

Best Practices for Engaging Youth as Partners in Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Sustainable Development Efforts

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Abstract

Youth are commonly referred to as important assets to society and as leaders of the future. In reality, they can be leaders of today; as well as an important component to decision-making at the family and community levels and critical to social, environmental, and economic viability. But this requires viewing them as partners in a shared process focused on their interest, knowledge, and abilities instead of as a token voice. This notion is sometimes contradictory to historical societal norms that may be based on seniority, class, or even gender. However, not only is it a right of youth to actively participate in society, it is important for building a generation of citizens who are able to be productive in a global economy and leaders of sustainable development. Ultimately, the success of youth and the success of communities are intertwined and best practice involves implementation of “positive youth development” and “youth participation” concepts in order for both youth and communities to thrive. Despite challenges, obstacles, and effort needed, the value of engaging youth in sustainable development shows promise for youth and communities. Not only is it an international policy declaration and a moral imperative; it is truly the right thing to do. The future of a society, and indeed the world, depends on adults working together with youth as representatives of the future. Utilizing a program development strategy and a logic model approach to jointly determine outcomes and impacts to be achieved can help guide the process for mutual benefit. This article explains potential challenges and barriers as well as recommendations of best practices identified in the literature for overcoming obstacles to achieving these outcomes through (1) positive youth development, (2) meaningful participation of youth at all levels, (3) youth-adult partnerships as a potential mechanism for sustainable development, and (4) a suggested planning process that makes it easier to evaluate how well results have been achieved.

Keywords: Youth-Adult Partnerships, Positive Youth Development, Youth Participation, People-Centered Development, Community Development

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Youth in a People-Centered Approach to Sustainable Development

Youth are commonly referred to as important assets to society and as leaders of the future. In reality, they can be leaders of today; as well as an important component to decision-making at the family and community levels and critical to social, environmental, and economic viability. But this requires viewing them as partners in a shared process based on their interest, knowledge, and abilities; not merely as a token voice. This notion is sometimes contradictory to historical societal norms that may be based on seniority, class, or even gender but, not only is it a right of youth to actively participate in society, it is important for building a generation of citizens who are able to be productive in a global economy and leaders of sustainable development. Best practice involves implementation of “positive youth development” and “youth participation” concepts in order for both youth and communities to thrive. Ultimately, the success of youth and the success of communities are intertwined and interdependent.

In *Our Common Future*, the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) stated “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This requires involving the people affected by decisions. Indeed, the expectation that participation by local people is key in developing and maintaining sustainable economies is included in several of the principles offered by Korten (1990) regarding “people-centered” instead of “growth centered” development:

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- “The first priority in the use of earth’s resources should be to allow all people an opportunity to produce a basic livelihood for themselves and their families.
- Every individual has the right to be a productive contributing member of family, community and society.
- Sovereignty resides in the people. The authority of the state is granted by the people and therefore may be withdrawn by them.
- People have a right to a voice in making the decisions that influence their lives, and decision-making should be as close to the level of individual, family and community as possible.
- Local decisions should reflect a global perspective and an acceptance of the rights and responsibilities of global citizenship.”

Young people need to be part of such a “people-centered” approach from the start. Recommendations from the Youth and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) workshop at the Education for a Sustainable Future (ESF) International Conference held in Ahmadabad, India (Centre for Environmental Education, August 2005) emphasized that need:

“Youth is a major force in bringing movement and change. Today, the world is facing serious environmental degradation. The world is rapidly changing, and conventional solutions will have very limited impact on solving such problems. Also, it would not be incorrect to say, youth are a major productive stakeholders (sic) and have fresh and innovative ideas. Thus, there is a special requirement to involve youth in planning, policy-making and decision-making as change agents for sustainable development. Taking this into consideration, all major international declarations/recommendations for sustainable development has stressed the need to involve youth as a key stakeholder.”

Such “major international declarations/recommendations,” include two program areas of Chapter 25 of the United Nations Agenda 21 (United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 1992) titled “Children and Youth in Sustainable Development,” in which the following bases for action were provide regarding the roles of youth:

Advancing the role of youth and actively involving them in the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development

“It is imperative that youth from all parts of the world participate actively in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.”

Children in Sustainable Development

“Children not only will inherit the responsibility of looking after the Earth, but in many developing countries they comprise nearly half the population. Furthermore, children in both developing and industrialized countries are highly vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation. They are also highly aware supporters of environmental thinking. The specific interests of children need to be taken fully into account in the participatory process on environment and development in order to safeguard the future sustainability of any actions taken to improve the environment.”

Youth-led development is “An approach to development driven and guided by young people that draws upon their energy, creativity and skills to create positive change. It can be on a small or large scale and implicitly values young people as an asset for society” (United Kingdom Department for International Development-Civil Society Organizations Youth Working Group, 2010, p. v). Furthermore, “According to the Center of Excellence for Youth Engagement, meaningful youth engagement produces benefits to youth and the communities in which they live. Through engagement youth gain a sense of empowerment as individuals and make healthy connections to others; resulting in the reduction of risk behaviors and increases in positive activities. In addition to the social benefits of these behavioral changes, the community gains through the energy and ideas that youth bring to organizations, activities, and their relationships with adults” (Morse, Markowitz, Zanghi, Burns, 2003, p. 5).

Unfortunately, historical efforts for involving youth have not always been for positive reasons and have had political propaganda or other ulterior motives as driving forces. The National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (1996, p. 3)

observed that “When we examine the history of the world, it becomes clear, and frightening, how much easier it is to sell hate or promote fear than to educate people about the complexities of the personal development process or how to develop caring interpersonal relationships. Many social movements, both those productive and dangerous, have built agendas around an enemy, whether individual, organizational, or conceptual.” Therefore, community leaders and others must demonstrate sincerity and remain cognizant to steer clear of even an unintended, false impression that young people are being used for ulterior motives or political gain. Otherwise, sustainable development efforts involving youth are destined to repeat history and fail.

Honoring the Rights of Youth to Meaningfully Participate in Society as a Prerequisite for Sustainable Development

As a result of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), young people have rights to meaningfully participate in society. Such rights pertain to freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of assembly; access to information; education for responsible citizenship; participation in cultural life and the arts; and more. Honoring these rights will surely contribute to the potential for youth involvement in sustainable development, but lofty goals often remain unfulfilled. In a statement by Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General on International Youth Day 2007 (United Nations Programme on Youth, 2010), he confirmed the importance of and commitment to engaging youth:

“We must fulfill our obligations to youth. The World Programme of Action for Youth asks Governments to consider the contributions of young person’s on all policies affecting them. Governments must honor this commitment. They must also increase the financial, education and technical support made available to young people...It is high time that we stopped viewing our young people as part of the problem and started cultivating their promise and potential.”

Youth themselves are often more in tune than adults regarding what needs to be done and offer practical explanations for why engaging young people is beneficial, as shown in this quote by an Australian youth (reported by World Bank, 2006) that succinctly captures the potential

value of involving youth in development:

“When it comes to ‘youth making a difference in communities’ I think the value of youth has been underestimated everywhere. Youth are excellent in delivering grass roots levels development projects at minimal budgets and very effectively. Due to the fact that they are involved at the grass roots level, they can easily implement a project without the bureaucracy of organizations . . . they often have a lower cost base too.”

The National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (1996, p. 20) explains that “Community building requires a shared purpose, an inclusive planning process, leadership development rather than service delivery, financial stabilization, opportunities for community empowerment through a learning process, and strategies for reconnecting people of all generations and backgrounds.” The intent of the remainder of this article is to present recommendations of best practices identified in the literature to overcome challenges and barriers for achieving these outcomes through: (1) positive youth development, (2) meaningful participation of youth at all levels, (3) youth-adult partnerships as a potential mechanism for sustainable development, and (4) a suggested planning process focused on mutually-agreed upon outcomes and desired impacts that makes it easier for youth and adults to jointly evaluate how well results have been achieved.

Viewing “Positive Youth Development” as a Method and an Outcome

Sustainable development is often focused on environmental and economic goals. However, effective efforts to engage youth in sustainable development both require and will result in positive development of youth in the process. In other words, positive youth developments can be both a process towards and a desired outcome of sustainable development efforts. A variety of studies and reports have provided evidence of the value of positive youth development and critical components and best practices for ensuring it is possible to achieve. This article aims to integrate those that justify a call to action with those that explain how it should be accomplished.

West (1974) listed four ingredients identified as necessary for youth to develop in a positive way (as reported in National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, 1996, p. 4): “a sense of competence, sense of usefulness, sense of

belonging, and a sense of power.” Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) explained that “One way to ensure that young people have access to what they need to develop positively, for example, is to create youth-empowering environments that offer young people the opportunity to: “experience feeling a part of a supportive community; meet their needs for mastery of skills and tasks; feel involved in determining their own future, while recognizing society’s need to control harmful behavior;” and to “contribute to the community” (as reported in National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, 1996, p. 14).

Creating opportunities for youth and positive environments is essential to facilitating positive youth development and making sustainable development a realistic outcome. In *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (2002, p. 7) listed essential features of community programs that facilitate positive youth development:

- “Physical and psychological safety and security;
- Structure that is developmentally appropriate, with clear expectations for behavior as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, to participate in governance and rule-making, and to take on leadership roles as one matures and gains more expertise;
- Emotional and moral support;
- Opportunities for adolescents to experience supportive adult relationships;
- Opportunities to learn how to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors;
- Opportunities to feel a sense of belonging and being valued;
- Opportunities to develop positive social values and norms;
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery;
- Opportunities to develop confidence in one’s abilities to master one’s environment (a sense of personal efficacy);
- Opportunities to make a contribution to one’s community and to develop a sense of mattering; and
- Strong links between families, schools, and broader community resources.”

Ultimately, a goal is to nurture positive assets in youth that

will contribute positively to the community. The Search Institute (1997) identified “40 research-based, positive qualities that influence young people’s development, helping them become caring, responsible, and productive adults.” Its *Developmental Assets* frame work is based in youth development, resiliency, and prevention research which has shown that “the more assets that young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive. When they have higher levels of assets, they are more likely to do well in school, be civically engaged, and value diversity. The positive power of assets is evident across all cultural and socioeconomic groups of youth in the United States as well as other parts of the world. Furthermore, levels of assets are better predictors of high-risk involvement and thriving than poverty, family structure, or other demographic difference.” This is particularly relevant because it coincides with other studies (Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) that show that “thriving” will lead to “contributing,” which seems key to demonstrating leadership to help others and necessary to engage in sustainable development efforts.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) relies on “five Cs”: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring. Furthermore, young people who have developed these “five C’s” are considered to be on the developmental path to the sixth C: Contribution to self, family, community, and the institutions of society (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; and Lerner, 2004). The six “C’s” are defined as follows:

Competence: Positive view of one’s actions in specific areas, including social, academic, cognitive, health, and vocational.

Confidence: Internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy.

Connection: Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in exchanges between the individual and his/her peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.

Character: Respect for societal and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity.

Caring/Compassion: A sense of empathy and sympathy for others.

Contribution: Contributions to self, family, community, and to the institutions of a civil society.

Thus, sustainable development involving young people is more likely to be achieved when it can foster the “six C’s” of positive youth development and contribute to asset development in youth.

Meaningful Participation is Key to Positive Youth Development and Sustainable Development Goals

The promise of positive youth development is not truly fulfilled and young people’s role in sustainable development cannot be achieved unless youth can actively participate in meaningful ways. Hart (1992: 4; p. 5) declared “Participation is ... the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and... against which democracies should be measured. Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship.” Thus, for youth to be true participants and not merely tokens, they must be given the opportunity for significant roles including leadership. Ultimately, “Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate. This principle acknowledges the importance of providing opportunities for young people to increase their control of what happens to them and around them, through participation and engagement.” (Youth line, 2012) But this isn’t simply good for young people. The Family and Youth Services Bureau (2007, p. 41) explained that “Communities benefit when youth get involved. Adults who interact with young people on government councils or who see the positive things that youth can accomplish will be more likely to view young people positively and to listen to their needs. When communities empower their youth by giving them leadership opportunities, support from caring adults, and chances to make a difference, the communities in turn become safer, healthier, and better places to live.” These are worthy potential “social” outcomes of sustainable development.

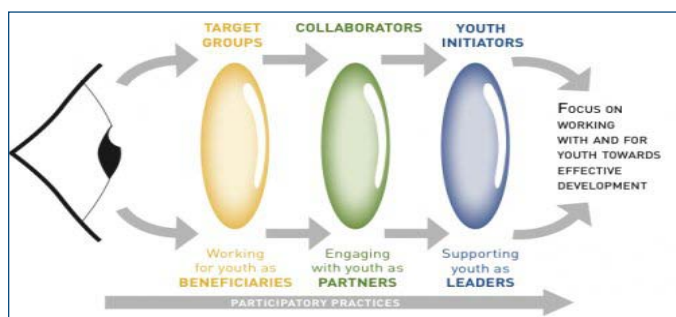
In planning to involve youth in sustainable development, it is important to understand differences in ways youth can participate. An adaptation of *The Three-lens Approach to Youth Participation* (adapted from the *World Bank World Development Report 2007* and featured in the *Youth Participation in Development - A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers*, p. 3),

shown in Figure 1 depicts the potential roles of youth. A youth mapping study conducted in 2007 by the Youth Working Group of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (as reported in United Kingdom Department for International Development-Civil Society Organizations Youth Working Group, 2010, p. 2) provided further clarification and “advocated that development assistance should work *for* the benefit of youth (as target beneficiaries), *with* youth as partners, and be shaped *by* youth as leaders. This is an assets approach to youth participation in development.” Furthermore, it explained that “It is important for institutions and practitioners to consider all three lenses; they are not mutually exclusive. Youth participation in development is often a combination of all three. The ultimate aim is to develop youth as partners and leaders in development. This is based on youth having agency: their capacity to act, their skills and capabilities and their ability to change their own lives. Youth operating as partners and leaders are inherently beneficiaries too.” This emphasizes the synergistic intertwinement of positive youth development and community development that lead to sustainable development.

Mental health is certainly an example of a positive community/social outcome inherent to sustainable development. Oliver, Collin, Burns, and Nicholas (2006) indicated “Building resilience in young people is an important goal if we are to strengthen capacity and promote skills that help to reduce mental health problems. One way to foster resilience in young people is through meaningful youth participation; that is, decision-making by young people that involves meaning, control, and connectedness. Whilst youth participation may occur in recognition of young people’s rights to be involved in all decisions that affect them, meaningful participation can itself enhance a young person’s sense of connectedness, belonging and valued participation, and thereby impact on mental health and well being.” Thus, participation is viewed as not just a means to sustainable development but a key potential outcome and integral part of the solution.

Examples of models that depict different levels of youth involvement possible include *Hart’s Ladder of Participation* (Hart, 1992), Figures 2a & 2b, and Schier’s *Pathways to Participation* (Schier, 2001) shown in Figure 3, which builds on Hart’s model by providing tangible “openings, opportunities, and obligations” for achieving youth involvement. These are in concert with *The Three-lens Approach* shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Three-lens Approach to Youth Participation



Source of graphic: <http://www.ygproject.org/guide/introduction/> / three-lens-approach

Figure 2a. Hart’s Ladder of Participation

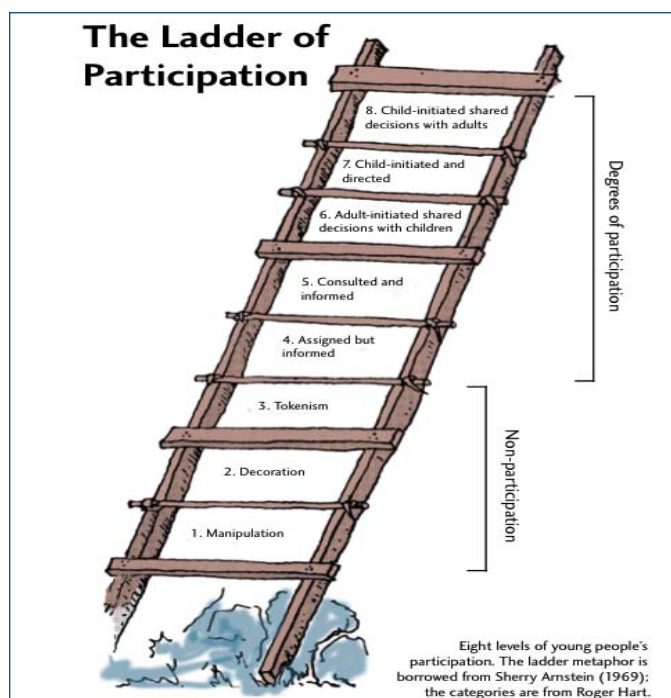


Figure 2b. Summary of Hart’s Ladder of Participation

8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Children and young people have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join them in making decisions.
7. Child-initiated and directed	Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children	Adults have the initial idea but children and young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Their views are not only considered but they are also involved in making the decisions.
5. Consulted and informed	The project is designed and run by adults but children and young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.
4. Assigned but informed	Adults decide on the project but children and young people volunteer for it. The children and young people understand the project and know who decided they should be involved and why. Adults respect their views.
The first three rungs are considered “non participation”	
3. Tokenism	Children and young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
2. Decoration	Children and young people take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing or wearing t-shirts with logos on [them], but they do not really understand the issues.
1. Manipulation	Children and young people do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, OR children and young people are asked what they think and adult-susesomeoftheir ideasbut do not tell themwhatinfluence they have on the final decision.

Source of summary: Gray (2002, p. 7)

Figure 3. Summary of Schier's Pathways to Participation

<i>Levels of participation</i>	<i>Openings</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Obligations</i>
5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making	Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?	Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?	Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?
4. Children are involved in decision-making processes	Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes?	Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes?
Note: Level 3 is the minimum to endorse the UN Conference on Rights of Children			
3. Children's views are taken into account	Are you ready to take children's views into account?	Does your decision-making process enable you to take children's views into account?	Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making?
2. Children are supported in expressing their views	Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?	Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?
1. Children are listened to	Are you ready to listen to children?	Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?

Source of summary: Gray (2002, p. 8)

Youth-Adult Partnerships Provide a Mechanism for Achieving Results

In line with Hart and Schier, William A. Lofquist's *Inventory of Adult Attitudes and Behavior – An Instrument for Examining the Nature of Adult/Youth Relationships* (1989; reported by Morse, Markowitz, Zanghi, Burns, 2003, p. 10) identifies “three styles or approaches to working with youth: (1) Youth viewed as objects with adults in control and no intention of youth involvement, (2) Youth viewed as recipients with the adult in control allowing youth involvement,” and “(3) Youth viewed as resources with shared control – a youth-adult partnership.”

Justinianno & Scherer (2001) defined youth-adult partnerships as “Efforts that involve young people and adults working together, sharing power, and learning from each other to build stronger communities.” According to Zeldin & Collura (2010, p. 6), “Youth-adult partnership is involving youth and adults in responsible, challenging, and collective action that seeks to benefit an organization or larger community. All individuals in the partnership have the opportunity to engage in planning, decision-making, and action consistent with their own interests and skill. It is not expected that all youth and all adults will be involved in all decision-making. Some members do not have sufficient time to always participate; other members may not always be adequately prepared to participate.”

Service-learning is a similar “strategy that many educational institutions and community-based organizations have embraced. It challenges students to address issues in their community through service, while at the same time learning on a personal, social and intellectual level” (Justinianno & Scherer, 2001, p. 9). Other terms are often used interchangeably with youth-adult partnerships, including student ownership, youth as decision-makers, youth as resources, youth civic engagement, youth service, and youth voice. “While many of these terms are similar, each represents a unique component of the role youth can play in service-learning programs.” (Justinianno & Scherer, 2001, p. 12). In any case, the goal is to meaningfully and appropriately involve youth in decisions that affect them and the communities in which they live.

Overcoming Challenges and Barriers

Despite overwhelming evidence of the need for and value of involving youth in sustainable development, there are certainly barriers and challenges to be recognized and overcome. Zeldin & Collura (2010, p. 36) profess that establishing a “sustainable development organizational culture,” requires “partnership values, partnership structure, and collective action.”

The National Resource Center for Youth Development (n.d.) explains that “Implementation of the positive

youth development approach can be challenging for several reasons: Organizational and cultural resistance to empowering young people, many adults have difficulty stepping back and letting youth lead, young people may have doubts that they are really being listened to or that their input can impact the system,” and “logistical issues (time, compensation, transportation, and scheduling) often do not support youth involvement.”

As is evident, the challenges of working with youth are sometimes actually inherent in the adults who need to work with them. According to the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (1996, p. 27): “Every generation, as far back as Socrates, points a woeful finger at the next. Promoting the youth development model requires helping adults to shift their paradigm about adolescence.” This includes:

- “Understanding the ‘challenges’ of dealing with adolescents, which may be less related to actual adolescent difficulties and more the result of adults’ inability to allow adolescents to think and question rather than simply follow.
- Acknowledging the strengths and attributes of adolescents.
- Understanding that each generation experiences a very different world than the preceding generation and that the developmental process is affected by the external environment.
- Addressing fear of youth behavior, which may be out of proportion to the actual circumstance.
- Accepting that each generation of young people must express its ‘uniqueness’ through music, dance, clothing, and interests that are different than the preceding generation.”

Barriers to participation of youth, as seen by the very organizations who aim to engage them, (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development, 2009, p. 10), sometimes include: “Youth participation not seen as a priority; not knowing how to go about it; not knowing how to involve and support young people; not having connections with young people or knowing where to find them; not having the time, energy or resources, not knowing how to discuss issues with young people, thinking that young people won’t want to be involved,” as well as “language and cultural barriers.”

Youth themselves see barriers to their participation somewhat differently than the adults, citing reasons such as “no awareness about how to participate, skepticism about existing ways to participate, discrimination against young people, unfriendly and formal environments, high demands on young people’s time, complicated or unnecessary processes, financial barriers (e.g. competition with work and/or expenses involved in participation), academic or bureaucratic language, and unclear expectations” (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development, 2009, p. 10). Fortunately, most barriers are not insurmountable and recommendations to overcome the same are typically straightforward:

- “Acknowledge young people’s cultural beliefs and values.
- Invite a diverse range of young people to participate.
- Ensure participation opportunities are accessible.
- Inform young people about opportunities and that they are under no obligation to participate.
- Recognize participation is beneficial to young people.
- Build positive relationships between your organization and young people.
- Develop a sense of belonging and security for young people.
- Create youth participation that is fun and challenging.
- Provide young people with information about the issue and decision-making process.
- Provide young people with timely feedback about the decision-making process and how their input was used” (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development, 2009, p. 13).

Sometimes, youth need some guidance in working effectively with adults who might be viewed as authority figures (such as teachers, parents, etc.) A report by Haid, Marques & Brown (Morse, Markowitz, Zanghi, Burns, 2003, p. 9), titled *Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy*, provides helpful advice to the youth in collaborating or partnering with adults:

“Establish a clear set of objectives, expectations and parameters to the working relationship. A failure to do so can lead to ‘experience taking over,’ pushing youth to the side and forcing them to play a much smaller role in

the decision-making process. This is especially critical in cases where adults have decided to create opportunities for youth involvement. A lack of clarity about roles and expectations can lead to some unfulfilled expectations and disillusionment with the process.”

Lastly, Zeldin & Collura (2010, p. 29) recommended that “It’s important that the work youth engage in is of high priority to the organization. If youth are only invited to participate in minor issues, then youth engagement will never have a positive impact on youth or on the organization.” Important functions to involve youth include: “governance and policymaking, training and outreach, organizing and activism, communication and media, service and philanthropy, and research and evaluation.” Otherwise, youth may not feel value enough to contribute their time and effort.

Making a Difference by Focusing on Outcomes and Impacts of Mutual Benefit

In *Program Development in a Political World—It’s All About Impact!*, Diem (2003) defined impact as “the difference we make in people’s lives as a result of programs we conduct. To be effective, they must ultimately change people’s attitudes or behavior, or benefit society in other ways.” It described a process for program development that yields impact; providing the recommendation for planners “To begin, start with the end,” which emphasizes the importance of setting specific, measurable objectives in advance. This will also make it easier to evaluate results and determine how well goals have been achieved. Because sustainable development is broad and sometimes a vague term easily misunderstood, the need to define clear, measurable objectives during the planning stage, is especially important.

A logic model approach to program development promoted by the University of Wisconsin-Extension (2002), Kellogg Foundation (1998), and others can help focus sustainable development projects by defining *Inputs*, *Outputs*, and *Outcomes/Impacts*. Youth participation would be a prerequisite “input,” activities and training are “outputs,” and positive youth development is a desired “outcome” of sustainable development; along with fulfilling its environmental, educational, or economic goals. In turn, this would be expected to yield positive changes for improving the lives and livelihoods of members of

a community, which are considered eventual societal benefits or “impacts.”

Of course, it is imperative to involve youth in all phases of a project. Whereas environmental and community development experts may be needed for their subject matter and scientific expertise; educators, community leaders, youth development professionals and youth themselves are also needed on sustainable development teams. Diem (1990) explained that a planning process involving youth can be simplified into three key functions: planning, conducting, and evaluating. Regarding the task of creating a planning team, recommendations included:

- “Involve people who will be participating or affected by the program.
- Identify and involve the appropriate people and assign tasks that match program needs and people’s interests.
- Delegate authority along with responsibility. Set expectations of outcomes, and then let people perform tasks with their own styles.
- Monitor progress and provide guidance and assistance as needed.”

Employing a Shared Planning Process for the “Greater Good”

In consideration of the aforementioned recommendations and best practices, here is an outline of a sensible process that may be useful for a variety of sustainable development efforts:

1. Identify needs and potential corresponding sustainable development goals. Clarify whether they are social, environmental, and/or economic.
2. Identify who should be part of a planning and implementation team.
3. Invite and form a team that includes youth. Consider how youth will be recruited and meaningfully engaged. Identify what incentives may be needed for participation; ranging from informal and formal recognition to tangible benefits such as possible monetary compensation. Provide equal opportunities for both adults and youth to participate and serve in leadership roles.
4. Create a safe and welcoming environment for all to feel comfortable to participate and honestly share

their thoughts, beliefs, ideas, concerns, recommendations, etc. When possible, make it *fun* for all participants.

5. Once the team is established, agree on both outcomes and process. Mutually set ground rules for participation, including key principles such as acceptance and respect for all. All team members should mutually determine:
 - Sustainable development goals and desired outcomes.
 - Methods, responsibilities, and timelines. This includes meeting location, times, frequency as well as agendas.
 - What other perspectives are needed on the team or should be consulted by the team? What other expertise may be needed beyond members of the team? Identify resources needed and available (both financial and human capital), as well as relevant regulations that apply and approvals needed.
 - Evaluation methods to determine how well outcomes were achieved.
6. Revisit and adjust planning during the process, including possible revisions to goals, adjustments to timelines, etc..How will alternatives be considered if/when obstacles to the original plan need to be overcome?
7. Evaluate progress toward goals as well as end results. Use findings to identify problems, communicate project benefits and successes to key stakeholders, and determine future goals. Evaluate process as well as project outcomes, such as:
 - How engaged were youth during the process? Were they provided equal opportunities for participation and leadership?
 - Were positive youth development outcomes achieved along with sustainable development objectives?
 - What can be improved in the process, including how youth and adults work together?

By mutually determining desired outcomes and the methods to achieve them, sustainable development goals become shared goals with greater commitment by all parties. Although this process may require compromise

requiring extra effort and time, more people will have a vested interest in success for “the greater good” instead of for individual or partisan interests.

Conclusion

Despite challenges, obstacles, and effort needed, the value of engaging youth in sustainable development shows promise for youth and communities. Not only is it a right, an international policy declaration, and a moral imperative; it is truly the right thing to do. The future of a society, and indeed the world, depends on adults working together with youth as representatives of the future. This requires cooperative efforts in the present.

In return, there are potential benefits to be gained for the individuals and communities involved. Zeldin & Collura (2010, p. 20) reported that “When young people are actively engaged in meaningful volunteer service, and work in close collaboration with adults, they are likely to show better school performance, more positive self-concept, better relationships with peers, increased social contacts, a greater sense of responsibility, and higher rates of college graduation. They are also more likely to have lower levels of alcohol and drug use, later onset of sexual activity, lower levels of delinquency, and reduced levels of depression.” These are beneficial to youth as well as families, government leaders, and community leaders who therefore can focus on achieving major sustainable development goals instead of using scarce resources to deal with perpetual problems that prevent progress.

The National Resource Center for Youth Services (2008, p. 11) added that “adults benefit by feeling a stronger connection with the youth their program serves, gaining a better understanding of the needs of youth, feeling a renewed energy for their work, experiencing improvement in morale stemming from youths’ spirit of flexibility and playfulness, and gaining an expanded resource base so that they no longer feel ‘responsible for everything.’”

When youth succeed, communities succeed and sustainable development is truly sustainable for both present and future generations. According to *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), that is the very essence of sustainable development.

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