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Leaving no one behind - Réflexions sur l'agenda 2030 des ONU

**terre des hommes schweiz supports young people worldwide
as agents of social change**

Leaving no one behind: putting youth at the centre of development

De Andrea Zellhuber

By focussing on the marginalized youth and children terre des hommes schweiz contributes to key commitment of the Agenda 2030 of "leaving no one behind". We are putting youth at the heart of our programme strategy because we are convinced that investing in youth is crucial for achieving progress in the SDGs. This means to empower marginalized youth to take an active role in social change in their societies. In our thematic fields of action the active engagement and participation of young people is decisive for sustainable change.



"Young people of the partner organization Cipo in Brazil are committed

against violence in their communities." Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz

Today's youth generation is the largest the world has ever seen: there are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24. This period in a person's life is critical to their physical, intellectual and emotional development, largely defining their social and economic prospects for the future. 90% of all young people live in developing countries. At *terre des hommes schweiz* we are committed to put these young people at the heart of our work. Our programme supports young people as agents of social change. Our thematic priorities are the interlinked fields of violence prevention, sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as economic empowerment of youth. In these fields of action we prioritize the most vulnerable and marginalized youth, for the following reasons.

Addressing health risks challenges of marginalized youths – focus on adolescent girls

Adolescents face particular health risks, which may be detrimental not only for their immediate future but for the rest of their lives. Sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent girls are of particular concern for a number of reasons:

- Early childbearing is linked with higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates and increased risk of induced, mostly illegal and unsafe, abortions.
- Pregnant girls or young mothers are systematically excluded from the educational system in many of our programme countries (e.g. Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, El Salvador).
- Of the estimated 22 million unsafe abortions that occur every year, 15% occur among young women aged 15 to 19 years and 26% occur in those aged 20 to 24 years.
- Gender-based violence is an all too common reality for many adolescents, especially girls. Globally, an estimated 30% of adolescent girls (15 to 19 years) experience intimate partner violence according to recent World Health Organization estimates. Violence against women and girls increases the risk of adverse SRH outcomes including unintended pregnancy and acquisition of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- An estimated one million young people aged 15 to 24 years are infected with HIV every year representing 41% of all new infections among those aged 15 years and older. Globally, young women make up more than 60% of all young people living with HIV; in sub-Saharan Africa, the corresponding number is as high as 72%.



Strengthening Young Women in Zimbabwe: Promoting comprehensive sexuality education in schools is an important goal. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz

Our country programmes in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Mozambique put a specific effort on the prevention of teenage pregnancies. Advocating for youth friendly services in sexual and reproductive health as well as for comprehensive sexuality education are key strategies. In these countries also child marriage is still a widespread phenomenon, especially in rural areas. Globally between 2000 and 2011, an estimated 34 per cent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 in developing regions had been married or in union before age 18. An estimated 12 per cent had been married before age 15. Girls at risk to become child brides are one of the key target groups of our country programmes. Early marriage exposes them to multiple threats including high-risk pregnancies and births, intimate partner violence, and the transmission of HIV. Therefore, within the strategic framework of “leaving no one behind” *terre des hommes schweiz* puts a strong emphasis in its programme on targeting adolescent girls. Especially our country programmes in Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa contribute directly to the following SDG targets:

- *Target 3.7:* By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education.
- *Target 5.2:* Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls
- *Target 5.3:* Eliminate all harmful practices, such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- *Target 5.6:* Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

When committing to the principle of “leaving no one behind” is fundamental to take into consideration multiple and overlapping inequalities. Some adolescents may be further marginalized because of individual characteristics or specific circumstances, such as disability or sexual orientation, belonging to a specific ethnic group, living in a marginalized community or urban settlement or area affected by high degrees of violence. Youth affected by multiple factors of social exclusion are most likely to be disadvantaged in access to health and social services. Our programme strategies are specifically designed to reach out to the most disadvantaged young people. Partner organisations often use cultural or sport activities as entry points to attract the hard to reach most marginalized youth.

Due to the commitment to the SDG principle “leaving no one behind” *terre des hommes schweiz* recently decided to support specific projects for LGBTI youth in South Africa. Young LGBTIs are often victims of violence and discrimination. They are afraid to use necessary health services or to report in cases of violence. A new project aims to strengthen these young people with knowledge and self-confidence, to stand up for their right to public health services. Furthermore it involves awareness raising of key actors in the health sector and school staff, as well as in the police to defend the rights of LGBTI youth.



Youth work in Tanzania: Playful approaches have proven effective in reaching marginalized young people. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz

Addressing youth unemployment: tackle underlying causes of multiple discrimination of young women

The multiple discrimination of young women is also evident in youth employment data. In our programme countries being young and female continues to pose a double challenge when looking for a decent job. *terre des hommes schweiz*'s programme strategy explicitly refers to the SDG Target 8.6: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment,

education or training. To effectively change the job opportunities for young women the underlying social causes of young women's weaker employment opportunities need to be addressed. Depending on the specific context hindering factors include early marriage, the gender roles that ascribe greater unpaid work burdens for females (household responsibility, unpaid care work), limited access to productive resources and persistent job segregation. Therefore our intervention strategies in economic empowerment on youth put emphasis on vocational training for young women. As rural youth face far more challenges in entering the labour market, the geographic focus in many of our country programme targets rural areas. Projects aim at lowering the social barriers that restrain young women's access to decent work.

Targeting the most excluded: Preventing youth violence by enhancing social inclusion and cohesion

In our programme countries in Latin America violence is one of the main social problems and is part of daily life. It has a destructive impact on development prospects. Young people as a group are especially affected by violence, in both regards, as victims and as perpetrators. A constant climate of fear and insecurity paralyzes young people's initiative to invest in their future and blocks them up in a feeling of hopelessness. Worldwide an estimated 200.000 homicides occur among youths 10–29 years of age each year, making it the fourth leading cause of death for people in this age group.

In many contexts youth are blamed for the high rates of violence, failing to recognize that these forms of violence are symptoms of a greater problem. Illegal economy, organized crime and gang activity, are caused by an array of deeply entrenched social and structural factors, including: poverty, inequality and institutional fragility. The policy response very often is limited to repressive measures, leading to massive incarceration of youth. In many Latin American countries this has led to broadly accepted stereotypes of youth being dangerous and a threat to society. Especially young men from disadvantaged communities are generally stigmatized and marginalized as the main protagonists of criminal violence. These social dynamics perpetuate vicious circle of violence, as the perception of social exclusion, of "being left behind" is one of the key risk factors for violent behaviour. The most important factor of youth's involvement in violent gangs is their need to be recognized and valued in their communities. Young men engage in violent activities because these youth gangs represent a structure where they can "be someone".



Youth work in Tanzania: Playful approaches have proven effective in reaching marginalized young people. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz

To effectively prevent youth violence and to break the vicious circle of violence and marginalization vulnerable youth need positive social structures that can provide them with a sense of identity and belonging. In contexts that are characterized by extreme social inequality a huge variety of cultural activities such as wall painting, street theatre, dance, music and video production contribute effectively to social inclusion of marginalized young people and strengthen the community cohesion in slums. Art, sports and cultural projects are door-openers to reach the most marginalized youth. These activities promote the experience of social recognition, and help young people to learn values of peaceful interaction and are sources of resilience. Through different forms of artistic expression and group activities young people who have felt excluded from society, experience self-affirmation and belonging.

Youth as actors for chance

Our country programmes in Brazil, El Salvador and Colombia aim at fostering youth's agency and positive role in society. This directly contributes to the SDG target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Our violence prevention strategies acknowledge that involving youth in decision-making processes is crucial in developing sustainable solutions to violence prevention. It is vital that we stop fearing young people and start to take them serious as partners in striving for social transformation. In our programme youth are not regarded as mere beneficiaries of assistance and support but as actors of change with a lot of potential to positively influence their environment.



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