Cover Page:

**iAM Ideas. Actions. Movements. Perspectives on Global Change**

Vol. 5 No. 1

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**www.ocic.on.ca  
  
State of the World’s Youth**(Background is a collage of different pieces of art put side by side)

**Voices from the Canvas: Adobe Youth Voices**

pg. 26

**Slacktivism: A Double-Edged Sword in the Fight Against Social Injustice**

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**Transforming Lives for a Peaceful Future in Colombia**

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“Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.” – Nelson Mandela

**Mandate**

iAM encourages critical thinking and presents new perspectives from a variety of actors, through articles, photo essays, podcasts, videos and more. iAM magazine examines how theory and actions intersect, looks at how to put reflection into practice, and brings marginalized voices from around the world to the fore in the name of global social justice, human dignity and participation for all. iAM is a platform that promotes an increased awareness and understanding of global social justice issues.

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**Letter from the Editor**

Generation Y (“GenY”), also known as the Millennial Generation, is a term used to describe anyone born between 1980 and the year 2000, plus or minus a few years at either end. If you have access to the internet, or a subscription to Time Magazine, you’ve most likely already heard of GenY: The Me, Me, Me Generation, who in many cultural contexts can be found in groups taking selfies or still living with their parents in their late-20s.

But is this generation – my generation – as shallow, lazy and selfish as our parent generations make us sound?

What the inflated titles won’t tell you is that those young people make up over a quarter of the world’s population, and are expected to remain at over half of the population of most African countries for the next three to five decades.[[1]](#footnote-0) And, unlike the generations that came before it, GenY is a truly global term. It defines a community of young people who have grown up under a globalized world where the local and international are elaborately intertwined.

Together, they’ve earned the title as “Most Educated Generation”, and all the debt that comes with it, while growing up in a global recession so severe, that it mimicked the Great Depression. They face a world of complex, inter-connected issues that affect youth worldwide across racial and class boundaries: skyrocketing youth unemployment rates, gaping social inequality, poverty, urgent global health issues and environmental degradation, or more generally known as the phenomenon of “problems without passports”. Today, a young person in Scotland has more in common with a young person in Sri Lanka than any time before.

Where there is no opportunity, GenY has stepped up and created it for themselves, and where there is change to be made, they created momentum. In a survey of 12,000 millennials (ages 18 to 30) in 27 countries, an impressive 62% of respondents stated that they believed that they could make a local difference, and 40% responded that they believe that they can make a global difference. From the creation of Facebook and Twitter, to the rise of B-Corps and Student Movements in Latin America, Quebec and the Arab Spring, GenY is a generation of innovative problem solvers, who have risen and adapted to the challenges before them.

Most importantly, GenY is made up of individuals with complex building blocks of identities, perspectives and beliefs. They are innovators, storytellers, antagonizers, advocates, nomads, critics, global citizens, artists, disrupters, pioneers, allies, and always evolving.

From the status of young people as refugees, to students debating the future of Generation Y, the state of the world’s youth is transforming our world and is the focus of iAM 2014.

**- Katie D’Angelo**

(Pictures line the bottom of the page of young people holding words that they feel describes GenY, up in their native language including: hebrew, japanese, arabic, english, spanish, french and english again. The words say determined, interconnected, lost, growing, resilient, frustrated and hopeful.)

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**Transient Identities: Forcibly Displaced Youth and the Global Refugee Crisis**

With over three million people displaced worldwide, the global refugee crisis has become one of the most insidious, debilitating, and “silent” disasters facing the world. The crisis is particularly destructive for children and youth, who make up roughly half of the world’s displaced people, and in large numbers are coming of age without a permanent home or identity. In her contribution to “The State of the World’s Youth”, Muzhgan Wahaj argues that governments and international organizations need to act or face an entire generation of young people lacking not only in a sense of identity, but the basic necessities that they need during their most crucial developmental years.

by Muzhgan Wahaj

The global refugee crisis is reaching an unprecedented and alarming height. The displacement of a staggering thirty-some million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP’s) worldwide threatens to create of forced statelessness; a permanent identity[i]. Young refugees are of particular concern in this crisis. The care of children forcibly displaced requires special attention to the lasting psychological effects of involuntary migration and its often brutal nature. There is a necessary urgency in such care of children that is unmet in global humanitarian aid and refugee aid measures. Unattended youth in refugee camps and those internally displaced in hostile territories are becoming indoctrinated with a culture of statelessness, one that is characterized by deep psychological traumas and intense resentment for the systems of authority that have either directly caused their displacement or have denied in any way the recovery of their national identities.

Where nearly half of internationally displaced persons are children, the necessary standard of care for these children sits at an impossible threshold for individual relief agencies to meet. The needs of forcibly displaced youth are substantial in that their developmental needs are especially particularized and require long-term strategies in mental healthcare and education[ii]. In the areas most heavily saturated with forcibly displaced youth — namely refugee camps, disaster relief shelters, and armed conflict zones worldwide — implementation of such long-term strategies would require the establishment of stable institutions that realistically cannot operate in such transient environments. Relief agencies cannot address the particularized needs of youth facing psychological and psychosomatic issues as they simply do not have the adequate resources to do so; the needs of these youth are outweighed by the more tangible need to provide bulk survival essentials to growing communities of refugees. Without the invested efforts of the international community in providing adequate aid, relief agencies are operating on a fraction of the funds and supplies necessary to provide access to even basic nutrition, medicine and clean water[iii]. International efforts at lending aid to refugees and displaced persons are mediocre at best, with geopolitical interests routinely taking precedence over the retention of human rights standards and international obligations in protecting children.

Lack of medical attention in identifying and remedying psychological ailments among displaced children intensifies and prolongs the culture of statelessness indoctrinated within these youth. Children internally displaced or seeking refuge in camps and shelters worldwide are at a substantially greater risk of violence, exploitation and trafficking[iv]. Without appropriate guidance and medical support, forcibly displaced youth will inevitably find other mechanisms to process and respond to traumatic situations. Most concerning of all is the potential for forcibly displaced youth in areas of armed conflict to become child combatants in war, either forcibly recruited by armed groups or willingly adopted by disenchanted or psychologically disturbed youth. The case of the Syrian refugees, rapidly becoming the greatest humanitarian crisis in modern history, demonstrates this best: despite over one million refugee children now crowding camps in neighboring countries, and five million others displaced within Syria, the international effort in resolving the civil war has been inexplicably delayed[v]. With little consensus yet drawn on how to introduce stability in the steadily collapsing state, more and more displaced Syrian youth are joining hands with rebel forces in their perceived revolution while the international community silently looks on[vi].

The refugee crisis requires at minimum an appeal to reform international legislations that govern refugee aid. This must begin first and foremost with a revision in the definition of refugee, which at present excludes internally displaced persons and stateless persons from the protection and rights of those encompassed under the current definition[vii]. This must be followed with an intense focus upon the psychological health of youth within refugee camps and living as internally displaced persons within armed conflict zones. Allocation of greater and more comprehensive resources in healthcare must occur or the psychological disturbances of forcibly displaced youth today will most certainly manifest as an incurable combatant personality among entire generations of youth. Equally as important in mitigating this crisis among forcibly displaced youth is the reconstruction of state stability in volatile areas worldwide. The international community has sat idle far too long in forcing resolutions to enduring armed conflicts worldwide. The repatriation of refugees and return of internally displaced persons to their homes and lives cannot be accomplished without a reduction in the hostilities that forced them away. Without such repatriation, forcibly displaced youth will continue to identify with a transient identity, and as they grow older the strain placed by their dependency on host countries and relief agencies will only continue to intensify.

The desperate need for interdependence between states in fostering these necessary changes is overwhelming, particularly in areas of armed conflict. Without the complete commitment of the international community in correcting the core causes of mass forced migrations, the refugee crisis cannot and will not be contained. Allowed to progress at this critical level, the case of young refugees will be one impossible to resolve in coming years. When entire generations of children are raised – some even born – into refugee identities, the fundamental crisis will no longer be repatriation, but managing a culture of transient identity that lends loyalty to no state, to no government, and to no legal system. The condition of forcibly displaced youth today reflects the condition of human rights and humanitarian crises as they will inevitably exist tomorrow. Unless remedied by intense efforts in mental healthcare and repatriation, the condition of forcibly displaced youth today will undoubtedly become the single most impassable divide in international relations in the future.

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**Meet the OCIC 2014 Global Changemakers**

Every year during International Development Week, OCIC recognizes remarkable young people who are creating positive change through their work. Nominated by Organizational and Institutional members, we interviewed the 2014 OCIC Global Changemaker Award recipients.

**Yi-Min Chun**

Dignitas International, HIV/AIDS Awareness

**What makes you want to get into international development work? What was the catalyst?**

The push forward in this direction was definitely the Dr. James Orbinski book “An Imperfect Offering: Humanitarian Action in the 21st Century”, but I think along the way I kept finding opportunities that kept fuelling the passion in me. It led me to Dignitas very early on in my university studies and it has turned out to be extremely rewarding. Now I serve multiple roles for Digntias, both as their National Coordinator for Youth, and Marketing & Communications intern while continuing to serve as President at the University of Toronto Chapter for the third consecutive year.

I don’t like getting too comfortable in one area because I don’t think that’s where innovation happens. Innovation doesn’t stay confined. Innovation continually breaks down traditional thinking and boundaries. This happens best when we harbour an environment that is inviting to interdisciplinary thoughts, ideas, and different people coming together. While completing my undergrad, one of my jobs was to be a Youth Health Navigator through the University of Toronto Dalla Lana School of Public Health. I piloted a new role in using youth to help cancer patients navigate the healthcare system using information communication technologies (ICTs). It was very novel and really made me reconsider the way I thought about youth involvement and public/global health. We’re known as Generation Y because of our tech savvy nature. It’s a shame that we’re not better engaging youth especially through ICTs to help solve some of our impending worldwide issues such as our aging population.

It’s hard to say which one is the key catalyst because I feel that everything that I’ve done has a catalyst of its own – continually propelling me forward and staying fresh to new ideas. Although challenging, I always find joy learning about different organizations, how to best be involved, and finally learn how to bring everyone together not only through commonality but also differences.

**What advice do you have for young people that feel disengaged?**

As a student at the University of Toronto, I’ve noticed that there is sometimes this culture where students attempt to get involved with many organizations for the sake of being able to put it on their resume. It’s difficult to get them engaged if they come in with that mentality. When I first got into university I wanted to get involved but I just didn’t know how. I threw myself out there in various types of organizations to learn about their initiatives and different levels of involvement for students. I continually let my passion guide me and in the end, that led me to Dignitas International. I found the best way to be better engaged is patience and genuine commitment; To stay with an organization, to learn what their needs are, and to act on how you can best help them. At the same time it’s important not be afraid to be involved even though you know you don’t have that skill-set yet. That’s what university is all about - figuring yourself out and figuring out what your passion is. There is a wealth of extracurriculars at your disposal to help you develop skills that you don’t have yet. My undergraduate degree didn’t have any public or global health component. That’s how I grew to learn about global health, and its related fields, by staying committed and helping to innovate alongside Dignitas International for the past six years.

**Do you have a favourite quote? What is it?**

“What’s your verb” – Dr. Alex Jadad

**Conrad Koczorowski**

AMREF, Global Health

**Do you have a favourite quote? What is it?**

“Every man’s life ends the same way. It is only the details of how he lived and how he died that distinguish one man from another.” – Ernest Hemingway

**Could you tell us about the work that you do?**

I took part in the CIDA funded International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) for six months with the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), an organization that does health care in African communities. I went to Uganda and played a role in the AMREF Uganda country office based mostly out of the capital, Kampala, but had lots of opportunities to go to the north and east and spend time in the field. I did operational research and provided support to their monitoring and evaluation department through developing tools, going to the field, observing existing projects, and helping guide the research process.

One example of an evaluation we did was of the inaugural e-Learning Midwifery program which let midwives upgrade their skills while continuing their work in health centres. I helped AMREF determine best practices so they could introduce the improved program to an additional eight schools. Having trained midwives is so important in Uganda because of the high rate of maternal deaths. I also trained and coordinated some of our organization’s partners in doing a three-district assessment of maternal health and family planning in Eastern Uganda.

**Who/what has been the biggest influence to you and why?**

I would have to say that it is my parents. They are both immigrants from Poland, and they both have that spirit of “always keep trying, always stay engaged, always keep looking for new opportunities.” My dad believes that this period of your life is all about writing the story for the rest of your life. Every obstacle, every success, every adventure just makes for a better story later on down the road. When they heard I wanted to do development work half-way around the world they were both very encouraging.

**Andrea Griffith**

YMCA of Greater Toronto, Sustainable Agriculture

**What makes you want to get into this type of work? What was the catalyst?**

A catalyst happens every day for me, when I read the news or simply walk down the street and witness the injustice of poverty and inequality. I am outraged by such injustice, but I’m equally impassioned to remedy it. It is human instinct that tells me that things can and must be better, that equality and peace are ideals to strive towards. And there sure is no shortage of stories of hope to back up that instinct!

**What advice do you have for young people that feel disengaged?**

Start small. Be patient with yourself. Always practice self-love as that is the foundation for everything. Go for a walk and discover your community on foot. What do you see? What is happening? What is missing? What makes you upset? What intrigues you? Read lots, especially fiction! Let it take you away and then bring you back. Read the news, but don’t let it bog you down. Enjoy music, art, dance, theatre and whatever else that moves you. Make time for personal reflection to consider how you fit into the world, your values, your ideals, your visions, etc. Find a mentor. They can be a friend, a relative, a peer, or a teacher. Surround yourself with friends and peers that inspire you and are interested in the same things that you are. Pick an issue that interests you. Go out and find people working on that issue. Volunteer with an organization of your choice.

**Could you tell us about the work that you do?**

Currently I am in a transition period after having finished my undergrad and then doing an internship with the YMCA. I’m trying to decide what to do next, whether to continue traveling, seek out mentorship opportunities, or do more formal schooling. In general, my work has been and will continue to be focused on social justice and environmental sustainability.

**Andre Wong**

St. Paul’s University College at the University of Waterloo, Environmental Advocacy

**What do you feel is the biggest challenge for young people globally?**

I’m trying to take the longer view, and the longer view for me is that the climate crisis is the most serious and crucial challenge that faces young people globally. I say that because the effects of climate change are already happening all around the world. We may not be seeing the impacts of climate change as much in Canada right now, but we have to realize that it is already affecting our global community and we have to do everything we can to reduce the effects of climate change because it will affect our lives in the future. People are dying in other parts of the world from the effects of drought and natural disasters that are enhanced by climate change.

Right now we’re young people but we’re going to be living with the consequences of our actions or lack thereof in the present. So we have to do much more on climate change. And how do we do that? Through things like sustainable development and trying our best to shift to a more sustainable society in terms of energy, such as renewable energy, more sustainable food systems, more conscious purchasing decisions and more active lifestyles.

**Could you tell us about the work that you do?**

I’ve been focused on the environment and sustainability for the last five or six years. Since I was young I’ve been very passionate about the environment and it has led me to be increasingly active and engaged in environmental issues. My main involvement has been at the global level. I’ve led youth delegations to United Nations Summits. For example, in June of 2012 I guided and led a delegation of 14 young people from across Canada and around the world to the Rio+20 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This was the largest United Nations conference in human history focused on sustainable development, and we were there as a youth delegation to speak about Arctic issues and the importance of sustainability in the Arctic. The reason why we focused on the Arctic was because of another experience that I had the privilege of being a part of, which was an expedition to the Canadian Arctic back in 2010 with Students on Ice, an organization based out of Gatineau, Quebec. I got to learn a lot about how fragile the Arctic environment is and the richness of the culture.

More recently, I coordinated two youth delegations to the recent COP19 UN Climate Negotiations in Warsaw, Poland. One was the Students on Ice Alumni Delegation and the second was a new delegation from my university called the University of Waterloo Coalition for Sustainable Development. These two delegations have two different mandates but they are both there advocating for the need for sustainability in our society and for our planet so we got to do some really good stuff when we were there.

One of our big highlights was that we had a meeting with Canada’s Minister of Environment, the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq. We spoke directly to her about our vision for the future of the Arctic and what our opinions and ideas are for the Arctic. As you know, Canada is an Arctic state and we’re very much invested in the Arctic. With climate change happening so intensely in the Arctic, it’s changing the region very rapidly, environmentally and economically, and we wanted to meet with her to express our views about how we can manage the Arctic in a more

sustainable manner.

**Do you have a favourite quote? What is it?**

“Every day you go to bed, your life is one day shorter, so make the most of every day.”

– Jimmy Chin

**Sabrina Rubli**

Humber College, Women’s Health and Empowerment

**Where did you grow up?**

I was born in Switzerland but grew up in Kemptville, near Ottawa. I moved to Toronto about three

years ago.

**Tell us about the work you do?**

My co-founder, Ella Marinic, and I started Femme International (FI) one year ago. As a result of a school project for Humber College’s International Development Postgraduate program. We had to design a water, sanitation and hygiene program (WASH) for an NGO in rural Kenya. During this process, we started thinking about how women managed their bodies during menstruation, and we discovered that there was hardly any research and few formal studies on the way girls manage their menstrual cycles and their health, and the relationship to development.

This is an issue we never think about in development but it’s the number one reason why girls miss school. In Kenya, girls miss an average of four days of school each month due to their periods, which seriously limits girls’ educational opportunities. Girls are often unable to attend because they lack access to sanitary products. In lieu of commercial sanitary products, girls will resort to using rags, leaves, and newspapers to manage their bodies – and even turn to prostitution to make the money needed to purchase pads. FI developed a Feminine Hygiene Management program which has two components: education and distribution. We lead girls through workshops to teach them how their body works, and why they menstruate each month. Then we distribute a Femme Kit, which is designed to contain everything a girl needs to manage her period — including a reusable menstrual cup. The cup provides up to twelve hours of protection so they can go to school and not worry about having their period. We partner with a local schools in Kenya. Ella and I run the workshops in the schools, and a local field coordinator, Rachael, who helps us organize partnerships. She helps to facilitate the programs.

**Ella Marinic**

Humber College, Women’s Health and Empowerment

**Who and what have been the biggest influences on you, and why?**

As much as I see the importance of an institutional education, my travels and experiences abroad have been the biggest influences on me. I wouldn’t trade those experiences, good or bad for anything; they have made me who I am today and what I’m passionate about. Also Sabrina, my co-founder for Femme, has been a great influence! She was the one who told me about the Humber College program, which led us to starting Femme International. If we hadn’t met, I can confidently say Femme would not exist and I wouldn’t be where I am today.

**How do you feel about the critics of Generation Y/Millennials who say that young people today are lazy and entitled?**

I read articles about entitled “Millennials” all the time and it gets me so angry, so fired up. We’re doing the best we can in an economy that is the worst since the Great Depression. We might not all have mortgages or pension plans or other markers used by older generations to measure success, but we do have a major work ethic and adaptability, and we’re not given credit for that.

We’re taking unpaid internships. We’re going back to school to specialize and hone our skills. We’re becoming entrepreneurs.

**Do you have a favourite quote? What is it?**

I am a bit of a quote buff so I have lot. But I like this one from Margaret Singer, which we use a lot within Femme’s merchandise: “No woman can call herself free who does not control her own body.”

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**Reflections on the OCIC 2013 Global Citizens Forum**

Fayaz Noormohamed, one of the two Lead Forum Volunteers for the OCIC 2013 *Global Citizens Forum: State of the World’s Youth,* reflects on the lead up to the Forum and the major takeaways from the two-day event.

by Fayaz Noormohamed

In April 2013, I read the posting for the position of Lead Forum Volunteer with the Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) and for its triennial Global Citizens Forum (GCF). The theme of the forum instantly appealed to me: “The State of the World’s Youth”. As someone who has worked on youth development in various countries, some questions about the Forum immediately came to mind. How will the complex and wide-ranging topic of ‘Youth’ be approached over a two-day conference? What specific tools would participants walk away with? Would it be possible to foster a collective capacity in addressing youth issues globally? I thought to myself, what better way to have these questions answered than to be a part of answering them.

The forum’s objectives were to a) convene OCIC members, youth and relevant organizations and individuals to strengthen capacity to address issues affecting youth globally, including in Ontario, Canada; b) share tools, research and good practices to increase effectiveness in youth-centered work; c) facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue on emerging issues pertinent to youth and youth-serving organizations; and d) highlight and support the work of organizations and practitioners as agents of change. Various individuals from OCIC’s membership accepted the call to join a Steering Committee. The Forum’s theme development was first on our agenda and together, we used an “Idea Jam” to map various topics of interest under the Forum’s theme. From ‘learning from African youth-driven projects’ and ‘youth mobilization through technology’ to ‘impacts of natural disasters and human conflict’ to ‘post-2015 development goals’, three thematic strands emerged from the Idea Jam: i) Youth as Influencers, ii) 21st Century Learning and iii) Employment, Livelihoods and Well-Being.

Following a call for nominations from OCIC members to invite international partners to attend and present at the Forum, the Committee selected outstanding youth development leaders from Jamaica, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nicaragua. In continuing the inclusive review and planning process, the Committee recommended keynote speakers and would meet to select 29 workshop presenters (out of more than 50 that applied) who would deliver 18 workshops and panel presentations organized across the three abovementioned strands.

The Forum was held on November 7-8, 2013 in downtown Toronto with over 130 sector leaders, practitioners, policy makers, advocates, activists, academics, funders and youth in attendance. Keynote speakers Rita Karakas of Canada World Youth and Jennifer Corriero of TakingItGlobal launched us off with their viewpoints, critical thinking and encouragement. Jennifer drew our attention to examples of social media and movements that enable youth to become agents of change. Rita stressed the world’s ‘youth bulge’ that is increasingly marginalized by multinationals that place economic and political motivations above anything else. The shared imperative by both of these outstanding leaders, however, was a pressing message for us all - particularly as we began a conference on youth. They urged us to always be deeply informed of the world around us, to be even more engaged through informed action and to remain unwaveringly motivated through it all. I was certainly encouraged, and I returned to their thoughts with others as we met one another during meal breaks and across tables in workshops.

And it was through those workshops that the multiple angles, perspectives and strategies around youth development would be unpacked, explored and contextualized. [click here for full program]. One of the most well received workshops at the Forum was from Simon Malbogat of Mixed Company Theatre in his session entitled Acting Out Social Conscience. Inspired by Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, himself a student of the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire, Simon used principles and methods of Forum Theatre to engage participants to imagine different responses and outcomes to common problems. The result is a tool that can stimulate thought, dialogue and action around for all ranges of issues related to youth and social change. More specifically for the international development practitioner were workshops like the one by Nadine Grant and Riaz Nathu of Plan Canada and the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, respectively. Participants were taken to Indonesia and Northern Pakistan, where the speakers shared their respective youth-centric models for sustainable economic empowerment programming. Workshop participants were tasked to engage directly with these models, imaging themselves as practitioners in those settings and undertaking, for example, a robust assessment to reveal employment needs, opportunities and readiness. This workshop underscored the importance of adopting context-specific economic development models for youth if improvements to overall quality of life for an entire generation are to be achieved.

With 3 workshops to choose from at each of the six modules over the course of two days, the overall experience to be had by each participant was bound to be varied. To visually capture these diverse learnings, each workshop concluded by asking participants to summarize on flipchart the top three big ideas they would walk away with. Near the end of the Forum, a wall nearly covered from top to bottom with these learnings allowed everyone to gaze over the collective response and this served as a poignant reminder of the power of a collective capacity on any given subject, not least youth development.

Closing comments from Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown engaged the audience on a number of issues and settings where the Canadian government is active. Following her remarks, OCIC hosted a reception, with dance and spoken word performances, to allow participants to continue conversations and networking with new and familiar friends. I spoke to many that evening who commended the comfortable and safe space that was created during the Forum. In such a setting, voices from youth and those concerned and working with and for youth alike were heard all the more clearer. That OCIC enabled such a space on a subject so important to our collective and shared futures meant a great deal to me as a part of the organizing team and even more so as an individual committed to bettering a world with youth at its centre.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbhtgxssgdY&list=UUNXCvHpuHRb-7iqDPPetuyA>

Transcript:

OCIC’s Global Citizens Forum 2013 - Transcript

Fades from black into footage

Title text: Danny Beaton - Turtle Clan Mohawk of Grand River Six Nations Territory. Opening Ceremony, OCIC Global Citizens Forum 2013

Video: Danny Beaton performing opening ceremony prayer.

Fade to black, fade into footage, upbeat music playing in background

Video: Montage of conference footage overlaid with text

Text:

Two Days

18 Workshops

43 Speakers

125 Global Citizens

International delegates from Columbia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Honduras, Jamaica and Kenya

One Focus: The State of the World’s Youth

Text on white page:

Ontario Council for International Cooperation (logo)

Global Citizens Forum 2013 (logo)

November 7th- 8th, 2013

Footage: Colourful pile of OCIC’s Annual General Report

Footage: Woman writing at registration table

Footage: Woman speaking to camera

Title text: Jennifer Corriero – Keynote Speaker. TakingITGlobal.

Jennifer: I really believe in the power that young people have, how important it is for us to create and design spaces that allow for young people to develop themselves to really have a voice.

Footage: Jennifer Corriero speaking at podium

Jennifer: What’s happening is a shift – a shift is taking place where young people are going from being just a passive learner in the classroom to being a mentor, and to being a facilitator, and to having a lot more to say because they’re gaining a lot more knowledge and outside access to knowledge from outside the classroom

Footage: various art pieces around conference room.

Footage: Woman speaking at podium

Title Text: Rita Karakas – Keynote Speaker, Canada World Youth

Rita: What drives development is the transnationals, the trans-continentals, and the trade agreements. There are significantly more industries, companies, bigger, with more impact, with global reach, than one-third of countries in this world. There are companies much bigger than many countries in this world who through economic transfers, market opening, free trade agreements, and through the technology impact of much more power than any individual, state and nation, on the lives of young people

Footage: Varied silent footage of workshops and conference attendees writing, speaking, and laughing

Footage: Man speaking to camera

Title Text: Riaz Nathu – Aga Khan Foundation Canada Panelist: Exploring Youth Employment Models

Riaz: I hope that participants walk away with the practical tools that we discussed, and more so a mindset of taking a youth-centric approach to understanding the labour market.

Footage: Woman presenting at a workshop

Title Text: Novia M. McKay, Jamaica - RISE Life Management Services. Workshop: Leading the Inner City Youth to Lead & Drive Change

Novia: And there are a lot of young people that are achieving success in academics, sports, etc

Footage: Woman speaking to camera

Title text: Nadine Grant – Plan Canada. Panelist: Exploring Youth Employment Models

Nadine: Plan and our partners in Vietnam take a holistic view. We see that young people need to kind of get their self-esteem up, they need to address issue of discrimination, they need to re-find their voice and their confidence. It’s a very empowering, um, model, and it looks beyond just getting the job and creating a more empowered young person

Footage: Woman speaking to camera

Title Text: Roshelle Filart – RESULTS Canada. Workshop: Harnessing the Youth Voice

Roshelle: Politicians, the media, they like to hear from youth, and if we can get youth to take part and use their, um, ability to speak out to take part in the democratic process, we can shape policy that can impact people living around the world

Footage: Man speaking at podium

Title Text: Dario Merlo – Jane Goodall Institute. International Keynote Panel

Dario: “Roots & Shoots” is a global youth movement around the world in more than 130 countries. For this program we have used actually different tools but one of them is to have school-based Roots & Shoots groups and sports-based Roots & Shoots groups, as you can see here on the different pictures

Footage: Man speaking at podium

Title text: Layton Shaw, Jamaica – Partner of Jamaica Self Help. International Keynote Panel

Layton: No, the challenges that kids face mostly at the Tavares Gardens Primary School are peer pressure, sexual abuse, and discrimination. A little bit of drama helps give these kids their moment to shine

Footage: Woman speaking to camera

Title Text: Erin Aylward – Gender at Work. GCF Attendee

Erin: Been learning about some of the different frameworks and toolkits that organizations use to gage what youth participation looks like and to ensure that they’re doing that in a meaningful way

Photograph: man giving a powerpoint presentation.

Title text: Jeff Perera - White Ribbon Campaign. Workshop: Youth as Male Allies & Leaders

Photograph: woman giving a powerpoint presentation.

Title text: May El-Abdallah - Arts Reach. Workshop: Creativity. Collaboration. Community: Supporting Youth Arts

Photograph: man wearing a red mask.

Title text: Simon Malbogat - Mixed Company Theatre. Workshop: Using Participatory Theatre to Develop Global Citizenship

Footage: woman looking at large sheets on paper taped on the wall, each titled “3 Big Ideas”.

Photograph: woman speaking at podium

Title text: Madeline Mendoza, Nicaragua - Partner of Casa Canadiense. International Partners Keynote Panel

Photograph: woman speaking at podium.

Title text: Sarah Wambui Itambo, Kenya - Partner of Rooftops Canada. International Partners Keynote Panel

Photograph: women and men sitting at long table

Title text: International Partners Keynote Panel

Footage: man speaking to workshop attendees

Title text: Aniket Bhushan – North-South Institute. Panelist: The Digital Advance & 21st Century Learning

Aniket: I wanna suggest to you that promoting Canadian values and global leadership requires engaging youth and requires engaging with the best of 21t century tools and technologies available and this is more possible to do than ever before

Footage: woman writing on a whiteboard in front of workshop attendees

Title text: Engineers Without Borders Canada. Workshop: Convening Learning & Community Spaces for Social Change

Footage: woman speaking to camera

Title text: Oshamimi Mayaki - MaRS Discovery District - GCF Attendee

Oshamimi: It is important to appreciate the work being done and the impact that’s being created but it’s also maybe more critical to think about it in terms of what are like, the institutional structures that these projects may or may not be reinforcing

Footage: man standing outside, speaking to camera

Title Text: Layton Shaw, Jamaica – Partner of Jamaica Self Help. Panelist: International Delegates Panel

Layton: Right so through the performing arts these kids are able to learn a lot of things, learn about discipline, learn about being persistent, learn about coming into yourselves over and over, to practice over and over and by virtue of them doing all these things they realize their self has been raised, they realize that they feel important. They feel as if, wow, I can be something, I can do something positive, and (\_\_\_\_)

Text on white page:

Ontario Council for International Cooperation (logo)

Global Citizens Forum 2013 (logo)

November 7th- 8th, 2013

Credits:

International Guests

Sarah Wambui Itambo, Kenya – Partner of Rooftops Canada

Madeline Mendoza, Nicaragua – Partner of Casa Canadiense

Dario Merlo, Democratic Republic of Congo – Partner of Jane Goodall Institute Canada

Layton Shaw, Jamaica – Partner of Jamaica Self Help

Keynote Speakers

Jennifer Corriero - Co-founder & Executive Director, TakingITGlobal

Rita Karakas - President and CEO, Canada World Youth

Workshop Presenters

Juwaeriah Abdussamad – University of Toronto

Mandy Bergen and Deborah Konecny – Catalyst Centre

Aniket Bhushan – North-South Institute

Kelly Bowden – Oxfam Canada

Shaunna Burton – Plan Canada

May El-Abdallah – Arts Reach

Irwin Elman – Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

Leigh Eagles – Save the Children

Zahra T. Esmail – Eva’s Phoenix

Roshelle Filart – RESULTS Canada

Craig Frayne – Horizons of Friendship

Nadine Grant – Plan Canada

Sara Hassan – TakingITGlobal

Sara Hsiao, Cari Bourrie, Dario Merlo – Jane Goodall Institute

Chizoba Mary Imoka – The Ontario Insitute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto

Kate Gatto – International Development and Relief Foundation

Simon Malbogat – Mixed Company Theatre

Andrea McArthur – Canadian Red Cross

Novia M McKay – RISE Life Management Services

Riaz Nathu – Aga Khan Foundation Canada

Mai Ngo – The Ontario Insitute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto

Jeff Perera – White Ribbon Campaign

Sjors Reijer – Mental Health First Aid Canada

Evans Rubara – York University

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Lisa Swainston - OCIC

Shayna Szymkowicz - YMCA of GTA

Oluseyi Taiwo Fasoranti - OCIC Volunteer

Evan Walsh - EWB Canada

Photographer -Allan Lissner

Film Crew

Executive Produce – Damali Kai Little-White

Producer/Director – June Chua

Cinematographer – Sarah Thomas Moffat

Sound Recordist – Tom MCMurty

Composer – Tandra Jhagroo

Next-Day-Editor- Rany Ly

Extended Editor – Jared Lorenz

Venue& Catering – 519 Community Centre

This Forum was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada

Logo: Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada

Logo: OCIC

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**Children of Prisoners: The Impact of Incarceration**

When a government decides to get “tough on crime”, leading to increased penalties for minor offences and increased spending on prisons, is there any thought given to the prevention of crime or the effects on the perpetrator’s children? The following piece, written in a North American context, explores a relatively unexamined topic when discussing the state of the world’s youth: the effect of incarceration on the children of those incarcerated.

by Rachel Urban Shipley

Debate rages about the most effective way to deal with crime. Opinions differ on whether incarceration is effective at preventing future crime or whether it increases recidivism rates, and many also argue that incarceration is not an acceptable way of punishing wrong-doers. One aspect of these debates that must be kept in mind is the effects of incarceration on the children of incarcerated people. Children can be affected both practically (for example, financial issues due to the lost income of the parent) and psychologically by the incarceration of a parent. Since children are not responsible for their parent’s crimes it is essential to evaluate harm done to them when considering the effectiveness and morality of incarceration.

Imprisonment has a variety of different effects on the children of offenders. Children of imprisoned parents essentially lose one parent from their life. Given that single-parent homes are often correlated with poverty (although of course many single parents are very successful), this is not good for children.[i] Contact with the criminal justice system can have negative effects on children, from the arrest (one study found that 40% of incarcerated parents were arrested in front of their children),[ii] to the trial (as “uncertainty about the outcome of the trial means that families cannot plan concretely for their future”)[iii], to the incarceration itself.

Incarceration can have significant negative effects on a family’s economic status, since the imprisoned person will be unable to provide much money while in prison (in many cases the family sends them money[iv]). Also, a criminal record has negative impacts on future job prospects when the jailed person is released.[v] A study interviewing families of incarcerated individuals found that “fully two thirds of family members reported they were financially much worse off since the incarceration.”[vi]

Furthermore, incarceration of one parent places stress on the other. Inadequate money is part of this, but additionally the stresses of caring for a child alone and supporting the incarcerated partner may strain their capacity.[vii] This has further negative impacts on the child’s upbringing, as it means the parent may not be able to provide the child with enough attention and supervision.[viii] One thing that is important to note is that the stigma against convicted criminals is very strong and tends to spread to their family members as well.[ix] This means that, in a situation where a family is essentially coping with the loss of a family member, they are bereft of the social support that might otherwise come to them.[x]

A meta-analysis of studies on the effects of parental incarceration found that children of incarcerated parents were more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour, although they were not able to draw strong conclusions on whether drug use and mental health problems were associated with having an incarcerated parent.[xi] This increase in anti-social behaviour (which includes a wide variety of behaviours, from criminal behaviour to simply lying)[xii] has several potential causes, one of which is that the stigma against the child may cause people the child interacts with to expect them to behave in an anti-social fashion, “fostering a self-fulfilling prophecy.”[xiii]

The effects of having an incarcerated parent on children are important not just from an ethical standpoint, but also because they reinforce socioeconomic divides and may have impacts on who is likely to cause crime in the future. Low socioeconomic status is linked with crime rates,[xiv] and parental incarceration is linked with poorer economic outcomes. Additionally, minorities are more likely to be incarcerated.[xv] The negative effects of parental incarceration mean that this overrepresentation in the justice system is impacting not only those individuals but also their families — and that incarceration will lead to more poverty and perhaps more crime, perpetuating inequality indefinitely.[xvi] Mitigating the negative effects on children in every way possible is necessary for preventing these cycles from continuing.

This begs the question of how to mitigate these issues. One thing that may help is permitting mothers to have their babies with them in prison which allows them to bond.[xvii] A program such as this was attempted in British Columbia; it has since been cancelled but the B.C. Supreme Court recently ruled that this cancellation was unconstitutional.[xviii] While the government may appeal this decision, many are hopeful that the program will be reinstated.[xix]

Another option that could possibly reduce negative impacts on children is to facilitate increased contact between incarcerated parents and their children. Parents may often be imprisoned far from where their children live, so good visitation programs might include help with transportation.[xx] Other caregivers may not wish to visit the prison, whether because they are busy or because they do not wish to see the incarcerated parent, leaving children without someone to accompany them.[xxi] Additionally, visiting hours may be during work or school hours, meaning that children do not have a time when it is feasible for them to visit; this should be considered when planning visitation hours.[xxii] Finally, the atmosphere in prisons may not be conducive to child visitation, as children may grow bored or be intimidated by prison officials and there may be very strict rules about where incarcerated people can visit or whether they can have physical contact with visitors.[xxiii] This should be considered in prison design (for example, toys could be provided for children visiting the prison), training for guards, and visiting policies. Time spent with parents is particularly important in situations where a parent is incarcerated only briefly, as they will soon re-enter their child’s life.[xxiv] Visitation is likewise important for children whose parents will be incarcerated longer so that they do not feel as though they have lost a parent. Telephone costs may be prohibitive, as prisoners may have to place collect calls, so another helpful action may be to provide families with a budget for paying phone bills or recommending some other form of contact, such as Skype.[xxv]

A further concern is the family’s transition when incarcerated parents are released. Programs that help to smooth the reintroduction of the parent into family life may be helpful since incarceration is known to have negative effects on family harmony.[xxvi] An additional concern is the reintroduction of the formerly incarcerated person to society in general. Programs that help released felons get jobs will be highly important for the well-being of their children. Stigma against former convicts may prevent them from getting jobs, but also simply the fact that they have been out of the workforce while incarcerated makes them less employable.[xxvii]

Many of these programs are already being explored in some places but they are not universal. Ultimately, children are unseen victims of prison sentences; consideration must be given to them in prison regulations. Since it is known that disrupted family lives can lead to criminal behaviour in children, having policies that assist those children could be an effective method of crime prevention. It is also important to consider the impacts of incarceration policies — for example, incarceration rates in the United States have gone up substantially.[xxviii] This begs the question: knowing what we know about the effects of having an incarcerated parent are on children, is it appropriate to increase the amount of people incarcerated, or should we find other options for dealing with these crimes?[xxix] The pluses and minuses must be weighed carefully, and the impacts on children must be carefully considered in this evaluation process.

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**May It Be Resolved: The Future of GenY Is Bleak**

Is the State of the World’s Youth hopeful or bleak? The Hart House Debate Club at the University of Toronto explores this question debating future of Generation Y. There are undoubtedly numerous challenges that face today’s global youth such as climate change, obstacles to effective international cooperation, demographic issues, and economic inequality. Yet Generation Y also has also demonstrated great innovation and technological development has led to massive improvements in both education and medicine in addition to bringing about a greater sense of global community. In this video, Murphy O’Connor, Tina Xu, Aislyn Flynn, and Kristen Pue debate whether the challenges facing Generation Y outweigh its resourcefulness and whether the future of Generation Y is indeed bleak or worth rooting for.   
  
Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFncS8hXcDc&list=UUNXCvHpuHRb-7iqDPPetuyA>

Transcript of Hart House Debate Video: The Future is bleak for Generation Y

**Introduction from Kaleem Hawa, Hart House Debate Treasurer**

Hello! We’re here from the Hart House Debate Club at University of Toronto. A lot of interesting debate has been had recently about how the future is going to look for Generation Y. Whether it comes to economics, safety, security, education or health. For this reason we have decided to bring the debate today on the topic “the Future for Generation Y is Bleak.”

**Government 1: Murphy O’Connor**

Ladies and Gentlemen, the future for Generation Y is bleak. The greatest international crises that we have ever faced requires a level of cooperation that we are wholly incapable of, and it requires states to bind together and reach international accords. As such, as an individual I am entirely powerless. Whether I am a person living in the Maldives or a person living in New Jersey, I don’t have any power to stop the water coming in. I don’t have the ability to speak at the international conferences making decisions on these matters.

And the great boon that the 20th century has given to the developing world, supposedly, is industrialization. Something which not only makes the problem much, much worse for the parts of the world that will be affected be climate change, but also comes along with a host of problems that cannot be mitigated. We are talking about the collapse of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, the use of sweatshop labor and child labor the world over, a financial and economic international system established that has led to the oppression of people the world over.

Mr. Speaker, we would tell you that it does not matter where you are growing up, but that your economic future is bleak. Why? Because there is a coming demographic crisis. There are too many Baby Boomers and too few people of Generation Y. And the gap between the dependents, people who take up huge amounts of resources in terms of medical costs, in terms of pensions, that group will grow and grow as the relative number of workers fails to keep place.

So my retirement is coming sometime next century. The thing at the center of each of these arguments is that we have increased communications and have thus exposed each other to different brands, to different ideals, to different lifestyles and have thereby revealed the real discrepancies between us. That more than anything else has led to the worst impact and effects of income disparity globally. On those grounds, we beg to propose.

**Opposition 1: Aislyn Flynn**

Ladies and Gentlemen, in deciding whether or not the future is bleak for Generation Y we have to deal with some criteria for measuring this question, and what we would tell you on side opposition is that Gen Y is better off than its predecessors and that there are in fact future developments that will mean better things for them and better things for society.

I’m going to bring three constructive arguments for you: I’m going to talk about economics, I’m going to society, and I’m going to talk about politics. I’m also going to address two pieces of rebuttal to what Murphy told you.

First, economics, because what I would like to tell you is that Generation Y has grown up in a society that is far different than the one before it. They are a society and a group of innovators and entrepreneurs. They create their own jobs. They are turning products that were once used for only one purpose into ones used for many, creating massive new jobs markets in technology and medicine. These are things that benefit large amounts of the population. Second, they do this under new kinds of self-employment. I think this is particularly important in what they can achieve and the way they operate even though it’s not traditional. People of Generation Y are also much better at saving money having lived through a recession, they have different ideas of what is a risk worth taking.

Second, I want to talk about society. I think a lot of the benefits we get impact people in the developing war, particularly technology becoming a lot cheaper. This improves education and medicine. This means we can educate more people through instances of communication technology, being able to provide laptops to the poorest countries in the world, meaning the mass of people that gets educated is much greater.

Furthermore, a lot of medicine is becoming cheaper because of the increase in innovation. There are extremely cheap needles that will be distributed among a lot of countries making it a lot easier to actually get medicine.

Third, I’ll talk about political issues. I think they are particularly important to talk about how this actually impacts those living in the developing world. I think it’s important to note that Generation Y is the one that has been fighting for democratic rights, has been fighting for the ability to actually actualize what they believe a human being should be able to do, that Gen Y might actually make it so the world doesn’t live under the many authoritarian regimes as ones before, because they are the ones able to best actualize their political will.

Dealing with what Murphy tells you. He tells you that international cooperation needs to come about because of climate change. Three responses. First, I actually think that Gen Y is actually leading this change and that young people are the ones that are actually trying to do it. Second, I think that green technology is becoming much cheaper largely because of technological developments driven by Generation Y. Third, I would claim there are adaptation plans coming about in virtually every country and the world is actually much more willing to take in environmental refugees than ever before shows international cooperation.

He talks to you about economics and the demographic crisis, but this discrepancy is hugely outweighed by the amount of people wanting to work in the developing world. Furthermore, I think the capacity for developed countries to deal with this problem is hugely significant in the way in which we can devote resources in a way that is better for all involved.

**Government Response: Tina Xu**

Opposition side, has given us flawed, piecemeal benefits. A lot of benefits from technology a lot of benefits from finance. A lot of things that have been developed in the developed world. However, she gives us no idea as to how they will actually be transferred into the developing world other than we will help them, other than we will give them. I think there has been overestimation as to what the developed world has been able to do. As to the amount of international cooperation that actually exists between nations. First, I’m going to defend my reputation, then I will develop my partner’s case.

So in economics, we hear there are now innovators and entrepreneurs. I would say that the 20th century was perhaps the greatest period of economic growth because it was a period of openness, because it was a period of actually international trade. The reason why the economy will never be as strong is that we are entering into a period of time where nations do not trust each other and in which nations are enacting more and more trade barriers to protect themselves through things such as health standards and labor regulations. Because of things such as tariffs, I don’t think that we will see more economic growth in the future. But furthermore, a lot of these new job markets that are created might create low-wage positions in developing countries. Often, these jobs don’t in fact become better paying jobs. There is no transition or prospect of future development when the only prospect is working in a sweatshop.

On technology, she tells us there is education and that there are new tools available to educate people, she also tells us there are new medications available. Unfortunately, the question is how do we actually get these things to people who need them the most? There is a lot of literature that says the only way to educate people, the only way to make people healthier, is actually to ensure a living wage that way they are able to take care of themselves and take care of their children. It doesn’t matter if there is medication available if you can’t afford it or if there are drug patents that make you unable to afford the medication you need.

Next on politics, we hear that this is the generation that is best able to actualize their political will. The problem with that argument is that a lot of times through actualization you do end up with a lot of civil strife, with entire generations of people that have only seen civil war and do not know how to interact or live in a peaceful society. You end up with generations that have grown up with war and with conflict and have had their childhood disrupted, that will find it problematic and traumatic to deal with some of the stresses of the modern world.

I think a lot of what my partner said went unresponded to. I think Murphy told us about climate change in a very clever way, that climate change requires actual international cooperation of an unseen level. It doesn’t matter if we have these adaptations, it doesn’t matter if we have these new technologies. The only way we can actually make a dent in fighting climate change is if we work together as a world. Unfortunately, we have seen thus far that this hasn’t been effective. I think that is why the future is bleak: we are not able to achieve the sort of cooperation to actually make a dent in the problem of climate change. Because we all now buy the same products, because farmers all across the world depend on companies like Monsanto for seeds, it means that when people do actually try to get involved in their communities, when people attempt to start projects to help others, often multinational corporations are not on their side. MNCs like Monsanto have seeds that destroy themselves after one season preventing people from starting community initiatives that they would like to. That is why the future is so bleak.

**Opposition Response: Kristen Pue**

I’m going to tell you why, in a variety of different areas of peoples lives, Generation Y actually has a very bright future. Let’s start with health and well-being. It is really important to note why it’s important that access to medicine has been cheaper. For the first time ever, generation Y is going to benefit from a generation that will be covered universally by access to affordable health services. Universal coverage, because medicine is cheaper, is possible for the first time in the lifetime of generation Y. We think in terms of human development, and in terms of access to services, this has increased exponentially because of access to technology and this is why generation Y is part of a generation that has the best human development and quality of life indexes ever recorded. We think the future is very bright there.

How about peace and security? The government would tell you trade barriers prevent growth and that inequality and conflict will be perpetual. We think generation Y actually exists in the most peaceful generation today. It is easy to be nostalgic for the past, but we have to remember the 1990s were a time of very violent conflict, that we actually saw many ruptures and persistent genocide occurring through this time. There was a lot of economic turmoil. Generation Y is in one of the most peaceful times. People are actually seeing themselves as part of a universal human community. Emerging markets are starting to pull themselves up and innovate in their own economy, one that participates on a lot more fair trade arrangements.

Let’s look at political rights. Information technology is really important here. Because people are able to communicate more clearly, they are able to demand more accountable and better governments. This ultimately means those in Generation Y living under the worst governments today, although some struggle will exist, will be able to hold their governments to account more than any other generation. The future is indeed bright.

Let’s talk about economics. Side government talks a lot about structural challenges to employment. We actually think that because generation y has greater access to education due to increases in technology that they are in fact the most educated generation to date. Generation Y is as a result in place to be the generation of the greatest innovators. Thus we think that they can pull themselves up and innovate, and that new parts of the economy can be formed, and that new jobs and new opportunities will be founded. We think actually, that for most countries the economic dividend from the abundance of young people will create immense growth opportunities. For countries in emerging economies, especially in Africa which is seeing a lot of recent growth, the demographic dividend is poised to make them significantly richer than before.

Finally, let’s talk about environmental lobbying. We know that climate change is a large challenge to deal with. However, for the most majority of countries, though some will certainly be harmed by climate change, adaptation strategies and the new green economy will provide significant opportunities for people. We think Generation Y is the generation of the green economy and of sustainable development. This idea is proliferated strongly among Generation Y and those in the youngest generations are the most likely to believe that climate change is occurring and to want to take action to stop it. We think Generation Y has considerable opportunities to promote green technology to promote international cooperation that older generations haven’t supported in the past. We think for this reason, that the future is bright for Generation Y even in terms of climate change. We beg to oppose.

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**Documentary Review: The Well - Intentioned White Saviour**

by Aysegul Karakucuk

We live in a world of good people; a world saturated with youth wanting to step up and do the right thing, and to help others. Every day, there are more reasons why we should be proud of our culture of global citizenship and involvement. I truly believe this is the case, and I starkly oppose the myth that all young people are apathetic. This optimistic place that I come from is precisely why at the outset, I thought that the documentary, *Blood Brother*, had so much promise. Sadly, I came away feeling that the whole project did a disservice to the capabilities of Generation Y as a culturally sensitive and respectful global community. More than that, however, I came away feeling that it took an already marginalized and voiceless group of people and muted them

even further.

In this award-winning 2013 documentary directed and produced by the talented Steve Hoover, we are walked through the story of Hoover’s best friend, a young Rocky Braat who, “seeking authenticity and wanting more out of life,” travels to India and chances upon a remote orphanage in Tamil Nadu, housing HIV-positive children and women. Compelled to develop a long-lasting bond and ongoing relationship with the community, and make a change in these people’s lives, Rocky decides to permanently move to this particular part of Chennai and gives up his life

of comfort.

Rocky’s sense of empathy and desire to do good are definitely admirable and something we should all aspire to. HIV/AIDS is one of the most heartbreaking afflictions that plague our time and for a young person to drop everything and place himself in the very core of such profound human suffering is definitely a sign of compassion and heart.

With this film, we get a glimpse of the state of women and children’s health and their socioeconomic situation. Unfortunately for the viewer, that glimpse is one that carries little substance and value. The most irksome reason for why such a critical topic becomes diluted and loses meaning is that this film is, in reality, about Rocky Braat, and not about the people he is living with. We get very little context, analysis, or commentary of any sort regarding this particular village, the name of which is barely ever mentioned.

There is an India in this film that is painted in such broad brushstrokes that it becomes an object of fascination and a channel for fueling one’s own self-image of altruism. There are poignant details that are lost in favour of footage zooming in on Rocky yawning, eating pizza and staring deeply into the distance. There are kids who, in the midst of telling their individual stories, get completely muted over by the soundtrack of sad background music, while Rocky narrates over their footage and claims that “each of their stories was so tragic, yet so incredible.” Each of their stories is left untold.

The film bombards the viewer with images that do not stray far from poverty porn. At one point, Rocky even feels it appropriate to place a father, who days ago lost his daughter to AIDS, in front of his MacBook and force him to watch a slideshow of his late daughter’s photos. As he breaks down in heart-wrenching sobs, Rocky pats him on the shoulder and proceeds to keep showing more pictures while the cameraman zooms in on the father as he covers his head. What can one truly learn from this scene? I learned little — except maybe that it is such an uncomfortable thing to watch someone’s private emotional torment so closely and voyeuristically.

I wanted so badly to like this film and connect with its subject matter. I wanted to be able to say, “I know what this kid must have experienced.” But I wanted that to be a shadow of an after-thought, instead of dominating the entire experience of sitting down for what I hoped would educate me.

This is a film that needed to tell stories that absolutely needed to be heard. This is a film that needed to make appeals to policymakers, activists, organizations and international actors — most of all, to us youth — to speak up and engage in conversations surrounding global health and poverty in India and cultural stigmas around AIDS. This is a film that did nothing to shed light on or even raise questions like “what needs to be done?” or “how do these people feel about being portrayed in certain ways?” or “what do they want to share with me?” Despite its often beautiful cinematography and undoubtedly well-meaning sentiments, *Blood Brother* was full of undignified clichés and portrayals, leading to further misrepresentation of marginalized communities to their

global audiences.

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**Voices from the Canvas: Adobe Youth Voices**

It is often the creative energy involved in producing a visual work of art that brings out the most innovative and passionate sides of youth as storytellers. In these pieces, a host of global issues affecting youth are highlighted through the digital art projects of Adobe Youth Voices’ program participants, a program of TakingITGlobal. From global health to peace to gender equality, each piece makes a powerful statement on the world as seen through the eyes of global youth — in both its beauty and harsh realities. This year, TakingITGlobal launched a new Global Gallery collection entitled Perspectives: Youth Creating Change, which celebrates young people’s positive achievements. All of the images in this article and more can be viewed there (ayv.tigweb.org). TakingITGlobal is an online community that connects global youth to encourage them to take actions on issues that matter to them the most.

**I am a Woman**

**Javier Esquit, Guatemala**

**Description:**

Javier’s piece is about gender issues and the idea of depicting a woman filled with positive messages is to remind us about women’s value.

**We Share More than a City**

**Puerta Joven, Mexico**

**Description:**

This piece is inspired by the new and emerging multicultural cities we are currently living in. Due to migration, young people from rural areas are coming to urban spaces and the promotion of peaceful cities is paramount to everyone.

**Peace Wanted**

**Aadeeptha Samarakoon, Mithun Kumarasinghe & Dasun De Soyza, Sri Lanka**

**Description:**

Peace is a human right that is so hard to attain. This poster was created to show the grave need for peace. Although Sri Lanka, where the artists are from, faced 26 years of civil war before the war ended and things began to return to normal, there is still a long way to go to achieve peace.

**Enforced Disappearance**

**Taszeel, India**

**Description:**

The testimonies of the families and the documentation of disappeared persons’ cases in Kashmir indicate that the practice of enforced disappearances is widespread and systematic. Due to a lack of proper surveys and documentation, there are no authentic figures available. However, about 8,000 to 10,000 people are thought to have disappeared.

**Bullied**

**Angelo Alberto, Bonaire**

**Description:** With this poster, Angelo wants to raise awareness of the impact that words have on someone else. Words can be supportive and nurturing to make someone feel good about themselves. We all have the power to use our words to make others happy. On the other side, we can hurt each other on an even deeper level than ever before, with just our words. Sadly, many teens today use mean names as a form of bullying.

**Positive**

**Jessica Rivero, Uruguay**

**Description:**

My project is about HIV, and tries to show how the person lives with pathology, how the disease developed in the person, and how the professional reacts in the face of this.

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**Book Review: The Resonance Today in The Radiance of Tomorrow**

by Alice Irene Whittaker-Cumming

Ishmael Beah’s first novel *The Radiance of Tomorrow* is at once a fable, a documentary, and a story told in the oral tradition. The author is a young person who, as an ex-child soldier from Sierra Leone, has intimately experienced the horrors that come from war, failed government, corruption and violence. In this follow up to his stirring bestseller memoir The Long Way Gone, Beah tells the story of what happens after the war, where victims come together to rebuild their lives in the face of lost hope and the breakdown of that heart of African life: community.

The novel begins as people cautiously return to their home village of Imperi after the end of Sierra Leone’s civil war. Families are fractured on both the individual and group level: physically through the loss of limbs to the rebel groups’ brutality; emotionally through the death of their family members; psychologically through the destruction of their ancestral home and the pervasive fear that war will return. Community builds slowly under the guidance of three elders, and we watch Imperi repopulate with older youth who were traumatized by the war, orphaned ex-child soldiers with no family other than each other, and young children who never experienced the devastation of war. Beah’s characters are rich and human, and we feel our hope grow as laughter, dancing and tradition slowly bring colour to a deserted village.

But then a force comes that is more destructive than any war. A foreign extractive company discovers rutile in their region, a highly sought-after mineral that is to become Imperi’s curse. The company builds pipes for water to serve their foreign workers, but the water source bypasses the villagers while mining byproducts poison their river and mutate their local fish population. A local bar is built for the miners, and the drunken roar drowns out the guiding voices of the ancestors.

Radiance of Tomorrow is told in Beah’s lyrical voice, and his rich, poetic style asks us to reexamine how the sky turns from day to night. The book is simultaneously modern and traditional: modern because of the timely examination of education, war, extractive industry and urbanization; and traditional in how it brings to life the African storytelling that Beah remembers vividly as a young boy before the war. It is this tradition of sharing tales from one generation to another that allows elders to pass important knowledge to a community’s youth. This book forces us to pause and question: does the roar of modern life drown out these stories, and what implications does that have on the youth who have historically carried these traditions forward?

Beah invites us to sit around the fire with the young people of Imperi and hear the wisdom of the elder Mama Kadie’s stories. It is up to us, the readers and listeners, to decide what we do with this acumen. We, like the community members of Imperi, can decide what to do with the essential truths and critical warnings that are embedded within these stories within a story. We can decide which type of youth we are: Colonel, the withdrawn ex-child soldier who listens from the fringes, willing to act but not to feel? Or Oura, the wise young girl who voraciously and curiously holds as many stories as she can remember, so that she can pass them on to the right person at the right time?

This is an important book. The denouement of this heartrending novel is a testament to the essential role that youth must play in any society, if we are to battle the complex forces like mining companies and civil wars that are currently draining the heartbeat of our modern world. *The Radiance of Tomorrow* shows that youth should – nay, need – to tell the story.

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**Documentary review: A Bit of Heart Behind the Headlines**

by Eva Salinas

Youth-led mobilizations have picked up steam across Latin America over the past several years - from the latest student movement that started in Chile in 2011, the YoSoy132 protests in Mexico in 2012, and the mass demonstrations across Brazil in June, 2013. Such public actions, often initiated by youth using social media on an unprecedented level and mobilizing support from around the world, reinforce the power of youth and their work. They also showed the world that in addition to raising awareness, real change can be made. In Brazil, for instance, after weeks of intense protest, President Dilma Rousseff agreed to a number of policy changes, including a reduction of public transportation costs. In Chile, four student leaders were elected to Congress during the recent 2013 national election, a major win for the movement there. Such examples are inspiring. But what about the voices of those in the region who, often due to socioeconomic inequality, are left without a platform and without the tools to articulate themselves?

It is some of those voices that Brazilian filmmaker Thereza Jessouroun tries to amplify in her documentary, *When Home Is The Street (Quando a Casa é a Rua)*, released in 2013. She takes us to the streets of urban Mexico and Brazil, where young people are caught in a spiral of domestic violence, homelessness, crime and addiction. The film’s structure is simple and to-the-point, with a window into the lives and minds of a few street kids who, like other youth around the world, simply want stability, love and respect. We meet Javier who, from the age of 13, was in and out of detention centres, living on the street and abusing drugs. Only a few years later, he lays out his story; articulate, emotional, raw.

The concept is in the same spirit of the powerful documentary film *Bus174*, also from Brazil, which was released over a decade ago but continues to be relevant. It tells the story of a young man who holds passengers on a bus hostage for several hours and while the drama of the hostage-taking unfolds, the filmmakers take the audience through the life of this boy and other street kids like him, highlighting the complex factors that contributed to bringing him to that very crucial moment. Similarly, *When Home Is The Street* does not attempt to necessarily justify the actions of these young people, but it brings much needed understanding, context and heart that is often left out from news headlines and statistics.

The film is also released at a time when young people in Mexico and Brazil are facing particular challenges. Certainly, there is much to celebrate in the region, including the successes from recent student movements, and an increase in entrepreneurial programs for youth, for instance, but there also continues to be a growing number of “ninis” - young people neither working nor studying. This is particularly worrying in northern Mexico, where drug-related crime and violence hit youth harder than most. Inequality and discontentment have been highlighted recently in Brazil, as the country plays host to a number of international events starting in 2014. Though these regional issues make this documentary particularly pertinent, youth homelessness is certainly a worthy and unsung issue worldwide. A bit of heart, and voice, to the subject is always welcome.

Other documentaries worth checking out are *William and the Windmill*, about a young Malawian man who builds a windmill from scraps; *Resistencia: Hip-Hop in Colombia*, which intersects music, young people and Colombia’s 40-year civil war; and *Girl Model*, the story of young women in Siberia hoping to escape poverty by entering the exploitative world of modelling.

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**Transforming Lives for a Peaceful Future in Colombia**

As the second most populated city in Colombia, Medellin has been disproportionately affected by Colombia’s history of violence. However, for a city that has become primarily associated with civil war and the narcotics trade, Medellin has witnessed a dramatic rebirth in the past decade, write Astrid Girlesa Uribe, Eva Enyedi, and Mónica Yohana Aguirre Duque. Their article examines the ties between youth empowerment, civic engagement, and the role the ACJ-YMCA has played in creating positive change in Colombia.

by Astrid Girlesa Uribe, Eva Enyedi, & Mónica Yohana Aguirre Duque

The names of Colombia, and especially Medellin, have been frequently associated with violence, drugs, inequality and poverty. Nevertheless, within the last decade Medellin has become a modern and developing center for new businesses, cultural festivals and social transformation – especially for youth. In this article we would like to take a look at part of that transformation through the youth initiatives undertaken by the ACJ-YMCA of Medellin, Colombia, and two of our volunteers who have experienced the transformation themselves.

By the beginning of the 1990’s Medellin was considered the most violent city in the world, with more than 300 homicides per 100.000 residents.[i] In 2004, in an effort to confront growing violence, the City Council of Medellin initiated the Integral Urban Projects program that aimed to build a city where citizens would have better access to essential public services, such as education, food, security, housing and a safe natural environment.[ii] A symbol of the new and better city envisioned in the program was the Metrocable, a gondola lift system that traversed the hills of Medellin and now connects the most vulnerable districts of the city. Suddenly, public libraries and parks became meeting points and spaces of social transformation all over the city.

In the field of youth engagement, the city took on an innovative approach, consulting youth in order to understand their specific problems and find solutions in a collaborative way. A key to the city’s youth engagement strategy was The Youth Observatory, a network of municipal and external institutions responsible for identifying, analyzing and sharing information about topics related to the youth of the city.[iii] One of the Observatory’s most interesting initiatives is the Youth Development Index, a statistical tool that asks youth in Medellin aged 14 to 26 about eight areas of interest (jobs, democracy and civic participation, development of young individuals, family and development, coexistence and human rights, health, services and goods, and education for life).[iv] Alongside the Youth Development Index, in 2012 the City Council created a Secretary for Youth, who is responsible for the coordination of youth policies, promotion of youth initiatives, and a separate program called Medellin, Jóvenes por la Vida, which integrates the results of the Youth Development Index into new policies and projects.[v]

The youth projects of ACJ-YMCA of Medellin are not only part of the Medellin, Jóvenes por la Vida framework, they go beyond it. ACJ-YMCA’s programs uses a holistic approach that helps young people to fight poverty, exclusion and violence but also to find their own role in society and become agents of change in their own communities. Alongside the national ACJ-YMCA youth strategy, the ACJ-YMCA of Medellin works around three main areas: Peace and Coexistence, Organization and Participation of Youth, and Young Entrepreneurship. ACJ-YMCA’s initiatives include: the Peace and Coexistence Ambassador Program, which trains participants about personal development, coexistence, peace, entrepreneurship and environmental protection; supporting the Reciclarte group by generating handcrafted paper using recycled products and vegetable filters; PreunYcom, which helps students prepare for university; youth entrepreneurship programs; and a series of institutional collaborations designed to provide training to public and private sector professionals who work with youth.

The ACJ-YMCA of Medellin believes that the best way to transform Medellin is to challenge inequality and empower youth. The following two stories are from young ACJ-YMCA volunteers who have experienced the transformation themselves.

Mónica Aguirre is a 28-year-old Colombian woman who lives in Medellin. She sees herself as a dreamer and her biggest dream is to change the world. Mónica truly believes that a better world is possible and can be achieved through politics and communication. Her involvement with ACJ-YMCA has included participation as a program beneficiary, a staff member and a collaborator. Only 11 when she started coordinating her first youth group, her social and community engagement has never stopped. Mónica began her involvement with ACJ-YMCA in 2007 and soon became a Municipal Youth Councilor, and played a role in the inception of the Youth Development Index.

Mónica has always been keen to utilize communication to change communities. She says, “working with communities made me realize that communication has a very important role in transforming societies. Communication media can be platforms for critical thinking that promote solidarity and teamwork in the community, relations of respect and recognition of the different actions in the field.” In 2008 Mónica and a number of other youth founded La Pupila, a community newspaper in the 4th District. 53 issues later, the newspaper has a website and brings together more than 50 young collaborators in the areas of radio, photography, multimedia and editing. In 2013 (with Mónica as director) La Pupila was nominated Best Printed Community Newspaper in Medellin.

For the youth of Medellin, who live in a context of vulnerability, it is not easy to transcend the multiple barriers that they face to become involved in the governance and decision-making that affect them. Much like Mónica, Luis Carlos Sánchez, is a young person who in spite of living amongst perpetual conflict was able to change his life and become a respected young leader in Medellin’s Comuna 13. For Carlos, the programs offered by the ACJ-YMCA of Medellin allowed him to not only develop his own skills as a leader, but also to use them to help others. He began his involvement with the YMCA as a beneficiary of the PreunYcom 13 program, which helped prepare him to gain admission to university. By 2007 Carlos had become a volunteer mathematics teacher in the very same program. Recently recognized by the University of Antioquia for his extracurricular activities in the fields of science and community work, Luis Carlos has represented the YMCA at the local, national and international levels.

As a pharmacy student, Carlos was always looking for ways to use his professional knowledge to benefit others. In 2010, with twelve other YMCA volunteers, Luis Carlos founded the Yntegral Health project, which aimed to help the most vulnerable communities in Medellin and in the Antioquia region. As part of the program, “The Health Brigades”, small groups of volunteers visited communities and shared information about sexual health, family planning, oral health, hypertension and nutrition.[vi] Carlos also became an inspector at the Hospital Unit of the Comuna 13, observing the clinics’ functioning and service-delivery to the local community.

Mónica and Luis Carlos are good examples of the new generation of youth in Medellin. They have faced challenges in their lives and, with some help, were able to overcome barriers and become active participants in the transformation of their communities.

We believe that the ACJ-YMCA model in Medellin is integral in helping youth fight poverty, exclusion and violence. But we also believe that it encourages young people to discover themselves, get to know their own strengths and weaknesses and become agents of change in their own communities. We are convinced that the future of Medellin depends on the ability of youth to think, decide and harness their power to make decisions in their own lives and build a city and a society where they all can grow and work in peace.

Medellin has become a model for other cities suffering from violence. The smart solutions in urban planning and social programs put in place by the ACJ-YMCA and other organizations have contributed to the reduction of violence in the city, and as a result in 2013 Medellin was elected the Most Innovative City in the World by the Urban Land Institute in a competition sponsored by the Wall Street Journal and Citigroup. The award recognized Medellin’s recent success in urban development, education policy and social development.[vii]

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**Slacktivism: A Double-Edged Sword in the Fight Against Social Injustice**

Thanks to online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, information sharing and the option to publicly endorse joining a cause or contributing to a campaign has become the norm. This modern day phenomenon of individuals believing that their click of a button is driving progress — without really taking the time to delve deep into the issue — is known as Slacktivism. While people of all ages can be slacktivists, youth are often associated with internet-spread trends. In this critique, Aleka Allen explores how the readily accessible is decreasing levels of actual involvement and asks: are acts of slacktivism sufficient to create meaningful progress?

by Aleka Allen

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It’s no secret that our daily lives are becoming increasingly reliant on digital technology. Within the past twenty years, simple tasks such as ordering meals, watching television shows and movies, and even making charitable donations have been made possible from the comfort of your smartphone or while relaxing in front of your computer, and social media and networking websites have made it easier to reach out to others and to provide a means for building relationships. In recent years, more and more charities and social causes as well as organizations have taken their campaigns online to raise awareness and generate more supporters for their cause. More and more organizations have taken to social media to corral users into publicly showing their support for their cause of choice by clicking on the ‘like’ button on Facebook or retweeting their latest tweet. Problematically, such actions are causing more harm than good — at least when looking to measure social progress. Realistically, it will take a lot more than a passive ‘like’ to actually instigate social change, but these methods of giving back are breeding a new type of activist: the Slacktivist.

**What is Slacktivism?**

The Oxford English dictionary defines slacktivism as: actions performed via Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website. In other words, slacktivism provides a low-risk, low-cost, technology-mediated participation for the user without demanding much from them in return. When considering the G20 riots in Toronto in June 2010, it’s easy to see why this so-called form of activism is appealing. Why go to a protest and risk being on the receiving end of police brutality when sharing a picture or news link onto a social media platform will provide the illusion of participation? Similarly, asking a celebrity that you follow on Twitter to retweet on behalf of a fundraiser you support is an act of slacktivism. Sharing a picture of a smiling survivor of a terminal illness who is asking for 10,000 likes for not dying is also slacktivism, assuming that’s the extent of the contribution to effecting the change that’s being endorsed, which is commonly the case or campaign function. Slacktivism presents an option to engage in feel-good anonymous altruism, yet isn’t a form of participation in the real sense. It removes the element of going outside the digital realm to truly taking action that would create meaningful impact.

**The Grey Area of Slacktivism**

While this new type of social activism might not be the ideal method of instigating tangible social progress, it is effective in increasing brand recognition, in gaining exposure and widespread public attention, and in encouraging dialogue rooted in issues that matter. Since December 2010, uprisings in several countries in the Middle East have resulted in the ousting of authoritarian and corrupt leaders in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen. Slacktivistsm played a huge part in promoting awareness of the Arab Spring protests by increasing the visibility of national and international priorities, such as political corruption and human rights violations, inflation, and authoritarianism in the Middle East. The wave of protests, demonstrations (both violent and non-violent), rallies, strikes, and civil wars have garnered worldwide attention and extensive coverage of many of the uprisings that are continuing to this day. It is undeniable that the momentum built through social media played a crucial role and was instrumental in building momentum garnering attention from the international media. Many of the protests, rallies, and events were coordinated through Facebook and Twitter — enabling the organizers to spread awareness while dodging the state-operated media — while other forms of digital technologies — text messages, photos, and videos — served to capture key moments during the protests, and provided to-the-minute live coverage of the problems that the demonstrators are still fighting against in their respective nations’ demonstrations. Social media provided the Arab Spring protesters with the tools to document their experiences and take matters into their own hands.

The enabling of internal and external communications between citizens promoted a type of collective activism that reached thousands of citizens who were otherwise searching for ways to enact positive change. The use of social media in the Arab Spring during the uprisings led to a democratization of mass media in the Middle East, and the unprecedented level of information sharing had resounding implications around the world. Even though the uprising is ongoing and over 150,000 have died in the fight, there’s no denying the role social media played in bringing international attention to their struggles.

**Red Equal Signs Go Viral for Same Sex Marriage**

While the use of social media proved effective and powerful in the Arab Spring Uprising, the same cannot be said for the recent Supreme Court hearings of two cases in the pursuit of marriage equality. On March 25, 2013, the Facebook group for the organization, Human Rights Campaign, shared a red and pink version of their logo as a way of showing support for same sex marriage — an equal sign against a red background — and urged their followers and fans to do the same. The image went viral. Within four days, Facebook reported 2.7 million users — including 13 U.S. Members of Congress — had changed their display pictures to the logo with newfound symbolic importance, prompting the image to go viral. Hashtags such as #equality, #DOMA, and #UnitedforMarriage started trending, spurring conversations of marriage inequality and LGBTQ rights across social and traditional media. While the campaign was tremendously successful in spreading awareness and gathering nationwide vocal supporters for the cause, the idea that the demonstration of solidarity through a profile photo could have impact on a law-making body was near-sighted. While the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down and Proposition 8 dismissed, it is highly doubtful that the Supreme Court took into consideration the millions of changed avatars and display photos in their decision-making process. In addition, as the red equal sign image went viral, it wasn’t long before parodies of the image surfaced on the internet, serving to overshadow the progressive message behind this iconic image. Although it was very of-the-moment, in the end this well-intentioned campaign played a minuscule role in the real fight for marriage equality, and was largely an empty gesture of bandwagoning to appear culturally aware. It’s even probable that individuals who chose to voice their beliefs by adopting the red equal signs were simply doing so in a vain attempt at displaying cultural awareness and pop culture bandwagoning. Sadly, in the larger picture, what was perceived by many as taking action for the cause — uploading a new picture which was largely an empty gesture — was in fact an act of slacktivism.

**There’s No Shame in Being a Slacktivist**

With digital technologies so readily accessible to the masses, it’s inevitable that social activism will surface wherever people congregate. And how else to reach so many with such immediacy? Within the past few years alone, yellow plastic bracelets, pink ribbons, and November-specific moustaches have become recognizable examples of new ways for twenty-first century citizens to show that they are aware of the injustices in the world. To be clear, there’s no real harm in sharing a link on a news event, liking a photo, or retweeting a tweet in the name of charity. In fact, giving a micro-donation is quickly becoming a trend in donating to a worthy cause, and the simplicity — made possible through these technologies — is laudable. As demonstrated by the Arab Spring uprisings, the traditional forms of activism (sit-ins, strikes, and protests) are still very effective methods in instigating social change. It’s okay to click like on a Facebook post from a charity but remember that there are more proactive ways to

give back.

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**Pushing for progress: Disability and Mine Action in Cambodia**

Youth are often the first in a society to demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, and nowhere is this as true as in Cambodia. These are the personal stories of youth who, faced with challenges that could be both physically and emotionally crippling, are finding creative solutions that create new opportunities for their generation. Here we read about young emerging leaders who are helping not only their own communities, but who also have best practices to offer their peers in other contexts who are rebuilding their countries.

by Joe van Troost

Growing up is pretty tough, no matter where you are in the world. But try to imagine growing up with a Danger! Mines! sign right in front of your house or down the street, or in the forest or mountains near your hut where you go looking for firewood. Try to imagine waking up and seeing your dad or mom, or both, missing a limb or damaged from a landmine or bomb and then watch them struggle to farm, recycle metal or just try to get around. Or imagine looking at yourself when you wake up and your hand or foot is gone, and then have to work in the fields or, if you’re lucky enough, go to school but face the mob of kids that look down on you. The sad reality is that many children and young people around the world live in this kind of situation. But that does not stop some of them from trying to improve their lives and the lives of others.

According to the report of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the *Landmine Monitor 2013*, 3,628 casualties due to landmines and explosive remnants of war were recorded in 2012. Most of those were injuries but over 1,000 of them were deaths.[i] The good news, if you can call it that, is that these are the lowest levels recorded since 1999. Worldwide, 78% of casualties were civilians, and 47% of those are children – most of them boys.[ii] The countries currently most affected by mine-contaminated soil include Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Croatia, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Thailand and Turkey, which are in the “more than 100 km2” category.[iii] The Monitor has a comprehensive list of countries and their various states of progress, or lack thereof, in regards to mine contamination and clearance and set in terms of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. This article, however, will focus on Cambodia.

In 2012, I took part in a CIDA-funded International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) through Mines Action Canada. I was deployed to Cambodia with a fellow Canadian to provide support for the Cambodian Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Munitions (CCBLCM), spearheaded by Sister Denise Coghlan of Jesuit Refugee Services.

In the six months I spent in and around the Siem Reap area, I assisted on a variety of projects focused mainly on what is known in mine action circles as *victim assistance*, working with people with disabilities (PWDs). This included a range of activities such as providing wheelchairs, latrines, emergency food and/or medicine supplies to rural PWDs and advocating local and state-level officials to improve the lives of PWDs according to international treaties such as the Mine Ban Treaty and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The major project we worked on was a pilot project that I’m happy to say is on-going. We developed surveys to interview PWDs and their village leaders to find out where PWDs were living, what their social, economic and health status was like, and if they had access to services like education and health centres. We also wanted to find out what the village leaders were doing to comply with Cambodian and international laws regarding the rights of PWDs and their access to society and the economy. I should note that while we looked for and assisted people who acquired their disability due to a landmine or ERW incident (explosive remnants of war, which includes grenades, bombs, rockets and other explosive items), we did not discriminate against someone who was disabled in any other way - birth, workplace or motor vehicle accident. In other words, we helped whomever we could however we could, regardless of their type of disability or how they got it.

How did Cambodia get a landmine and ERW problem? This brief summary of Cambodia’s recent history should not be construed as definitive and I encourage readers to research the details. Basically: American forces dropped an obscene amount of bombs on the Vietnam-Cambodia border during the Vietnam War but not all of them exploded. When the Communist group known as the Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot usurped power in 1975, they haphazardly set up landmine fields on their western border with Thailand. Eventually Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1979, ousted Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge and scattered them towards the Thai border areas. The Khmer Rouge then engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Vietnamese-installed government. Landmines, usually set by young men (see: Aki Ra), were again deployed and cases of grenades, bullets, rockets and bombs were sprinkled in hiding places around the countryside — buried under rocks, planks and in caves. With unexploded bombs and rockets scattered throughout eastern Cambodia and landmines and ERW on the western border, some places more than others were literally mine fields. Fast forward some forty years later and many of these ERWs are still in their hiding places — just as deadly, waiting to be found by de-miners, farmers or children playing or looking for firewood.

Due to the high contamination rates in Cambodia, they have high levels of recorded casualties. According to the Monitor, “…the 186 casualties recorded in 2012 were 13% fewer than the 211 mine/ERW casualties identified in 2011 and more than 90% less than the over 3,000 casualties identified in 1996.”[iv] A Handicap International report states that the prevalence of disability in Cambodia was around 4.7% of the population.[v] During my time in the field, I met hundreds of people with disabilities and diseases that I had never encountered before, from all age ranges. I would say that the majority of these people did not have easy lives; most lived in dire poverty, and according to their surveys, many lived in physical pain from their injuries and quite a few felt ashamed or self-conscious about their situation.

When asked what they could do to improve their own situation, most people over 35 or 40 years old were despondent or didn’t have an answer. But I remember very clearly three of the answers young people gave me: a boy blind from birth wanted to be a musician so he could play for tourists at Angkor Wat temple; a well-dressed young woman in a modified wheelchair, a polio victim, wanted to be a seamstress to make clothes to sell at the market; and a young man with a crutch from Handicap International who lost his leg below the knee wanted to become a mechanic, to repair motorcycles and mopeds. I met four men, some in their 20s or 30s, all missing parts of their legs, who worked together to build outhouses for each other and for other disabled people — in 40 oC heat and for not a lot of money. A separate article would have to be written about the de-miners, the people who risk life and limb to rid their country of landmines. All of these people were hard-working and desired a chance to provide for their families while remaining hopeful, despite all that was stacked against them.

Young Cambodians today are also playing leadership roles beyond the field level. Advocates in the CCBLCM are intelligent, motivated citizens who have been pressing governments for increased rights for PWDs for years. These include the many young men I worked with in the CCBLCM office in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, and Song Kosal, a youth ambassador for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), who has dedicated her life for the realization of a mine-free world.

Sadly, the youth in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, just to name a few places, will be called upon to rebuild their countries and they will face many of the challenges Cambodians have faced. Hopefully they will be able to network and learn from the experiences of Cambodians and build a better present and future for all of their citizens, including persons with disabilities. To my knowledge, delegates from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Nepal and Eritrea have already met with the Cambodian government and mine action workers from the Cambodian Mine Action Authority to exchange knowledge and best practices. Although each situation is different, I hope they can learn a lot from each other so they do not have to “reinvent the wheel.” If governments can sign onto the Mine Ban Treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and then implement the terms of those treaties, it will be an encouraging start for rebuilding their countries.

In addition to the landmine problem, the youth in Cambodia face severe challenges beyond those I have already mentioned: corruption, abuse, human and sex trafficking, political unrest and an uncertain economy. Yet I can’t help but admire the tenacity showed by the people I met. I want to dedicate this article to the youth in Cambodia, who continue to work so hard to make their country a better place for themselves and future generations.

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**Taking it to the Streets**

Historically, youth voices have been strong instruments for effective change, and are proving to be even louder in the 21st Century. Young people around the world are demanding transformations of all kinds, enabling millennials to build movements through protests and other mobilization tools in order to challenge the status quo. In this piece, the author shares some of his personal experiences in Cambodia to illustrate the feeling that individual acts matter to impact a collective, inspiring youth to stand up for what they believe in to make a difference.

by David Peck

“Every generation gets a chance to change the world. Pity the nation that won’t listen to your boys and girls. Cos the sweetest melody is the one we haven’t heard.” - U2

Bernard Shaw said it was a pity that youth was wasted on the young. In many cases this may be true, but when it comes to movements for change young people are making a serious difference. Consider the man who faced four tanks in Tiananmen Square and stood his ground in the youth-led democratic protests of 1989 in Beijing. He was only 19 years old. The iconic picture has now become known as *The Unknown Rebel.* Or how about the courage and tenacity of Malala Yousafzai, the 16-year-old activist who has changed the way people view women in Afghanistan and who is now the youngest ever nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Or Bilaal Rajan, who started fundraising at the age of four, and currently works with UNICEF as a junior ambassador.

Cambodia is ranked third in the Greater Mekong Sub region for economic growth.[i] Extreme poverty, high mortality rates, landmine issues and food security continue to be serious concerns, and yet it is a country whose future lies on the shoulders of its youth. According to *Feed The Future*, approximately 70% of Cambodians are under 35 years old. That’s a young country, the majority of its citizens are born in, or after 1979. The Khmer Rouge were defeated in 1978 and the country was plunged into ten years of civil war. The young blood that comprises the kingdom today is its greatest asset and liability. With little history, tradition and tacit knowledge to guide these young men and women, Cambodia is carving a new path for itself into the 21st Century. In a recent Globe and Mail article we read of the clash that protestors had with police over unionization and garment worker wages. Civic unrest, political dissatisfaction and moral outrage abounds. Young people are demanding transformation of all kinds. Protests, social media, and the general consensus that things need to change are challenging the way things have always been done in Cambodia, at least in recent history. In the last election, millennials upset the political apple cart and reminded the ruling class that change is possible and that the status quo must sit up, listen and act accordingly. The youth-led vote is gaining knowledge, courage and insight. Change is coming, however incrementally. Young Cambodians know they have the ability to make a difference. They are fighting back, taking to the streets and speaking out on a variety of issues. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are agents of change. What we do affects the environment and others around us. Each one of us can have a profound, positive effect on the world. Individual acts do matter. The road to social change is less traveled for a reason. Too often wealth, status and celebrity subvert a socially just and relevant heart. Are we walking along the road less traveled or are we merely traveling the road less and less? Cambodian youth and what they’re facing as they make their way into the future are an active reminder to us all that what we do does indeed affect everyone else. Getting involved matters.

Narith is a 21-year-old farmer from Stung Treng, and like over 85% of Stung Treng’s population he relies on agriculture to survive.[ii] He and his family live on a fairly large piece of land for producing crops and livestock sustainably. Unfortunately, they still live way below the poverty line, making it difficult for him to provide even the most basic necessities for his children. Narith’s ongoing struggle is in large part due to a lack of knowledge about advanced farming techniques, sustainability components and all this combined with an underuse of resources. Choices are difficult to make when some decisions have been made for you. Politics, geography and education have a way of hobbling even the most committed.

Currently I’m working with a project in Stung Treng that is helping to address some of these issues through skills related classes, a farm that will be maintained to mentor locals, like Narith, as he and others continue to build their own capacity. With the right tools things are starting to change. We all have a toolbox. Some of us just have a little better access than most. With the right motivation and incentives Narith and thousands of agricultural workers just like him will no longer struggle to provide food, shelter and education to their families. This is about development that seeks to build up others around them with a solution that is contextually based and relies on the local knowledge of community-based leaders and their people.

About 2,500 years ago Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth of the day. In truth, he was encouraging them to ask penetrating questions, dig a little deeper than the politicians of the time, and go beyond scratching the surface. Young Cambodians are looking for a leader who will encourage sustainable development and support growth for its entire population – people, planet, prosperity. They are fighting back. They are taking their ideas and opinions to the streets and are having a political influence that is affecting the conversation around unions, garment worker wages and human rights abuses.

The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) has for the first time developed into a promising alternative to the dominant ruling party led by Prime Minister Hun Sen. This is in large part due to the fact that the CNRP has effectively mobilized Cambodian youth and provided them with hope for a brighter future. David Chandler, a historian and author, said recently, “…educated, urban Cambodians, at least, are not simply sitting back and letting things wash over them any longer. This doesn’t mean they are politically foolhardy. It means that they are more skeptical and responsive than Cambodians have generally been.”[iii] He wrote this in 2010 and by the looks of things and if you read the New York Times or The Cambodia Daily you will get the sense that a wave of unrest abounds.

Youth, I trust, will never be wasted on the young and I do hope that we can learn a lesson or two from them about not sitting idle and mildly accepting the status quo. Turning a blind eye does no good. When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, says Wendy Kopp, he didn’t start by trying to improve the candle. He decided that he wanted better light and went from there. You don’t need to read the Phnom Penh Post to know that Cambodian youth are taking it to the streets in many new, fresh and revealing ways. They too want a better light.

Rithy Panh is a Cambodian filmmaker who survived the civil war, the illegal American bombings[iv] in the 1960’s and 1970’s, and the Khmer Rouge era as a child and has made several movies about the history of his people and homeland. He is now an Oscar contender for his new film, *The Missing Picture*. It is a creative and moving film about the strength of the human spirit, the desire for growth and the commitment to a new future. Panh said, “It’s been a very long journey. From my childhood experiences with the Khmer Rouge, to learning cinema in France, and now, getting nominated for the Oscars – well, it’s good. It shows the people of Cambodia that you have the possibility to express your feelings and point of view, that you can look at your own history – and even if it is terrible – you can face it, and you can film it, and claim your dignity back.” [v]

Panh’s first film about a family of Cambodian refugees on the Thai/Cambodian border called, *Site 2* was awarded the Grand Prix du Documentaire at Cannes in 1989. Panh was 25 years old. Wasted on the young? I think not.

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