what leadership is and what leadership programs should offer. It also denies that some youth truly have the skills, talent, and character to be exceptional leaders (2006: 50).

This debate clearly has implications on how best to support young people in effecting change. Kahn et al, 2009, have argued that the two concepts need not be mutually exclusive and that good youth leadership programs should provide the opportunity for all young people to learn and grow, while also encouraging and nurturing those with the talents and desire to do more (2009: 18). In doing this however, it is important that 'inherent' leadership qualities are not confused with socially determined attributes that arise from social, economic or other forms of privilege. More privileged young people for example, may display greater capacities in participating in mainstream policy or political structures precisely because of their backgrounds and familiarity with these settings. Partly related to this point, Kress (2006) has argued for a greater focus on assessment tools that would allow for the identification of young people who naturally gravitate toward leadership which in turn will inform strategies on how best these skills can be nurtured and developed.

Making Leadership Programs Attractive and Accessible

A critical precondition for leadership development is that programs to foster leadership skills and capacities are attractive, open and accessible to young people. Kahn (2009) in a study on youth leadership initiatives in Brazil, the UK and Australia, noted that young people can often be put off by the language of leadership, which can be seen as elitist, individualistic, self-serving or inward-focused, rather than directed at social change. Equally, young people can perceive 'leadership' development as daunting, relating to an end point of taking on a leadership role which may not appeal to them. Given many of these complications in leadership language, some programs have avoided an explicit

definition of leadership, trying instead to get young people to create their own understandings of the concept (2009:17).

Other studies have noted imbalances in accessing leadership programs. Libby (et al, 2006) for example, has highlighted the need to create more opportunities for marginalized youth to develop leadership skills through participation in 'inside' settings (in other words, within mainstream social or political institutions) rather than just participation in grassroots efforts that come from outside systems or institutions of power (2006). This relates back to the discussions on "incrementalist" approaches to effecting change and 'transactional' leadership, which often involve a substantial "insider" element – for example being able to research and develop evidence based ideas and recommendations that are premised on an understanding of decision-making in mainstream institutional settings. Limiting opportunities for marginalized youth to participate in these settings closes off important avenues for such young people to progress change.

As mentioned earlier, DFID-CSO Children and Youth Network (2010) in their guide on participation of young people in development also highlight the risk that leadership development programs can reinforce inequalities by targeting youth leaders from well-known visible groups. They note: "like all other areas of development, understanding inequalities and power relationships is crucial, including in relation to gender dynamics. The youth sector can learn from gender in terms of appropriate approaches for reaching out to excluded members of communities" (2010: 89).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Applying a "theory of change" approach, this paper has identified four key high level outcomes that a whole range of institutional and social movement actors have employed in supporting young people to create "positive, equitable and sustainable change". These are that:

- Young people participate in formal political, policy and governance structures.
- Young people are civically engaged and active in their communities or societies.
- Young people engage specifically on positive change issues at local or global levels through youth-led initiatives or effective intergenerational partnerships.
- Young people have leadership skills to work effectively in different contexts.

Each of these outcomes is interlinked and one can be an important precondition for the other. For example, participation in formal policy structures will be less effective if young people lack leadership skills or other capacities necessary to participate on an equal footing with others. Equally, leadership skills and other capacities have less effect if young people lack access to decision-making structures, including access to formal State political and policy governance or participation in social movements.

Each of these outcomes areas also have a whole set of interlinked theories and preconditions, illustrated graphically in the report and discussed in some detail. For example:

- Participation of young people in formal political or policy making structures will have little impact if such participation is not meaningful or is tokenistic. Also

important, is the need to promote equality of access, focused in particular on marginalized and excluded young people.

- To support the creation of positive and equitable change, general levels of civic engagement by young people may not be sufficient if this does not contribute to political engagement and the development of social capital that support values conducive to driving progressive change- for example, tolerance for others and respect for diversity and pluralism. The evidence suggests there is no automatic link between civic engagement and the development of such values.
- The evidence suggests that ‘youth development’ focused on raising awareness and developing young people’s ‘internal’ capacity is critical to engaging and supporting young people in creating progressive change. Particularly important in this respect, has been forms of support that build the confidence and positive identity of young people who have been marginalized as a result of low standing and status due to factors such as gender, race, disability and sexual orientation.
- For ‘youth development’ to impact effectively, young people need to have progression pathways into social movements and other vehicles for promoting positive and equitable change. Important strategies in this respect include support for youth-led initiatives but also creating opportunities for inter-generational partnerships based on equality and trust.
- Young people need the leadership skills to participate effectively or to drive change in different contexts. Important preconditions for this include access to leadership programs that cultivate key skills necessary for effecting change. These include social and emotional competencies such as self-awareness, collaboration, empathy, relationship building and the ability to lead and influence based on personal attributes rather than simply holding formal positions of authority.
- Leadership development programs need to promote the leadership capacities of all young people while at the same time providing for the needs of young people who have exceptional talent and capacity for leadership. In striking this balance, programs need to be cognizant of the inequalities that may disguise the true leadership talent of marginalized and disadvantaged young people. Important in this respect, is the need to ensure that such young people have access to leadership training related to ‘inside’ settings (within mainstream social or political institutions) and not just participation in grassroots efforts that come from outside systems or institutions of power.

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