Embracing Commonwealth Values in Youth Development

Commonwealth Values and Youth Development

Introduction

> It is our belief in democracy that makes us champions of young people: those who will not just inherit the future, but who can and should shape the present.
>
> ~ Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General

Welcome to Unit 4 *Commonwealth values and youth development.* In this unit, we discuss ways in which you might consider using the various principles we have talked about in this course. We start by considering 'participation' and look at its various meanings. The concept of 'levels of participation' is introduced – a concept that makes the distinction between externally directed and self-directed participation. We consider the factors that facilitate or constrain participation in group projects and decision-making. In particular, we consider the issue of who has power and control, highlighting the effects of gender, ethnic and other factors.

The term 'empowerment' is examined and analysed. We advocate working with democratic styles of leadership – particularly through consensual processes – to encourage youth empowerment. Finally, this unit describes the main features and principles of consensual decision-making. It will take you roughly 5 hours to review and reflect on the material in this unit.

Learning Outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

o   define ideas of participation, power and empowerment, particularly in relation to young people

o   select and use different styles of decision-making, in particular consensual styles

o   consider activities which could enable young people to acquire skills needed for effective participation and decision-making.

Participation, Power and Empowerment

> We live in an age when to be young and to be indifferent can be no longer synonymous. We must prepare for the coming hour. The claims of the Future are represented by suffering millions; and the Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity.
>
> ~ Benjamin Disraeli

Youth development work is often described as a process of increasing the participation of young people in national development and decision-making. This is assumed to entail youth empowerment. In Unit 1, we identified empowerment and participation as central Commonwealth values. In this unit, we explore these values in more detail. Like human rights and democracy, they are about higher order modes of interacting with young people.

The use of the concepts of 'participation' and 'empowerment' in the youth development context implies giving young people more control over their personal development. Of the different styles of decision-making identified in Unit 3, consensual decision-making is the most challenging, but it comes closest to facilitating people's participation and also to empowering them. We examine this process in the next section. But first, let's look at the principles underpinning young people's involvement in the decision-making process.

Participation

Participation in democracy, in employment, in education, in cultural development – these are all enshrined as individual rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are also included in the Harare Declaration as priorities for the Commonwealth. But what does 'participation' mean? Here, we examine this notion from the point of view of project planning.

The history of international and national development efforts includes many different approaches to and interpretations of 'participation'. When we think of a 'participatory project', we think of one where the main beneficiaries of the project have also been involved in some way in designing and managing the project.

But some people seem to just attach the word 'participatory' to projects because it sounds better, even though complete control of projects remains with outside planners or elites. For example, there exists a 'participatory family planning project' where participation only means coming to the clinic for contraceptives.

Participation and young people

Traditionally, young people have been excluded from active participation in many of the decisions that affect their lives. When we are very young, our parents, family members and other adults always make decisions on our behalf. Usually they are genuinely concerned with our interests.

But as we grow into adolescence, the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, we begin to develop our own sense of

what 'our best interests' are, and we may not have the same perspective as the adults in our lives have.

However, adults do not always want to relinquish their role as decision-makers, sometimes because they see dangers that young people do not, and they do not always recognise when young people become able to begin to make their own decisions, and to take responsibility for the consequences of those decisions.

That point of change is a difficult one that requires careful negotiation. This struggle for greater influence and autonomy takes place not just within our families, but also at school and in community contexts, where adults may be even more wary of giving up some of the power invested in them.

The kind of actions and reactions that you have thought about are all framed within the relationships to power that the young people and their parents have. We look at notions of power next.

 Reflection

Think about your own context and the young people who you might be working with.
Outline some of the concerns that the parents have with regard to the young people. How do the parents demonstrate this concern? How do the young people react to this? What are their responses with regard to their parents' concerns?

 Reflection Activity for Certificate Students

eJournal Reflection Activity 4.1 (about 20 minutes)

Log in to the Mahara ePortfolio Website. Make a note of your observations in your learning journal. Title the entry, "Reflection Activity 4.1"

If you need help writing an eJournal, please refer to the Learning Journal. If you need help posting your reflection, please refer to the Mahara Learning Journal Guide.

Power

Participation is centrally concerned with issues of power. Different levels and sources of power will have an impact on who can get involved in a project or in making a decision, who speaks at meetings, whose ideas are listened to, who benefits and who does not.

In most cultures, men have more power than women, and elders have more power than youth. In a development context, gender and age differences in power translate to gender and age differences in participation. As a result, separate avenues of participation often have to be established, such as women's groups and youth groups.

Understanding power

'Power' is at the heart of empowerment, so we have to understand ideas of power before we can tackle empowerment. We have suggested that differences in power are often the source of inequalities in participation, whether at the level of a group discussion, a community project or national politics. But the word 'power' has more than one meaning. At least four different ideas are combined in the way we use the word:

○ power *over*: control over people, resources and decision-making, sometimes based on violence and intimidation

○ power *to*: knowledge, skill or ability to solve a problem, learn or accomplish new things

○ power *within*: spiritual or inner strength based on self-acceptance, self-respect and self-confidence (may be called 'charismatic power')

○ power *with*: group or collective strength, the sense that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts when people work together with common goals.

The first in the list – 'power over' – is probably the most common usage. It is the only interpretation where power is a limiting

concept: if one person gets more, then someone else must have less – like dividing a limited plot of land.

Someone with power over others is in a position to make other people follow their will or direction. Their authority may come from weapons, physical strength, economic resources or some kind of social authority.

'Power over' is often not welcomed by the individuals who are controlled by it. Their responses can range from passive acceptance to very active resistance. The level of resistance depends in part on the other sources of power that the disadvantaged people feel they possess or can generate together.

In every society there are powerful groups who wield this controlling kind of power, but other people also have varying amounts of the other sorts of power. In the case of 'power to', 'power within' or 'power with', if one person gets more, no one else need have any less. In fact, the growth of these sorts of power in one person should enhance the power of others.

A good example of this comes from education. It is often said that 'knowledge is power', but it is a kind of power where everyone can get more without the supply ever running out. And when one person improves their knowledge, other people close to them should also benefit from their learning.

Sources of power

When you think of a powerful person, you might imagine a wealthy, well-fed business man in a suit and tie or it might be an army general with access to weapons. But would you think of a mother? Or a mechanic?

You could think of a mother's power as the power of love, and the power to shape the learning of her children. A mechanic has power to fix things using his or her skills. Laws, knowledge, social position, resources, creativity, commitment – these are some of the diverse sources of power in our societies.

Power within families

> Women and girls hold the key to sustained development and improving the lives of others. To change a woman's life for the better is to unlock the potential to change and lift a whole society.
>
> ~ Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General

Within families, there are also power imbalances. Often, men have more of some kinds of power (for example, control over resources and decision-making) than female members. Adults have more power than children.

However, millions of families all over the world operate so that the members with more power use it in the interests of those with less: parents make decisions that are in the best interests of their children, and a husband protects and supports his wife and children. But it is important to recognise that this is not always the case. The global incidence of physical, emotional and other abuse, and of economic and sexual exploitation of women and children is testimony to the misuse of power within families.

Next, we look in more detail at issues of empowerment.

Empowerment

We must become the change we want to see in the world.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

The process of empowerment has to address all of the meanings of power described above. Empowerment is about:

o helping to increase the skills and capacity of individuals

o helping people to become more self-confident

o helping groups to work together

o helping to create a more equitable division of resources and decision-making.

Notice that the word 'helping' is used in each of these points. Empowerment is not something that someone can give to anyone else. It is not like a package that can be neatly wrapped up and delivered. In reality, empowerment is usually 'self-empowerment'. Just as you cannot force anyone to learn, you also cannot force them to become empowered.

Empowering Young People

Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.

~ Kofi Annan, Ghana, the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people.

Empowering Women

Every literate woman marks a victory over poverty.

~ UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. In spite of the fact that most development agencies identify women's literacy

as the single most important factor in development, one out of every three women in the world cannot read and write. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed the transformative effect on both a family and the wider community when a woman is literate. "Literate women are more likely to send their children, especially their girls, to school," he said. "By acquiring literacy, women become more economically self-reliant and more actively engaged in their country's social, political and cultural life."

Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said that investing in women's literacy carries very high returns.

> It improves livelihoods, leads to better child and maternal health, and favours girls' access to education. In short, newly literate women have a positive ripple effect on all development indicators.

Reflection

After reading so far in this module, what do you now feel are the key things you can do to contribute to the empowerment of young people and women? This may be at a global, national, or local level, and also within the context of your own group of young people.

Reflection Activity for Certificate Students

eJournal Reflection Activity 4.2 (about 20 minutes)

Log in to the Mahara ePortfolio Website. Make a note of your ideas in your learning journal. Title the entry, "Reflection Activity 4.2"

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Consensus

In Unit 3, you looked at different styles of democratic decision-making. Of the three styles listed there – majority vote, consensus and proportional outcomes – 'consensus' is the one that requires the greatest participation, and the one that most promotes empowerment. In the rest of this unit we examine the meaning of 'consensus' in more detail, and look at how to work in a consensual manner.

The word 'consensus' comes from the Latin for 'to think together'. We use it to mean a conclusion or agreement. Its Latin root helps us to keep in mind that it is a process as well as a product.

In other words, consensus is not just where you end up; it is how you get there. For this reason, it often involves many different processes, and so it is often easier to define consensus by explaining what it is not. That is what we will do next.

What Consensus is Not

Many people think that consensus is the same thing as complete agreement. In theory, it is possible that when you start out to reach an agreement by consensus you will find that all participants are in complete accord on all matters under discussion.

Think about your own experience – is unanimous agreement common? Unanimity, by its very nature, is destroyed if one single person doesn't agree. In practice, this means that if a group is trying to reach a unanimous decision, then every single person participating in the group process has a potential veto that can stop the decision from being reached.

So, if not everyone has to agree absolutely to create a consensus, does that make consensus a kind of majority rule, perhaps where the majority has to be pretty substantial (such as more than three-quarters)? Not really, because in reality that kind of 'super majority' mechanism also creates a veto for the minority.

The difficulty with both unanimous and majority-rule decision-making is that they are confrontational, setting up opposing camps of people – them and us. Neither side in a discussion has any motivation to modify their position, to incorporate some of

the ideas of the alternative view or to find creative new solutions.

In a majority-rule system, each camp is motivated to press its position firmly enough that it convinces the required number (50 per cent or more) that it is right. In both unanimous and majority decision-making, winners and losers are usually assessed by voting. However, many analysts of management practice have expressed opinions such as the following:

> Voting has no place in the consensus-building process. Voting is a convenient way of disposing of an issue with dispatch, but it commonly suppresses conflict rather than resolves it. … Voting forces categorical 'aye' or 'nay' choices. Although people are acculturated to accept the will of the majority, they may not feel obliged to support the majority position. (Wynn and Guditus, 1984: p. 45.)

How consensus decisions are made

Consensus-seeking tries to reconcile differences by locating and building on areas of agreement, sometimes called 'integrative goals'. The process may be more time consuming than that of majority voting because the position of all parties in a consensus decision must be taken into account and a practical solution found that everyone would abide by. Those with opposing views may not like the decision, but they *must* agree that they can live with it.

So far, this discussion has been fairly abstract. Now we will look at how consensus works within the Commonwealth. This may help to make it more concrete.

Consensus in the Commonwealth

Commonwealth Heads of Government and other Ministerial meetings operate through consensus building. At Heads of Government Meetings, the Secretary-General often plays an active part in trying to assess or create consensus on difficult issues. The first Secretary-General, Arnold Smith, described his role in this way:

> A Secretary-General, it is clear, must be impartial to the extent that he is responsible to the collectivity of member states and must not favour the interests of one group against another. But this need not mean he is neutral, nor that he steps carefully down the middle between various views.
>
> In short, the elected Secretary-General of a dynamic international community must embody for the association what Rousseau called 'the general will', and should act accordingly. It is also his responsibility to try, when necessary, to develop a general will, by discussion with heads of government and ministers and, when appropriate, with journalists and in public speeches. (Smith, 1981: 43–44.)

Case study: The Vancouver Summit

Consensus is often interpreted as 'the sense of the meeting'. However, in the case of sanctions against South Africa raised at the Vancouver Summit of 1987, the general sense of the meeting was that stronger economic sanctions should be applied against South Africa. Some writers have described the result of this meeting as the abandonment of consensus. Another way of looking at it, however, is to describe it as pragmatic consensus. The Commonwealth took a firm stand on economic sanctions on which one of its members, Britain, reserved judgement. The Okanagan Statement and Programme of Action on Southern Africa reflects both the 'consensus' and the dissenting position. The integrative goals that allowed both sides of the disagreement to tolerate each other's position were a genuine commitment to the Commonwealth as an organisation, and a unanimous disapproval of racism and racial discrimination. Without these integrative goals, the Commonwealth might have disintegrated under the pressure of tensions over South Africa more than once in its history.

Principles of consensus

You might be looking for some clear-cut 'rules' for how to work in a consensual manner. But there are no set rules for consensual decision-making. There are, however, some well-tested principles and key ingredients that everyone should understand before embarking on the process.

The main principles are:

o Everyone who will be significantly affected by a decision should participate in the consensus process, if at all possible.

o All positions and concerns need to be heard out fully – each individual should be able to express dissent and should respect and welcome the different viewpoints of other participants. People must be prepared to present their 'bottom-line' positions, the minimum terms upon which they can agree, as well as their preferred terms (rather than withholding or hiding this

information, as is common in adversarial negotiations).

- o All participants need to listen actively and with an open mind to each others' views: they should strive to understand each others' positions even where they are not in agreement.

- o Where differences exist, participants need to think creatively together about how diverse positions and expectations can be integrated, or how some common ground can be reached.

Best conditions for consensus

A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

The principles of consensus outlined above are easy to agree with in the abstract, and comparatively easy to implement when discussions and decisions are fairly uncontroversial. It becomes more difficult to practise when divisions within a group are deep, and animosity begins to undermine mutual respect. It is also difficult to practise when decisions need to be taken urgently and immediately. Consensus usually emerges slowly, as positions are refined and modified step by step to accommodate others. Attempting to rush a consensus process results in the same feelings of winning and losing as do using majority-rule or veto decision-making.

A consensual style of decision-making works best when participants genuinely respect each other, and everyone fundamentally agrees about the identifiable goals, or at least has shared values. It demands considerable commitment from group members to participate in the process, sharing their ideas and actively listening to others.

 Reflection

Think about young people you have worked with. What were the different personalities involved? What sort of problems would you anticipate for reaching a consensus with them? What sort of approaches do you think would work best with them?

 Reflection Activity for Certificate Students

eJournal Reflection Activity 4.3 (about 10 minutes)

Log in to the Mahara ePortfolio Website. Make a note of your ideas in your learning journal. Title the entry, "Reflection Activity 4.3"

If you need help writing an eJournal, please refer to the Learning Journal. If you need help posting your reflection, please refer to the Mahara Learning Journal Guide.

Unit Summary

In this unit you have covered the following main points:

- o definitions of participation and the challenges of participation for young people

- o the nature of power, different meanings of the term, and the various sources of power

- o the notion of empowerment and creating an empowering environment for young people

- o consensus – what it is and how it works

- o approaches to developing the best conditions for consensus decision-making.

To check how you have got on, look back at the learning outcomes for this unit and see if you can now do them. When you have done this, look through your learning journal to remind yourself of what you have learned and the ideas you have generated.

✅ Unit 4 Quiz

1. Which styles of democratic decision-making requires the greatest participation, and the one that most promotes empowerment.

   ⚪ majority vote

   ⚪ consensus

   ⚪ proportional outcomes

2. Which style of democratic decision-making tries to reconcile differences by locating and building on areas of agreement?

   ⚪ majority vote

   ⚪ consensus

   ⚪ proportional outcomes

3. Knowledge is power because it is a kind of power (choose all that apply)

   ☐ where everyone can get more without the supply ever running out

   ☐ where when one person improves their knowledge, other people close to them also benefit from their learning

   ☐ all of the above

   ☐ none of the above

4. Empowerment is something you can give to someone else. (True or False)

   ⚪ True

   ⚪ False

References

Smith, A. (1981) *Stitches in Time: The Commonwealth in World Politics*, Andre Deutsch, London

Wynn, R. and Guditus, C. W. (1984) *Team Management: Leadership by Consensus*, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill