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and Development Essential for
Country and Community Progress**

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SUSTAINABLE YOUTH TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ESSENTIAL FOR COUNTRY AND COMMUNITY PROGRESS

Annette Hartenstein, Ph.D.

The World Bank reports that about 25 percent of the world's population (1.5 billion people) is age 12-24, 1.3 billion of them in developing countries, the most ever in history. Youths are the basis for the future health and well-being of their communities and are the key to breaking the cycles of inter-generational poverty. However, concerns grow about the status and employment of young people, particularly in countries transitioning from war with many de-militarized youth with limited education and skills and in those countries experiencing economic downturns. In the Middle East and North Africa, more than half the region's population is under 25 and experience the economic and social impact of conflict and/or economic downturns. As the number of poor people increases, more children and youth fall through the cracks, ending up on the streets and in informal labor markets without education and training. Youth unemployment and underemployment are not exclusively problems of developing and transitional countries; they are also problems of developed countries.

In stagnant and transitional economies, youth compete against numerous unemployed adults for a limited pool of jobs. University studies are available for those who can afford them, but there is little incentive to graduate and look for jobs that don't exist, or for which they have no training. Under these devastating circumstances, alcoholism, drug use, crime and other illegal activities, including human trafficking, have proliferated. Those youths who can emigrate leave their countries, contributing to a significant brain drain.

Youth are often discouraged about their circumstances and are clamoring for improved conditions, suggesting that among a nation's principal objectives, addressing youth unemployment and underemployment ought to have high priority. Youth should be enabled with useful and transferable skills for earning their livelihoods while at the same time being equipped to make a contribution to the development of their community and ultimately their nation.

As the World Bank's *World Development Report 2007* explains, improving youth employment opportunities and conditions are more complex than a simple focus on education, training, health or other sectors working in isolation. This effort involves a systematic and coordinated strategy that includes appropriate policies and programs that address providing employment opportunities and youth preparation and deployment. This important report is available at: www.worldbank.org/wdr2007.

A number of related workplace issues also need to be addressed when considering enhancing youth employment since workplace conditions will shape the quality of the experiences of young workers. These issues cover: improving workplace safety and health conditions, combating forced and abusive child labor and HIV/AIDS, eliminating discrimination and violence, promoting worker rights, and establishing better labor-management relations. Although these issues are not addressed in this article, it would be advisable to review the work of the International Labour Organization at: www.ilo.org for its expertise on these matters.

Although the concept of “youth as resources” is increasingly acknowledged, the practice of engaging youth in development activities as full partners is still not fully accepted. “Development without including youth is not sustainable.” It sums up the importance of focusing on and engaging youth. So, how can we begin to work with youth as full partners? How do we create “youth friendly” environments? How can their energy and idealism become an asset to communities while helping them gain the skills and competencies to be productive, contributing members of society?

Lessons learned from youth development initiatives suggest some guidelines and best practices for future programs incorporating youth into development activities. I hope this list will be further evaluated, expanded and refined as part of a growing body of successful practices. These practices include:

Build Relevant Policies that Cover Investments during Youth’s Life Transitions. The World BANK suggests these transitions include: learning, starting a productive working life, adopting a healthful lifestyle, forming a family and exercising citizenship.

Focus On Building Human Capacity Rather Than On Quick And Easy Deliverables. For example, don’t provide PCs without building the human capacity to effectively use and apply these tools to solve real life issues and problems.

Foster Program Governance That Includes Youths as Partners. Engage youth as full contributing partners at all stages of program and activity planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Consider them to train for and become trainers, trainer-of-trainers and or a community development outreach coordinator. For these positions, use carefully constructed criteria linked to the objectives of the activity for selecting youth as partners. Be as open and transparent about the criteria and selection process as the situation permits.

Employ Innovative Learning Approaches. Use modeling, coaching, and experiential learning. Offer “Hands-on learning” coupled with reflection as one of the most effective learning and skill development strategies.

Provide Life Skills Training Early. Provide opportunities for children and youth to develop a set of core self-management skills and organizational skills that can be transferred to income generating and life activities. Self-management skills cover self-assessment, learning, planning and goal setting, building relationships, life management, including problem solving, adapting to change, negotiation, conflict resolution, teamwork, adopting a healthful lifestyle, and citizenship. Gaining leadership and project management competencies, such as planning, needs assessments, budgeting, evaluation, and conducting meetings, can also be useful for older youth.

Build on Strengths. Don’t reinvent the wheel. Use localized, tested training materials and resources wherever possible. Help youth and members of the community appreciate what they do have as local resources (human, natural, social and financial) within the community. Encourage and facilitate collaboration at the national and local levels.

Provide Internships, Community Service Learning, and Mentoring. Advocate and encourage communities and the public/private sectors to help youth gain skills through paid and volunteer services. Help internship providers learn how to be effective mentors and facilitators of experiential learning.

ROLE OF HRD IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Human Resource Development professionals must turn their energy towards undertaking youth development in a comprehensive manner and become a valuable partner to help design and implement effective strategies for youth development. The HRD Community should sponsor research, disseminate information about useful training designs, implementation, evaluation and learning methodologies, and hold youth forums and programs. The results of these activities should be shared with government, universities, businesses and non-governmental organizations to improve their interventions and training programs.

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