

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



APRIL 2004 NO. 9

YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK OUT FOR QUALITY MEDIA

In preparation for the 4th World Summit on Media for Children and Adolescents, we are dedicating this month's newsletter to *Voices of Youth's* adolescents and media board. From 19 – 23 April, young people from around the world will join professionals, policy and decision makers at the Summit to explore quality media for all, from all. *Voices of Youth* representatives will be at the Summit reporting on outcomes and the role young people play in achieving set goals. **So stay tuned!**

OVERVIEW

Over the past 36 months, young people from all regions of the world have used *Voices of Youth's* adolescents and media board to explore the impact of media on youth and society, and how its impact can be harnessed for positive change. Through their discussions, participants offered clear recommendations for media professionals, decision makers and their peers, such as: calling for a halt to the negative representations of adolescents; using the media to spread awareness and understanding of sensitive issues; implicating parents and governments in media regulation; and most critical, partnering with young people to ensure a quality media that fairly represents and appeals to youth.

All VOY participants agree that, through its images, choice of programming and news foci, the media strongly influences both how young people see themselves and society's image of youth. Participants thus criticize the media for negatively stereotyping young people as "rebellious,

violent, materialistic, drug users," and blame the media for promoting violence through these negative representations.

Young people are asking the media to offer more varied programming options that acknowledge the realities of the world as it impacts children and adolescents. They also call for positive images of youth leaders and change makers they can emulate and use as inspiration.

Participants recognize that parents and governments also have a role to play, and speak of the need for regulation, on both a micro (in the home) and macro (national policy) level.

Young people see themselves as the most critical component to ensuring a balanced and accurate media that attracts and supports youth. They ask to be involved at all stages of production and policy, and to have their opinions taken into account.

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THIS MONTH ON VOICES OF YOUTH

[e-discussions for the 4th media summit!](#)

For 4 weeks young people, moderated by a youth Summit delegate, discussed the themes of the 4th World Summit. [Read more!](#)

WEBSITE SPOTLIGHT

[Have you seen the new VOY?](#)

Check out the new VOY and tell us what you think in the [Guest book](#).

UPCOMING

[Discussion boards, languages and more!](#)

on 19 April VOY's upgrade will be complete with new discussion boards, French, Spanish, and more!

[e-discussions for the International AIDS Conference](#)

Youth join the discussions on 19 April!

INSIGHT OF THE MONTH

"I'm sick of hearing that everything is too sensitive to discuss. If everything is too sensitive, how is the world going to heal? To all those teens and youths who have been told to 'shut up' and 'keep quiet' about 'sensitive issues', to heck with the social norms. Keep your opinions strong and continue to let your voice be heard." *boy, 16, Singapore*

UPCOMING JUNE ISSUE
HIV and AIDS

QUALITY MEDIA

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

April 2004

Click on a link to read what Young People Are Saying about Quality media

[Stereotyping](#) [Making an impact](#) [Not all negative](#) [Youth programming](#)
[Media's responsibility](#) [Regulation](#) [What can media do?](#) [Conclusion](#)

STEREOTYPING

Of the many issues discussed, young people on *Voices of Youth* dedicate the most attention to the media's tendency to stereotype adolescents and present all 12 to 19 year olds as having identical characters, interests and values. In addition to generalizing, young people feel the media tends to wrongly portray young people as "temperamental and foolish" (boy, >21, Nigeria), using drugs and prone to violence.



SLOVENIA

"I believe that the image given to the youth in the media is not fair at all. It is very much stereotyping. It shows the youth as very superficial, only caring about themselves and having no regard for others and their problems. Although there might be some shows and magazines which show the other side of young people, they are still pretty unnoticed." *girl, 18*

Young people call on the media to make efforts to give a more balanced and realistic view of children and adolescents. They ask for a fair representation that celebrates their successes and individualities, while acknowledging their struggles.



AUSTRALIA

"I think it would be better if the media tries to give a balanced point of view, that is by portraying positive images of youth, such as by highlighting our achievement in different areas, interviews young people who have passion and have the courage to follow their dreams despite difficult circumstances." *girl, 18*

MAKING AN IMPACT

The need for a balanced and fair image of adolescents is particularly critical given the huge impact young people see the media having on society, and on adolescents in particular.

Negative self-image: Many young people look to the media for some guidance as to who they are and what they are capable of accomplishing. As such, "by labeling young people as uncaring and ignorant [the media] also makes them believe that they really are like that and they don't even try to help and make a difference. And that also very much affects their self-image." (*girl, 18, Slovenia*)

Violence: Participants also feel that by focusing on images of young people as violent and irresponsible, the media indirectly promotes this behaviour among youth, and particularly among adolescent boys.



INDIA

"Commercial T.V Channels r snatch-ing away the ethical values from the adolescents and promoting them to behave irrationally...and instigating the boys to go for teasing, molestation, & rapes..." *boy, 21*

Society's view of youth: In addition to the impact on youth, participants also feel that the media directly impacts the way society views young people.



ALGERIA

"Aujourd'hui, les jeunes sont considérés comment un des grands maux d'un pays... Cette image péjorative devrait être rayée des médias et remplacée par une bien meilleure qui symboliserait le meilleur des futures." *boy, >21*

NOT ALL NEGATIVE

While the majority of participants criticize the media, many messages address the potential for the media to constitute a powerful force for good among young people if used appropriately.

In particular, the media has the potential to educate • spread awareness

about sensitive issues, and issues shrouded in silence (HIV and AIDS) • act as a window to the world • promote adolescent development • and foster youth participation.



KENYA

"Personally, I've learned a lot from the media. I learned to appreciate different cultures and different people. I got a glimpse of places I might never be able to go to in my lifetime. I realized that we all share the same problems, the same opinions and the same hopes, no matter where we are and regardless of religion, colour or gender. I've learned that every little thing I do matters" *girl, 18*

Catalyst for change: Just as the media can be an instigator of violence among youth, participants also see it as a mechanism for promoting responsible social action. Images of young leaders and change makers can be catalysts for behaviour change among young viewers and listeners and the inspiration for growth and development.



NIGER

"En effet, les médias doivent jouer un rôle central dans la prise de conscience des populations mais aussi des enfants en particulier. Pour cela, couvrir les activités des jeunes militants est capital pour motiver les autres et aussi pour convaincre les adultes qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une institutionnalisation des enfants" *boy, 19*

Spreading awareness: Given its wide reach, young people see the media as an excellent tool for increasing awareness around issues such as child labour, HIV and AIDS, and commercial sexual exploitation; issues that are traditionally considered 'sensitive' and difficult to broach.

Young people are asking the media to pay more attention to such issues and their impact on children.



NIGERIA

"the media has done no good in ensuring that the awareness of [HIV] is taken to the grassroots... it pains me to see my cherished continent gradually going down in shreds as a result of...ignorance." *boy, 19*

REAL LIVES... ADOLESCENTS AND MEDIA AROUND THE WORLD



COLOMBIA

"En mi país (Colombia) se llevo a acabo un foro sobre la sexualidad en la radio, tocando indiscriminadamente temas como la virginidad y la vida sexual de las personas, hablando del condón como la forma más eficaz de prevenir la enfermedad para poderte enredar con cualquiera. Así, la asociación de padres de diferentes colegios preocupados por esto reunieron a los directores de las emisoras juveniles en el país para ponerle un limite a esto, los jóvenes viendo la preocupación se asociaron y crearon un grupo para evitar el daño a la sociedad por este medio." *girl, 19*



GHANA

"Curious Minds. This group is on radio transmitting to all the ten regions of my country and to other west African countries. A lot of people in the country are becoming aware of their rights. The most interesting thing about this group is that children do the advocacy, present, produce and direct all the programmes they have on TV and radio. I am happy to be one of them and was at the 3rd world summit for children in the country." *girl, 17*



SEYCHELLES

"Hi, I produce the youth program for the am radio service here in the Seychelles and I find that Seychellois youths are not willing to contribute towards the 30 minute program. Gosh, here is one chance to allow other age groups to know our needs and opinions. I find myself going out to get interviews from people and groups yet, they rarely come forward!! I have been producing the program for nearly a year now and I try to allow the youths to know the different youth groups in existence, what other youths are up to, the activities being organised and new facilities that has been created for us. Does this happen everywhere else?"

QUALITY MEDIA

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

The need for programming that directly targets children and adolescents remains a major concern of young people on *Voices of Youth*.

Participants agree that in most countries there is very little programming geared specifically at their age group, and that programs that are available tend to appeal to a generalized image of youth as materialistic and interested in violence.

Young people speak of the need for programmes that discuss the real world around them, presenting politics, current affairs, rights, and pertinent issues in youth-friendly terms.

Youth role models: Participants also asked for programming that offers role models to emulate, stating that "young people would be easily inspired if we have role models that are our own age and who experience similar pressures as us." (*girl, 18, Australia*)

MEDIA'S RESPONSIBILITY?

Although arguing that the media should focus more attention on awareness, education and programming appropriate for young people, participants feel that ultimately the media is a commercial entity driven by financial concerns.



KENYA

"The media is out to "entertain" and they will do what they deem necessary to attain an audience.." *girl, 19*

News: Giving particular attention to the news, one young person from Australia spoke of how the media is "under immense pressure to deliver...something that enrages people or gets them emotionally involved" (*boy, 19*) if it is to satisfy expectations.



ANDORRA

"Los medios de comunicación, salvo raras excepciones están al servicio exclusivo de quienes les pagan. Nunca ha existido tanta autocensura en los medios de comunicación. Si para cobrar el sueldo mensual hace falta mentir, se miente." *boy, 20*

Following this rationale, participants asked if the media is not simply a reflection of the society it serves? If so, is the media responsible for its programming choices or its consumers? Participants did not resolve this question, but agree that independent of who is responsible young people need to given a greater voice and be recognized as an important constituency if they are to be appropriately represented.

REGULATION

Discussions also addressed the question of who is responsible for ensuring the media offers varied youth programming, and programming that focuses on awareness building and adolescence.

Policy makers: Not wanting to jeopardize the right to freedom of expression, young people still feel that national and international officials should take an active role in the regulation of media.



KENYA

"the complexity of ways the media is used makes the media both beneficial and harmful thus calling for greater caution from what we receive from the media; because the media both builds and destroys the community. Thus media laws, censorship of media programmes, parental advisory and child-lock facilities in modern televisions attest to the need for caution in media usage." *boy, >21*

QUALITY MEDIA

Parents: Even more than policy makers and governments, parents are given primary responsibility for their children's media experience.

Young people on *Voices of Youth* see parents as regulating what programs their children watch, explaining and contextualizing programs, and advocating for better and more varied youth programming.



KENYA

"Parent should also take it as their responsibility to advise media owners in scheduling their programmes based on different interests at different times eg soap operas, music videos and movies that are far much erotic should be scheduled when children are asleep." girl, 20

CONCLUSION

Young people on *Voices of Youth* clearly grasp the complex nature of the media and its role in terms of children and adolescents. They are asking to be given the chance to impact programming and be recognized as a critical constituency that deserves a voice and a place at the negotiating table.

Participants also call on the media to use its reach and capacity to spread awareness and promote growth, development and solidarity.



GHANA

"If most children in the media are from rich families and they act on the command of adults, I'm beginning to wonder whether this is really participation. From what I know about participation, all the children, rich or poor are supposed to be part of the decision making but here is the case where most of the children are being string pulled by those in authority. Children managing their own affairs in the media is very rare. I am in no way saying that we children should take over the decision making. There's a proverb which says that what an old man squats to see the child stands on the highest mountain but can't see. So all we're trying to say is that, that we should live up to Article 12&13 which emphasize participation. If we're able to do this we'll surely have a world fit for children." girl, 14

WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO?

Show our potential: "I encourage all young people to band together and show the world what we are made of. Because it's our world. The older people are just looking after it for a bit." (boy, 19, Australia)

WHAT CAN LEADERS DO?

Regulation: "I am therefore calling for a greater media censorship that will not affect press freedom and its limitation, to promote media usage for the purposes of community development." (boy, >21, Nigeria)

Listen to us!: it is commendable for UNICEF to initiate this program [*Voices of Youth*]. It is a start. But the success of this program would only be realized if the U.N. and the whole world listen to what the young people have to say and take action. It's a cliché that still is true." (girl, 20, Philippines)

WHAT CAN MEDIA DO?

Give us a chance to shine: "we do not only want to be heard on the media when we have gone to smoke, do drugs, engaged in war of crimes, but most importantly, we want to be heard when we are making great strikes in our world. Let our little efforts towards making the world a better place for all be heard. We are tired of being showcased as sources of entertainment and fruitless arguments. We have more and can do more than what you perceive of us to the betterment of the world. Give us the chance." (boy, >21, Ghana)

Show us the real world: "Media has to help adolescents to get ready for the real life that expects them out of their family shelters. But what it really does is to show a very beautiful or a very terrible world, not the real one." (girl, 17, Albania)

Take responsibility and reach out: what is needed in this day and age is responsible, honest and sensitive ways of reaching to the masses. what must not be overlooked here is the extremely huge influence that all forms of media have on the populations of the world...especially the youth. (boy, 19, India)

Spread the word: I think they should have a specific programme that will, on a specific day of every week talk about issues like these [aids] affecting young people." (boy, 21, Nigeria)



PHILIPPINES

"To make a larger sense, media contribute to whatever is the attitude of the youngsters today, be it bad or good... which will be sooner or later, applied in the real world." boy, 17

VOICES OF YOUTH

<http://www.unicef.org/vo/>

Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues. Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, *Voices of Youth* provides more than 20,000 young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.

WEB-DIALOGUE ON MEDIA FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

From 15 March through 9 April, UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, invited children and young people from everywhere to join a four-week web-dialogue hosted by UNICEF's websites, [Voices of Youth](#) and [MAGIC](#), in preparation of the [4th World Summit on Media for Children and Adolescents](#) which will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 19 – 23 April, 2004.

The web dialogues ran for four weeks and focused on the four themes of the Rio Summit. The dialogues will be moderated by an adolescent Summit delegate and a UNICEF facilitator and be held in English, French, Spanish and Russian.

The summaries of these discussions will be presented at the Summit in April.

“ONE WORLD, MANY VOICES” IS THE TOPIC OF WEEK 1 (MARCH 15–19). Here are some of the questions: How does the media in your country portray children and adolescents? Does the media distinguish between children and adolescents by gender, age, culture, ethnicity? What do you think the impact of the media's portrayal of children and adolescents has on young people? What is the role of young media makers? What role do you think should young people play in the media?

“MEDIA: MARKET, AUDIENCE AND VALUES” IS THE TOPIC OF WEEK 2 (MARCH 22–26). The main questions: How do you think children and adolescents impact the Media and the programmes it chooses to produce? Should the Media dedicate programming to difficult and real life issues that affect children and adolescents today, such as HIV/AIDS, violence and unemployment? If so, what do you think the impact will be on children and adolescents? Should the Media stay away from images that are too violent or sexual? By showing these images is the Media teaching bad habits or exposing children and adolescents to real life issues? Where do parents and guardians fit in? What media skills do children need to learn in schools or elsewhere?

“CHALLENGES TO QUALITY, ALLIANCES FOR QUALITY” IS THE TOPIC OF WEEK 3 (MARCH 29-APRIL 2). The central questions: What is “quality media”? How would you define this term? Do you think everyone has the same definition of “quality media”? Is it possible to produce quality media for war torn countries and country in emergency? What role should society, governments, industry, young people, play in defining and controlling quality media?

THE FINAL WEEK OF THE WEB-DIALOGUE (APRIL 5-9) summed up the discussion and looked at the present and the future of the media concerning young people. What should the media make a priority when trying to create quality programming for children and adolescents? Money? Diversity? Awareness about issues? Education? Entertainment?

What is the most important message that needs to be gotten across at the Summit? What issues should the youth delegates raise when talking to media professionals and producers of children's and youth media in Rio? What issues should be addressed at the Summit that are not on the agenda?

See [Voices of Youth](#) for more information, including summaries, profiles of youth moderators and soon to come daily journals of the participants