

## **Briefing Session on Youth**

### **Investing in Youth**

#### **Summary Report**

The Programme on Youth of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations held a Briefing Session on Investing in Youth on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 in UN Headquarters, New York. The lunch time Briefing forms part of a series of 12 briefings, planned in the context of the International Year of Youth (2010-2011). The UN Programme on Youth organized this Session to focus the spotlight on the benefits of recognizing youth development as a smart investment for the public and private sectors. The Briefing Session was open to member states, UN staff, and civil society NGOs with ECOSOC status.

Moderated by Mr. Roberto De Leon, of the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the UN, the briefing brought together three panellists:

- Ms Wendy Cunningham, Coordinator of the Child and Youth Unit of the World Bank;
- Christopher Basninelli, Executive Director of Bridge the Gap TV;
- Mr Prateek Awasthi, Programme Analyst at the UNFPA.

Roberto De Leon introduced the panellists, providing a brief bio (see end of report) on each in terms of their work on youth related issues, and specifically on issues related to investing in young people. Taking a question and answer format, the panellists were asked two rounds of questions, with audience participants also given the opportunity to pose their own questions. An interested audience asked questions about the work of the World Bank, UN system and NGOs in the area of youth investment, focusing on how to involve youth more interactively in investment and development issues and how to reach young people.

Wendy Cunningham detailed how the World Bank has been working for over 10 years on investment issues, emphasizing that the concept of investment is one which holds much weight with economists. The World Bank looks not only at the benefits of investing but also the cost not investing in young people will have on a society. The World Bank's message is, investment in youth, is investment in development.

Wendy Cunningham also spoke about the competing demands for scarce resources emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the constraints faced by policy makers, the cost of implementing programmes versus the results of the programme and evaluating programmes against each other to see where money is better invested.

Prateek Awasthi discussed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the important part they have played in youth investment. In particular, he mentioned the importance of investing in young girls, as they are often the most disadvantaged group in

society. Investing in their education, health and development brings about rewards not only to the individual, but to the community and country in which they live. Mr Awasthi stressed the importance of investing in those the furthest away from meeting the targets and goals of the MDGs, as this is where the most gains will be made in development in terms.

Prateek mentioned the importance of involving young people themselves in discussions and decisions about youth investment and poverty reduction. Referencing statistics, Prateek informed the audience that 66% of poverty reduction strategies had not consulted with young people when being developed and as a result investment targeted towards youth was often severely lacking. He therefore underlined the importance of learning from young people their needs as a means to developing strong and successful poverty reduction methods.

This sentiment was highlighted by Christopher Bashinelli who spoke about the powerful role young people themselves play in enhancing youth investment. Young people can bring about change in their societies by being actively involved in helping to shape policies in their own communities. In addition, he stressed the powerful role technology is playing in bringing young people together virtually through social media and the part this plays in youth empowerment. Christopher drew attention to the work of Bridge the Gap TV and its philosophy for engaging young people: The three E's: Entertain, Educate and Empower. He believes that for young people to become active and participate, the message needs to be entertaining enough to draw a young person's attention, be informative enough so as to educate the person on the issue at hand and empowering enough so that it encourages young people to act on the issue.

The Briefing Session provided an engaging overview of the main issues in terms of Youth Investment and a varied panel to discuss the work larger players such as the World Bank and UNFPA and individuals and NGOs, such as Bridge the Gap TV play in promoting and participating in investment in youth.

### **Further Information on this topic**

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To hear an interview with Wendy Cunningham from the World Bank on the International Year of Youth click here <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/detail/111954.html>

For more information on this issue consult the International Year of Youth Fact Sheet: Youth as a Smart Investment  
<http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/youth-smart-investment.pdf>

### **Panellist Biographies**

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**Ms Wendy Cunningham** is the Coordinator for the World Bank's program on Child and

Youth Development and the manager of the Child and Youth Development Unit at the World Bank. She is responsible for supporting the Bank's efforts to provide evidence-based program and policy advice and operational support on a range of child and youth development issues in developing countries, with a particular focus on early child development, school-to-work transition, and youth violence.

**Mr. Prateek Awasthi**, United Nations Population Fund's Programme Analyst for the Adolescent and Youth Programme works to increase the participation of young people in policy dialogues and programmes. He manages the Special Youth Fellowship Programme and the Global Youth Advisory Panel, supporting advocacy and communications efforts of international youth organizations and networks.

**Mr. Christopher Bashinelli**, Executive Director for Bridge the Gap TV, moderated the launch of the International Year of Youth. He produces and hosts a reality show where he investigates the lives of young people across the globe by spending time in each of the poorest countries on Earth.