

YOUTH DELEGATION FINAL REPORT
5th UNESCO YOUTH FORUM
OCTOBER 12-13, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The 5th UNESCO Youth Forum took place on October 12 and 13, 2007 for the purpose of developing recommendations on the topics discussed at the Ministerial Round Tables planned as part of the General Conference: *Education and Economic Development and the Contribution of Science and Technology to Sustainable Development – the Role of UNESCO*. The recommendations made by the 5th Youth Forum were developed into a report that was presented at the 34th Session of the General Conference's Plenary Session on October 19, and was distributed during the two Ministerial Round Tables.¹ The report may be found in the document 34 C/INF.10 (attached). This year's Forum saw record numbers attend, with 261 participants, including 174 representatives from 116 countries.

The Forum was opened by the Chairperson of the 34th Session of the General Conference, Mr. Musa Bin Jafaar Bin Hassan (Oman). The Chairman of UNESCO's Executive Board, Mr. Xincheng Zhang (China), Mr. Pierre Sané, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Social and Human Sciences, as well as the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, also gave speeches at the Forum's Plenary Sessions.

The delegate from Ecuador was elected to the position of Chairperson of the Youth Forum's Plenary Session, while the representative from Sweden was elected as Rapporteur. Jinny Mailhot and Wojciech Gryc, Canadian delegates at the Youth Forum, were elected as Chairperson and Reporter for their respective working groups.

The delegates were selected following a call for applications from the thirty members of the Commission's Youth Consultation Group. Cynthia Lacasse, Programme Officer, Youth, with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, acted as resource person.

THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK AT UNESCO'S YOUTH FORUM

The first hours of the Forum were devoted to opening addresses and explanations of the Forum's procedures. The reports from UNESCO's Regional Forums were then presented at the Plenary Session and small group discussions followed. The topics for the Forum were then explained: a one-hour session before each of the two group work sessions. For the discussions, the youth were then divided, on a linguistic basis, into six working groups and discussed one topic per day.

¹ While seats were reserved for young delegates to the Youth Forum at the education Ministerial Round Table, the Canadian delegates were not able to attend, as we were late in receiving the information.

RESULTS OF THE UNESCO YOUTH FORUM

The following section presents the two major areas of discussion at the sessions in which the Canadian youth delegation took part, as well as the results obtained and their relationship to the Canadian proposals.

A) THEME 1: Education and Economic Development

During the first work session, which lasted for less than 3 hours, the young people worked on three broad topics found in the working document, namely: education and economic growth, the quality of education and sustainable development challenges and partnerships and international cooperation. The participants were reminded that peace and stability are the foundations of a society with sustainable development, and that education is a universal right with respect to cultural diversity. They also emphasized that youth participation in institutions must be strengthened within the Member States and that the Education For All program is and must remain an indisputable priority in attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

The participants in the 5th UNESCO Youth Forum discussed and recommended the use of information technology and communications to increase the exchange of best practices at several levels. This recommendation resembles the one put forward by the young Canadian experts who stressed the importance of integrating Internet 2.0 into the UNESCO site in order to encourage active participation from youth. The Forum participants also stressed the necessity of broader and more in depth cooperation with the existing networks, in particular at the national and international levels, cooperation that would complement the efforts and resources already invested in projects that are directly tied to UNESCO (e.g. youth, education and sustainable development). Such use of the Internet, combined with use and better promotion of the UNESCO site's existing tool, *Open Training Platform*, appeared necessary to facilitate the inclusion of youth in the discussions and exchanges around education and economic development.

In the same way, one of the major points of discussion was the need to popularize the tools and guides produced by UNESCO (ideally, in partnership with youth). Guides such as *All Different, All Unique: Youth and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, *Ten Keys to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and *World Heritage in Young Hands* to name a few examples. It is interesting to emphasize that the Canadian recommendations also involved setting up a tutorial for better understanding of the C/4 and C/5 documents. Better comprehension of UNESCO's documents, which are often technical, would ensure more effective participation from the young people in the Organization's institutions and the implementation of its programmes.

The young people noted the necessity of increased collaboration between National Commissions, Member States and UNESCO personnel in the youth organizations working on problems related to education (whether at the formal or informal levels). In this way, partnerships appear to be a means of integrating UNESCO's principles and

programs into other activities that are under way at the local, national and international levels, or to at least reduce the duplication of efforts and resources. In the same way, the Forum participants recommended that UNESCO focus on better public visibility for its programs and jurisdictions. The role of the UNESCO Clubs and the School Networks could also be maximized in order to encourage the sharing of knowledge on a more local level. Training for the youth consultation groups from the National Commissions is also strongly encouraged. Canada was cited as an example in this regard.

A) THEME 2: Science and Technology for Sustainable Development

The discussions on science and technology for sustainable development proved to be interesting, with many young people feeling very strongly about the importance of education, innovation, and access to knowledge. The actual working groups focusing on this subject took place on the second day of the Youth Forum, and three hours were allotted to discussing the themes. As per the Youth Forum reference documents, discussions on the topic were to focus around a number of themes, including the importance of science and technology for promoting economic growth, better public policy, and how the teaching of science and technology may be improved.

The working groups came up with a diverse range of discussions, and many ideas were similar to those raised in the Canadian consultations. Indeed, of the seven recommendations raised in the final report of the Canadian consultations, five related points were raised in the final report of the Youth Forum. As members of the drafting committee, the Canadian youth delegates were able to see these discussions develop, and can attest to the importance of the Canadian contribution to the science and technology discussions.

These five points can be grouped into two major themes: “education and youth”, as well as “high level policy”. In the first set of recommendations, Youth Forum participants were vocal about the importance of education as a key to lowering the barrier to entry for those interested in the field of science and technology. It is important to recognize that the pedagogical tools employed by teachers for subjects under the umbrella of science and technology are often seen as dull and impenetrable – the fact that many young people avoid these subjects should not be considered a sign of their lack of interest, but simply a sign of inadequate educational tools. Many forum participants support the idea of using non-formal and informal educational tools to make science more open to a broader audience, at least to promote a basic understanding thereof. Furthermore, a larger emphasis must be placed on the teaching of ethics and culture within science and technology curricula. Science and technology hold great potential, but can be used for both good and bad. UNESCO is an organization at the leading edge of ethical thinking, and should promote such critical analysis of scientific and technical research. Indeed, many scientific programs around the world do not have any sort of ethical requirements in terms of teaching.

With regards to the latter category of “high level policy”, many participants promoted three key issues, all surrounding intellectual property and the importance of technology

when it comes to social and economic development. In terms of international and sustainable development, young people found the challenge that the digital divide brings to the world a key issue that UNESCO could contribute to overcoming. The existence of a digital divide that threatens to grow wider as new technologies are invented is unacceptable. It threatens the effectiveness of educational systems, stunts economic growth, and makes it difficult for countries to catch up in the long run.

One way to promote the increased use of technology to overcome the digital divide, and to use technology to solve other pertinent problems, is to promote localization – the modification of technology to regional and local contexts. Many technologies are designed and created in developed countries, and giving others the ability to modify such tools to fit their own needs is integral to technical adoption and effective problem solving. As it stands, many Youth Forum participants see the current system of intellectual property rights as a hindrance to localization and general technical research. While they do not feel the system should be abolished, having UNESCO promote knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and access to various customizable technologies would be beneficial. A related point is the importance of open source software and open access to research and scientific information. Many institutions in both developed and developing nations are at a disadvantage because they cannot afford the large sums of money required to access journal articles and research results. It is important that UNESCO explore ways in which such research can be shared within disadvantaged communities and regions. Some participants went so far as to say all publicly funded research should be freely accessible.

Two issues that were not given much prominence in the final report of the Youth Forum, but did come up frequently in discussions in Paris as well as the consultations in Canada, deal with complex systems and the importance of indigenous knowledge. In the first case, UNESCO can play an important role as an institution that straddles the border between science and the social sciences, and promote interdisciplinary research to overcome social and environmental problems. In the second case, it is important to emphasize the use of technology to preserve and cultivate traditional and indigenous knowledge systems. While a few projects like this exist, participants feel more could be done.

In general, the discussions surrounding “Science and Technology for Sustainable Development” were fruitful, sincere, and many good ideas were shared. Youth clearly have a respect for both science and technology, but also see that it is important to approach such subjects ethically and with a respect for culture. Many feel that while there are many subjects under the umbrella of “science and technology”, it is important to take an interdisciplinary approach to solve problems and understand the world.

SIDE EVENTS

The Canadian delegation was able to participate in a number of side events during the Youth Forum, both as official events within the Forum itself, or through the support of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and Canada's Permanent Delegation.

As part of the official Youth Forum festivities, the delegation was able to participate in a boat cruise on the Seine River as an introductory event to the Forum itself. The cruise took place on the evening prior to the start of the Forum and allowed Wojciech Gryc, the participating delegate, to meet with other delegates. At the same time, Jinny Mailhot attended a reception in honour of Mr. Michel Audet, as a welcoming tribute for Quebec's permanent presence in the Canadian delegation to UNESCO. A second Youth Forum event was the "Chocolate Ball", an event featuring various chocolate treats for participants and observers of the Forum.

Through the efforts of Cynthia Lacasse, the participants were able to have meetings with two UNESCO officials as well. The first, Mr. Konstantinos Tararas, is a consultant for the Human Rights and Development Section of the Division of Human Rights, Human Security and Philosophy. The meeting allowed focused on discussing various issues surrounding ethics and human rights, especially the importance of emerging rights and the right to the benefits of scientific progress.

A second meeting took place with Mr. Bernard Combes, who is spearheading the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. The meeting was very informative, and provided the participants with a number of guides, books, and pamphlets surrounding various aspects of sustainable development. Mr. Combes is very interested in promoting the vulgarisation of documents, something that the Canadian consultations and Youth Forum also strongly support, and the meeting focused on this topic as well.

In general, the side events were a welcome addition to the rest of the Youth Forum. Not only did they allow participants to relax and get to know each other, but through the meetings above, also allowed them to learn a great deal about UNESCO's work, and some of the specific projects and happenings within the institution.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE FUNCTIONING OF YOUTH FORUMS

The first hours of the forum were devoted to opening addresses and explanations regarding its procedures. The subjects were then explained to the participants only one hour before each of the two work sessions, which lasted for less than three hours each. This is, it goes without saying, quite insufficient to discuss such broad themes, and this affected the quality of the content of the final report, despite the efforts of the delegates, a deplorable fact given the quality of the young people present at the Forum.

The first work session (Friday, October 12) dealt with Education and Economic Development. It was very difficult for the participants to start the debates and exchanges because there was a lack of follow-up as to the procedure to follow in the sub groups. As a result, Jinny Mailhot directed the participants in her group while presiding over the debates. Most of the participants had little if any knowledge of UNESCO. Too often, it was the Canadian delegates who explained and showed them the workings, programs, jurisdictions, relationships with other UN agencies and mechanisms for internal UNESCO decisions. As a result, the first work session on education was, to a large extent, devoted to clarifications on the Forum and UNESCO.

The session on the second topic, science and technology in sustainable development, resulted in more in-depth discussions. This can be explained by the fact that the participants, more at ease with the Forum's and UNESCO's mechanisms, were able to concentrate more fully on the content and to develop more concrete recommendations. In certain working groups, the participants took a half hour of the allocated time to discuss recommendations for the operation of the Forum itself (see following section). The strongest recommendation was to add an extra day to the schedule, because the lack of time was felt throughout the entire Forum.

This lack of time made the second session very chaotic, in particular when the translators left. Despite everything, the forum participants confidently entrusted the editorial committee, of which Wojciech Gryc and Jinny Mailhot were members (Canada is the only country to have two members), with finishing the report. In fact, the report was drafted the following day by a team of less than 10 people who had to integrate a series of changes proposed by the delegates.

Therefore, while the delegation was first rate with regard to drafting the report, the report was unsatisfactory, in our opinion, and lacks concrete ideas that can be easily implemented by the National Commissions, the Member States and the UNESCO Secretariat. We therefore recommend to Canadian partners to use the wording of the recommendations from the Canadian consultations, which are more concrete and easily applicable to Canada in the context of UNESCO's mandate.

It is important to emphasize that the last recommendation from the Youth Forum's final report (point 1 in the section Future Youth Forums) was worded directly by the Canadian delegation. We feel that it represents the desire expressed by young Canadian experts at the youth consultations, to rethink and reconstruct the concept of youth forums at the international level. The recommendation reads as follows: "We urge Member States to become more involved in the process of the constructive development of Youth Forums."

Recommendations from the Canadian Delegation to the 5th UNESCO Youth Forum for its Future Editions

1. The success of future UNESCO Youth Forums depends on the efforts invested by the Member States in the selection process and the training of their delegates. We note that there is much work to do in this area, in particular at the level of the other National Commissions. Clearly, the means are lacking in several cases and the Youth Forum is not a priority for most Member States, but it would still be of interest to maximize the expertise of the young people available by giving them, at the least, the information that they need to fulfill their role in an adequate manner. Canada has a lot to offer on this topic to Member States interested in maximizing the preparedness of their youth delegates (a fact that the head of the youth programme discussed with Ms. Henriques-Muller, Director of UNESCO's Youth Division).

2. It is important to ensure that follow-up is done on the recommendations made at the Forum, by UNESCO's youth unit as well as by the young people themselves. It was suggested that a follow-up mechanism be put in place – a recommendation that was also made at the 2005 Youth Forum. Better follow-up would be an excellent means of disseminating information on UNESCO's activities and ensuring some continuity in relation to the points made at Youth Forums. This concern on the part of the participants is directly related to the previous one.
3. It is suggested that the Youth Forum be held during the General Conference rather than prior to it.
4. Two days are clearly insufficient for such debates. Either one day should be added (a return to the 3-day initial Forums) or a theme should be removed (so that not more than one is discussed in two days). This would certainly maximize the quality of the content (assuming minimal preparation for the event on the part of the delegates).
5. We suggest that UNESCO ensure that the information relating to youth participation in the events going on at the same time (e.g. round tables) be given to the permanent delegations and to the National Commissions early enough to allow for necessary travel arrangements. It was unfortunate that Canada "lost" its place at the Ministerial Round Table on Sciences because of a lack of information.
6. As to support for a young person from a developing country in the Americas attending the Youth Forum, it would be important to strengthen the selection process. In fact the very short deadlines caused problems with visas that led to the absence of the young delegate from Grenada this year at the Forum. It was suggested that the deadlines be given to the Member State approached to receive such support, in particular at the level of submitting the person's name, in order to facilitate the visa process, if necessary.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up on recommendations from the Youth Forum now rests on the shoulders of the Forum participants, as well as on all those interested in the stakes discussed at the Forum. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO has undertaken to disseminate the Youth Forum Report, and the report from the participants at the Pan Canadian consultations, to partners in the youth network as well as to members of the Commission. We hope that some youth organizations will feel compelled by some of these ideas and will decide to act as leaders in implementing them in different regions in Canada, with support from the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and from its partners.

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