2. National studies
4. Fiji

Country summary

Fiji is located east of Australia and has more than 300 islands in its archipelago. In 2004 Fiji’s total population was estimated at 836,000 with 28% aged between 15 and 29 years.5

Estimated youth population at a glance

As Fiji’s birth rate is low compared with most Pacific countries, it has a relatively lower percentage of people aged between 0 and 29 years. There are a number of urban centres located along the coast where there is a trend in youth urbanisation.

Table 4.1: Key youth statistics

| 2004 population aged 15-29 | 234,000 |
| 2004 population aged 0-29 | 495,000 |
| 2004 population aged 15-29 as % of total | 28% |
| 2004 population aged 0-29 as % of total | 59% |

Source: USP 2006

Unemployed youth aged 15-24 12%
Net primary school enrolment 98%
Gross secondary school enrolment 83%

Source: World Bank 2006c

Figure 4.1: Population aged 15 – 29

Source: Adapted from USP (2006)
Main youth issues

The National Youth Policy of the Fiji Islands identifies key priority issues that are to be addressed through the policy. These issues include youth employment, leadership, youth participation in decision making, adolescent health, sports and recreation, cultural and religious understanding, youth rights and support for at risk young people.

Government and youth policy

The Ministry of Youth is the government department responsible for youth activities and youth policy in Fiji. One of the key challenges for the Ministry is to coordinate government ministries in implementing the National Youth Policy and working together with civil society organisations on a more formal basis to implement the policy strategies.

The National Youth Policy sets out the key objectives and outcomes for addressing youth issues. The policy designates the Ministry of Youth as a lead agency for coordinating policy and program implementation. As such, the Ministry has established a mechanism for working with young people through the National Youth Advisory Board, Provincial Youth Forum and the Youth Assembly of the Fiji Islands.

The National Youth Policy has addressed the issue of youth participation in decision making by stating that young people will be encouraged to maximise their leadership skills to effectively take part in the decision making process and promote the principles of good governance. The existing mechanisms in place such as the National Advisory Board and the Provincial Youth Forum provide an avenue for young people to develop their leadership skills and influence policy at national and provincial levels.

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and youth

Fiji’s NGO sector is very active and visible with many organisations providing direct and outreach services to young people around the country. There are gender specific organisations as well as religious organisations working in the area of youth development in both rural and urban areas. Some of these NGOs include:

- Fiji Youth Concern Network
- Ecumenical Centre for Research Education & Advocacy (ECREA)
- St John’s Ambulance
- Fiji Red Cross
- Fiji Women’s Rights Movement
- FemLink Pacific
- Equal Grounds Pasifik
- Homes of Hope

“The policy accepts that the youths are our future and it is imperative to develop their full potential and their active participation in national development. Integrating them into the local-global dynamics is also important, given that this will promote their sustainability.”

Fiji National Youth Policy
Fiji national study

Background

Fiji has a well-established youth advocacy sector that is supported by active youth and community based NGOs. Recent coups, however, indicate that this Pacific Island nation of 900,000 people is facing huge challenges in sustaining strong economic growth in a context of cultural tensions, political instability and sharp divisions along ethnic and religious lines. The future of Fiji will impact on the ability of young people to take their place as leaders.

The life experiences of young people in Fiji differ according to their ethnic background, and their rural or urban location. While most of the country has an adequate infrastructure, educational and employment opportunities still concentrate in urban centers, especially greater Suva where almost half the total population live.

The youth consultation found that young people in Fiji are involved in a diverse range of informal activities aside from school, university or work. They are full of ideas about how to create change and want to make sure that other young people in Fiji have equal access to education and employment opportunities. They are concerned about the country’s political situation and they want to contribute to building strong leadership and governance. At the same time, they want to live in a culturally harmonious society where they can feel proud of being Fijian, regardless of their cultural and religious background.

Summary

Key findings of the consultations:

1. The marginalisation and voicelessness of youth in Fiji is a consequence of low cultural and societal status, decision makers’ lack of understanding of how to effectively engage young people in solving community problems, and the absence of a coordination mechanism to enable the Ministry of Youth to share information and work with NGOs and youth groups around the country.

2. Young people would like to be engaged in formal discussions with politicians and people in authority about policies and projects that impact them and their families. They do not want ‘youth participation’ to equal physical work such as constructing footpaths and village beautification, because they feel that they can contribute to the development of their communities in more meaningful ways. They especially want to have their voices heard at meetings, forums and consultations.

3. Young people in Fiji believe youth participation must be inclusive of the disadvantaged, including youth in rural areas, young mothers, school dropouts, youth with disabilities and youth living on the streets. They would like the Ministry of Youth to encourage more young people to participate in the Provincial Youth Forum of the Fiji Islands, the National Youth Advisory Board and other governmental bodies and committees.

4. Fiji has a well established youth advocacy sector compared to other countries being investigated as part of this research but is limited by the lack of formal recognition by government, restricted funding, and to some extent political instability. There is an opportunity to pool the resources available to build the capacity of the youth sector.

Recommendations

Policy development and building institutional capacity to support youth participation

- Adopt a holistic approach to youth development
- Expand youth leadership programs
- Promote collaboration between all stakeholders
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of existing youth participation mechanisms.

Youth participation in education and life long learning

- Develop health and social support services for young people on the streets
- Expand youth media programs.

Youth participation in employment and training

- Establish a nation-wide microfinance scheme for young entrepreneurs.
About the sample

A total of 53 young people completed the questionnaire and 25 young people participated in the focus group sessions conducted in Suva and Namosi province. Due to time, budget and personnel availability constraints, it was not possible to obtain a larger sample for Fiji. Efforts were made to gather as much input from NGOs and other organizations as possible to provide a broad picture of the situation faced by young people. The age and gender distribution of survey respondents is presented in Table 4.2. Throughout this chapter urban respondents are those who live in Suva while those living in all areas outside Suva are classified as rural.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One respondent did not specify their age

Employment and volunteer status

Figure 4.2 shows employment and volunteer status of respondents who completed the questionnaire. Of those who lived in Suva 14 per cent had paid work at some point in time, but none of those living outside of Suva. Conclusions cannot be drawn from this small sample, but it suggests that further investigation of youth employment and unemployment in rural and urban Fiji is needed.

An interesting finding was that 41 per cent of respondents in Suva and 56 per cent for those living outside Suva were currently volunteering. The majority of volunteers said they were involved in constructing footpaths, buildings and gardening to beautify their village. In Namosi Province, focus group participants said they were frustrated with being asked to volunteer their time on physically demanding projects. They felt they were being ‘used’ when instructed to undertake such projects by family and village heads. On the other hand, some of the young people from the Suva focus group session were actively involved in volunteering work with various NGOs and believed that formal, paid employment in the civil society sector should be promoted as a career option for young people in Fiji.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban: n=28; Rural: n=25
What Fijian youth say about their dreams, goals and issues

The young people who took part in the focus group sessions in Fiji had a clear idea of their career goals and where they wanted to be in five years' time. Many of them wanted to complete their schooling or university studies and find a job that matched their skills and interests. In Suva, some were worried that many educated young people were leaving the country to seek a better lifestyle and income in countries such as Australia, United States and New Zealand. The participants in the focus group agreed that although they were attracted by the opportunity to go overseas to study or work, more could be done to prevent the brain drain of young professionals from leaving the country.

Many youth in the Namosi focus group wanted to finish school, own a business or become a professional rugby player. The majority had completed or were in the process of completing secondary school, and wanted to earn a good income to support their families. Financial constraints were preventing young people from following their dreams. At the same time, the Namosi group wanted to serve their parents and community over their own individual dreams and goals.

Who should be told about youth concerns?

Forty-five per cent of rural respondents and 31 per cent of urban respondents believed that youth leaders were the best people to tell about youth issues (see Figure 4.3). More than 60 per cent of respondents in both urban and rural areas suggested ‘others’ including friends, teachers, NGOs and church youth groups (refer to Figure 4.3).

“I would inform the community leaders about problems and let them know how painful it is to know that nothing has been done to solve our problems. I would go directly to the leaders and tell them to their face.”

(Young person – Matubu, Fiji)

Figure 4.3: Who are the best people to inform about youth issues?

Note: Other includes teachers, non-governmental organizations, regional bodies, schools and other informal networks. Urban: n=26; Rural: n = 22

Given the small size of the sample, it was not meaningful to disaggregate responses by age and gender, but the focus group discussions and interviews indicated that older youth were less likely to suggest informing church officials about youth issues and more likely to suggest telling youth representatives and their peers. Focus group participants were uncertain as to whether the leaders would take any action to solve the problems that young people face.
“Older people make the rules and regulations, young people carry out the instruction and you don’t ask ‘why are we doing this?’ or ‘can’t we do it like that? We’re here to carry out what our elders want done without question.”

(Young person – Suva, Fiji)

Figure 4.4 shows that the majority of respondents thought their community and community leaders consider youth needs and plan to give youth better opportunities, with the percentage higher for those from rural areas. Rural respondents were also more likely to regard their community and community leaders as well informed about youth issues. This contrasts with some other countries, especially Papua New Guinea where less than 50 per cent of the respondents thought their community was well informed and considered their issues.

One explanation could be the well-established presence of NGOs and existing youth participation mechanisms in Fiji. For example the Provincial Youth Forum coordinated by the Fiji Ministry of Youth provides opportunities for young people to engage in dialogue with village and provincial leaders, and the government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community considers the needs of young people and plans to give them the best opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community &amp; community leaders are well informed about the problems &amp; issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons why community leaders were thought not to consider youth needs and plans related to lack of communication, as well as the community giving low priority to youth issues. Among the few youth consulted for this study the older respondents were more articulate about their issues and concerns than their younger counterparts. As Fijian culture endows status according to age, it may be that the younger you are, the less voice you are likely to have. This was reflected in an interview conducted as part of this research with the Ministry of Youth. The Provincial Youth Forum, a mechanism for young people in rural areas to communicate with the government, was said to be very successful in engaging young people from all provinces. The interviewee observed that older youth representatives tend to dominate and utilize the Forum to pursue their own personal and career agendas.
How do young people access information and how do they express themselves?

As shown in Figure 4.5 newspaper, TV, radio and friends were the most common sources of information for the respondents who completed the questionnaire. Seventy-one per cent of respondents from Suva identified newspaper as their number one source of information followed by TV (64 per cent), radio (54 per cent) and friends (54 per cent). In comparison, the respondents from outside Suva said friends (68 per cent) and radio (68 per cent) were their most common sources of information, followed by newspaper (64 per cent).

As noted in Case study 1 presented overleaf, youth-run newspapers are very popular amongst Fijian youth they have a wide circulation around the country and have a powerful influence on young people. References to newspaper as a common source of information indicate that these respondents are literate. As would be expected, in study countries with lower literacy rates (e.g. Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) the percentages of respondents identifying newspaper as a common information source were lower.

Figure 4.5: Main sources of information

Note: Urban: n=28; Rural: n=23
Figure 4.6 shows that talking to other individuals was thought to be the best way of informing community leaders about youth issues (75 per cent of all respondents who answered Q20).

This was followed by meetings and group discussions (29 per cent), and other methods of informing community leaders (23 per cent) such as the use of media and approaching NGOs.

Although ‘turning to parents and youth leaders’ was chosen by several participants in the other study countries, none of the Fijian participants mentioned it. It is difficult to say why respondents tended not regard approaching youth leaders as effective. It was evident that young people participating in the focus group in Namasi were reluctant to share their views in front of the youth leader, and it was difficult to encourage them to speak openly about the problems they faced. More in-depth discussion took place when the focus group was sub-divided into groups of two or three. It appears that although meetings were mentioned as the preferred way to inform community leaders, village meetings are often highly structured and young people are not allowed to speak unless asked to do so.

This suggests that opportunities exist for villages to develop alternative mechanisms for encouraging youth input into resolving local issues. As noted in the literature review, villages rely on young people to undertake physical work but in return, young people should be encouraged to actively participate in decision making within the village.

**How do young people perceive the role of government, community and family in achieving their goals?**

Participants in the focus group sessions were politically aware and interested in creating a political system that allows for young people’s voices to be heard. It was evident from these discussions, however, that participants lacked awareness of their civil and political rights. One participant from the Suva focus group said that most young people vote for the same political party as do their parents, or, if they have a relative running for Parliament, are compelled to vote for them.
Is anyone listening?

Despite the mobilisation of young people in rallies and marches, focus group participants believed that the government takes very little notice of young people. At the general elections held in May 2006, young people from Suva nominated a youth candidate for a seat in the national parliament, but the candidate was not elected. The importance of age as a marker of social status was evident in the following comment from a focus group participant.

“How likely is it, though, if you have one youth running for parliament and you have all these people pushing 60 years. How seriously are they going to take him or her?”

Politicians were perceived as ‘untouchable’ people, detached from the real world.

“They drive around in their 4x4, they get a good salary and they are not doing much to help the rest of Fiji. They are just self-serving people.”

(Focus group participant, Suva)

Focus group participants in Suva and Namosi province acknowledged the efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Youth to involve young people in its activities and consultation processes. An interview with a representative from the Ministry of Youth pointed out that the biggest challenge for the Ministry is to promote its functions and purpose to other ministries within the government, however. As in other study countries, the Ministry of Youth in Fiji was seen as a government portfolio of minor importance. According to an interview with the representatives from the Youth Ministry, in an event of budgetary review, the Youth Ministry would be the first to have its funding cut. For the Ministry of Youth, being recognized as an important part of government within the overall government structure is just as important to its success as winning public confidence in the work it is doing.
Role models

Surprisingly, when asked about leadership focus group participants felt that none of the many young people in sports, arts and music were desirable role models. The NGO representatives interviewed as part of this research thought there were several successful youth leadership programs in Fiji, including Leadership Fiji. This initiative aims to create future leaders through networking activities and leadership training, and has been recognized as an effective model, especially for young professionals as it receives corporate support.

Another example of a program mentioned as successful is the Emerging Leaders’ Forum (ELF) organized by the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and funded by Oxfam New Zealand. ELF is a 12-month program targeting young women aged 18 to 25 years, with the aim of increasing participants’ awareness of women’s rights and issues. The writers consider ELF to be an excellent example of capacity development for young women that can contribute to greater participation of young women in leadership positions at local and national levels.

Overall, participants were keen to become involved in political affairs and community activities in order to improve living conditions within their villages and families. Although young people are “seen but not heard” in Fijian culture, they appreciate that parents and village leaders are trying to get the best outcomes for young people. What young people want is the opportunity to have their voices heard by their families, communities and the government.

Case Study 4.1: Youth in print

Youth journalists keep young people up to date about the latest celebrity news, music charts, current affairs and sports through Kaila! and Wansolwara newspapers.

Kaila! is a weekly for young Fijians and is owned and published by The Fiji Times. It has a wide circulation around the country and it recently won an award for the Youth Readers category of the Pacific Area Newspaper Publishers’ Association 2006 Awards. The other popular youth newspaper is Wansolwara, which is published by journalism students of the University of South Pacific. Wansolwara reports on university happenings and general news, and because it is written by young people for young people, is very appealing.

Newspapers provide opportunities for young people to investigate and report on issues that are of concern to them, and share this information with other young people. They also encourage them to read – helping them to arrest the general decline in newspaper readership amongst the youth population. These two examples show that young people are using creative ways to share information and reach out to young people around the country.
5. Papua New Guinea

Country summary

The Melanesian nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest country in this study, in terms of both population and land area. It is located to the north of Australia on the Eastern half of New Guinea Island. In 2006, PNG had an estimated population of 6,187,000, with more than 80% of the population living in rural areas, mostly in a subsistence economy.

Estimated youth population at a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1: Key youth statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29: 1,588,000⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29: 3,8223,000⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29 as % of total: 28%⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29 as % of total: 67%⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Enrolment (2000): 77.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-29 year population never attended formal education⁵: 1,196,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the study countries, PNG is forecasted to have the highest proportion of young people by 2009 with more than 28%⁹ expected to be aged 15 – 29 of whom more than 84%⁸ would be living in rural areas. Although this proportion is projected to decline marginally over the next two decades, the number of youth in this age group is expected to increase to around 2,591,000 by 2029⁹.

Figure 5.1: Population aged 15 – 29

Source: Adapted from USP (2006)

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⁶ Derived from the Secretariat of the South Pacific Community
⁸ PNG National Youth Policy 2006
⁹ Adapted from the University of the South Pacific. ‘Working Paper of the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance’ Suva, Fiji, 2006
Main youth issues

During their vital transition to adulthood, PNG youth face similar problems to youth in other South Pacific nations. The main problems identified by SPC Youth Bureau include unemployment, substance abuse, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancies, family breakdown and other health related issues. SPC’s website estimates that approximately 45% of PNG’s law & order problems are caused by youth. Furthermore, these issues are present in an environment of escalating youth violence, and crime and one where police have been known to treat youth offenders brutally too.

An Open Space style consultation forum was run by the World Bank in 2006 involving over 80 ‘at risk’ youth in Port Moresby. The forum identified several issues of concern for youth including school fees, skills training for illiterate youth, increased sporting opportunities to bring communities together, and a support for victims of abuse and violence including counseling services.

Government and youth policy

- The National Youth Commission within the Ministry for Community Development is the key central agency of the National Government established to assist with the needs of PNG’s youth. The Ministry organized the first PNG National Youth Summit in 2006 with young people from around the country gathering to create a declaration with a youth perspective on the Millennium Development Goals. The Ministry also organized PNG’s first Youth Parliament in 2007, bringing young people together to voice their views on youth issues.
- PNG has a Comprehensive National Youth Policy. The policy also has wide government support, and is aligned with PNG’s National Government Medium Term Development Strategy 2005-2010. It engages a diverse range of government, NGO and faith based organizations. It is also participatory; treats rural development as a priority; is decentralized to allow all levels of government to implement youth policy; democratic; and voluntary. The policy identifies a wide range of relevant strategic areas including access to relevant education, nurturing sustainable livelihoods for young people to be self reliant, promoting healthier lifestyles, stronger communities and institutions, and building an identity for Melanesian youth.

Non Government Organizations (NGOs) and youth

NGOs and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) play a vital role in PNGs development, providing a host of essential services for young people. It is estimated that FBOs collectively provide half of the health services and co-manage up to 40% of primary and secondary educational facilities (Hauck, Mandie-Filer & Bolger, 2005). Many FBOs also extensively engage youth, forming youth groups and providing vital education, skills training and counseling services. Some of the key NGOs assisting youth include:

- Port Moresby City Mission – The Port Moresby City Mission provides various services to young people, most notably its popular vocational skills training programs which have led to increased employability for participants. The Mission provides vital second chances for school drop outs, with 200-300 youth passing through its programs every year. The Mission has good relationships with many key employers who recognize the training the Mission provides to its participating youth, thus leading to improved job prospects for the participants.
- Save the Children – The Youth Outreach Project (YOP) with Save the Children in PNG works in four locations in the country. With the project based at the Country Office in Goroka, Eastern Highlands province, offices are located in Goroka, Kainantu and Ungaii / Bena districts. Another small office is based in Madang province. The project works with young people aged 18-25 years but also encourages youths up to 30 years who are committed to doing HIV/AIDS education in their communities. YOP targets out-of-school youths with its peer education program which trains youth to be peer educators in their respective communities. Activities range from one-to-one, small group and occasionally general awareness activities, on request from the communities. YOP also distributes Information, communication and educational (IEC) materials and condoms, provides referrals to STI and VCT sites in the two provinces and generally provides management support for youth to do their work effectively.
- PNG Family Health – PNG Family health runs several programs for youth, targeting mostly at risk young people including young women and youth who are HIV positive or have other health problems. It runs awareness programs on health issues in the National Capital District and the Central Province and advocates for increased health education during schooling for youth.

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10 http://www.spc.int/youth/Country_briefs/png.htm

“This National Youth Policy calls for all sectors of the Papua New Guinea community, whether in public or private sector, non government, faith-based organizations, international agencies, families and individuals to work together to assist our young people to achieve their pursued goals and to participate meaningfully in the country’s development.”

PNG National Youth Policy 2006
Background

Young people in PNG want to be employed, start their own families and contribute to their communities. Financial and employment constraints were noted as being the major barriers to them achieving their goals. Focus group participants and questionnaire respondents indicate that it is difficult to discuss concerns with their parents. Community leaders such as chiefs and school principals were perceived to be unapproachable and disinterested about youth issues.

Generally, young people felt unable to turn to leaders, politicians and people in positions of authority to discuss their problems. Some youth expressed a strong feeling that they were treated as a separate part of society and were not welcome to participate in meetings, discussions or other such forums with older generations.

Summary

Key findings of the consultation:

1. The lack of channels for young people to effectively communicate their ideas and concerns with the older generation including parents and community decision makers was seen as the main drivers behind marginalisation and voicelessness. Few respondents believed that communities plan for the needs of their young people effectively, while respondents also commented that many decision makers were not interested in youth issues.

2. Participants want to be involved in the development of programs and policy relating to young people. They prefer direct methods such as focus groups with decision makers, forums to share their ideas and also an ability to participate in existing mechanisms such as community or village meetings.

3. Youth want effective strategies to promote youth participation including developing the ability to empower youth to be involved in their communities through support of youth organizations, youth groups and youth targeted media, along with increased support for drop-in centers and training centers. This needs to be supplemented with investments to educate decision makers on the potential benefits of youth participation, and how to construct programs to allow young people to participate in existing youth focused programs.

Recommendations

Policy development and building institutional capacity to support youth participation

- Increase access and quality of youth media
- Expand support for youth led community projects
- Improve coordination between youth sector organizations
- Establish issue specific youth consultation panels.
Youth participation in education and lifelong learning

- Engage youth in curricula planning
- Increase health education in schools and establish more youth health clinics
- Reduce school fees.

Youth participation in employment and training

- Improved recognition of youth volunteering experiences and alternate training courses by formal sector employers
- Increase vocational training opportunities
- Promote and support agricultural opportunities for youth
- Develop support structures for youth entrepreneurs.

About the sample

In late 2006, 148 young people were surveyed in PNG (see Table 5.2).

Approximately 90 participated in focus group sessions held across three provinces, namely: Eastern Highlands, National Capital District (NCD) and Central Province. It is recognized that PNG is an ethnically diverse country and the survey sample is by no means a representative sample of the country’s ethnic diversity.

Table 5.2: Respondent characteristics by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group*</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Three respondents did not specify their age

“The biggest thing about the big people in the office is that they don’t communicate well with young people.”

School student, Port Moresby

“If the leader, shows that he is concerned to help the youth, the youth will change.”

Youth, Port Moresby
Description of the sample

Of the 148 questionnaire respondents, 54 lived within Port Moresby and 94 were from other areas. Four of the seven focus groups were conducted outside the NCD.

In total, 15 per cent of respondents were currently employed and 17 per cent were currently engaged in volunteering (see Figure 5.2).

Urban areas in all the figures refer to respondents from Port Moresby and rural respondents are those from all other areas outside Port Moresby.

Figure 5.2: Employment and volunteering by urban & rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 19%</td>
<td>Yes 15%</td>
<td>Yes 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 14%</td>
<td>Yes 18%</td>
<td>Yes 28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban: n=54; Rural: n=94

What PNG youth say about their dreams, goals and issues

Young people expressed a variety of future ambitions during focus group sessions, ranging from professional employment to beginning families. Initially, most were shy as they seldom had opportunities to speak about their hopes and dreams. Participants from most of the seven focus group sessions also mentioned a dream of contributing to their communities, as well as helping to improve the conditions for youth. A large number of participants had trouble identifying and expressing their dreams, possibly an indication that such career planning and forward thinking may not have been taught or encouraged.

Despite their ambitions, participants were disheartened by the numerous problems facing them. The main problems raised related to education, including financial limitations for education, insufficient scholarships, and being discouraged from continuing education due to a devoid of employment opportunities. Youth in rural villages were more focused on basic needs such as gaining access to running water, paved roads and electricity.

Interviews with adults in NGOs and government departments also highlighted the issue of boredom where there were concerns that young people were more likely to engage in criminal, violent, and anti-social behaviour if they have nothing to do; incidences in the past indicate that youth’s anti-social behaviour may incite violent responses from police, then further escalating the problems. Boredom compounded with feelings of disempowerment, and lacklustre educational and employment opportunities only exacerbate this already serious issue. This view was confirmed in some of the focus group sessions with young people in Port Moresby.

Who should be told about youth concerns?

When asked who they turn to discuss their hardships, ideas and ambitions, focus groups participants and questionnaire respondents produced similar results, indicating that there was a limited range of people whom young people could turn to.
“I want to get married but life is so tough and HIV is becoming so big in the community. I am so scared who I marry as I am scared of getting the HIV infection.” (Young man – Akameku Village EH)

“Many young people cannot talk to their parents directly about their problems...

…I think they [leaders] don’t understand us because they don’t put themselves down to the level of youths. They think that when they have the position they are above everybody.” (Youth – Port Moresby Suburb)

**Figure 5.3: Who are the best people to inform about youth issues?**

![Bar chart showing preferences for informing about youth issues.](chart.png)

Note: Other includes teachers, non-government organisations, regional bodies, schools and other informal networks. Urban: n=54, Rural: n=89

**Culture of silence**

A culture of silence is prevalent with focus group participants indicating that it is often difficult to discuss any of their concerns with their parents. Community leaders such as chiefs and school principals are often unapproachable and not interested. Figure 5.3 indicates a preference for discussing problems directly with community leaders who may have the necessary authority to take action on suggestions put to them. This was especially true in the rural areas; while both urban and rural respondents indicated preferences for other options such as youth leaders, peer groups, or their schools. Some participants had attended community meetings but had been denied opportunities to speak. As a focus group participant from the Eastern Highlands put it: “We young boys are not supposed to talk.”

Questionnaire respondents and focus group participants generally felt unable to turn to leaders, politicians and people in positions of authority to discuss their problems. Some youth expressed a strong feeling that they were treated as a separate part of society and were thus not welcome to participate in meetings, discussions or other such forums with older generations. Many indicated frustration, apathy, distrust and discontent as a result of not being able to speak to relevant people about their concerns.

Only 30 per cent of urban respondents, and 34 per cent of rural respondents felt that their community & community leaders considered the best interests of youth, while only 54 per cent of urban respondents and 47 per cent of rural respondents felt that these communities and leaders were well informed about youth issues as seen in Figure 5.4.

Being employed led to a greater sense of community and security with young people, making them feel that their issues are better understood by the community as 62 per cent of employed youth believed their community leaders were well informed compared to 47 per cent of unemployed respondents.
Poor communication

The reasons for this poor understanding of youth issues among community leaders was explored in Figure 5.5 where respondents felt the problem could be attributed to a lack of communication channels with youth with a lack of awareness on youth issues ranked second. Both of these answers had higher responses in urban areas while rural respondents also indicated that a lack of interest in youth issues was a big concern.

Almost all participants believed that improving decision maker’s understanding of young people’s issues and connecting them with young people would lead to more effective youth programs being developed and more consideration being given to the concerns of youth.

Figure 5.4: Awareness of youth issues

Community considers the needs of young people and plans to give them the best opportunities

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes 30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes 34%</td>
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Community & community leaders are well informed about the problems & issues faced by young people

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes 54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 47%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban: n=53; Rural: n=87
This view was confirmed by one of the government representatives interviewed, who also suggested there should be programs for decision makers to understand youth problems. An adult interviewed from a NGO highlighted that the inability to express their concerns could lead to depression.

**Figure 5.5: Why respondents feel their communities and leaders are not well informed about youth issues**

Note: Other reasons represented a variety of comments including other priorities for community leaders, lack of young people working together to inform community leaders and that the leaders do not have the resources to consult and understand youth issues. Urban: \(n=23\); Rural: \(n=40\)

Youth engagement is still a very new concept in most areas of PNG and training would be required to teach decision makers about the benefits of youth engagement, how to change their attitudes towards working with youth and show them how to build youth engagement into the decision-making process and the resulting programs. An alternative could include involving such decision makers in existing youth engagement programs such as the PNG Youth Parliament, or the youth radio program ‘Youth Tok’ so that they can monitor the achievements of these programs and thus understand the value of supporting similar strategies.

**How do young people access information and express themselves?**

The proportion of respondents who wanted to inform their community leaders about youth related concerns rose with every five year age group as seen in Figure 5.6. While 64 per cent of respondents had a desire to inform community leaders about youth concerns at some point, only 61 per cent of these respondents (or 39 per cent of total respondents) did something about their concerns.

Forty five percent of these respondents who wanted to inform leaders about problems claimed that they approached leaders about the issue. Nineteen percent approached their parents, while 52 per cent took other actions including speaking to NGOs, sharing their concerns at workshops or other tasks.

Of the 61 per cent of respondents who wanted to express their concerns to decision makers and actually did something about their concerns, 43 per cent did not get the results they wanted.

Of these, 18 per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not know how to communicate their concerns to community leaders whilst 29 per cent of the respondents noted that the low status given to young people was the reason for why the decision makers did not do anything about their issues. In addition, 24 per cent of the respondents identified other reasons such as lack of cooperation and support from other young people, leaders and families, and a general lack of interest within the community.
In terms of preferred methods for voicing their concerns to their community leaders, there was a preference towards direct approaches such as speaking directly or through meetings (65 per cent of respondents) and using the media (55 per cent respondents) as shown in Figure 5.7. These figures support the high proportion of respondents who mentioned they had tried to directly approach a community leader previously about a youth issue.
Conveying their thoughts through community or other meetings was also highly preferred with 14 per cent of respondents selecting that option. This preference towards direct methods of engagement should be taken into account when designing youth participation methods.

When asked about their preferred medium for gaining news and information, radio was the most commonly accessed media. This was mentioned by over 80 per cent of respondents, followed by newspapers, TV and friends, results that were consistent across urban and rural areas. The results are presented in Figure 5.8.

![Figure 5.8: Main sources of information](image)

Note: Urban n=54; Rural n=94

The Youth Tok radio program supported by the World Bank, and run by youth, for youth, provides an excellent platform for youth participation in this medium, with a weekly program allowing young people to speak about their concerns and also to listen and receive advice. However the program is currently not reaching its full capacity; such programs should aim to engage more participation at the grass roots level through involvement with young people at schools, community events, sporting events, and even consider broadcasting live from events and schools. Youth radio has also proved very successful in Tonga (see Case Study 8.1). In effect, young people are able to share their ideas, speak about concerns, learn, and change the culture of silence they are used to, while not breaking with tradition or cultural mores.

**How do young people perceive the role of government, community & family in achieving their goals?**

Despite having a negative attitude towards the effectiveness and trustworthiness of governments, young people in this study recognized that governments along with communities and family play vital roles in helping them to achieve their goals. The suggestions given by youth in the focus groups and from interviews with NGOs and government in this section offer many paths to bridge the divide created by the ‘culture of silence’ and real opportunities for engaging youth with government, community and families to participate in development. The views captured in the focus groups are consistent with those uncovered in the preceding analysis of questionnaires which showed a preference towards direct methods for voicing concerns and engaging with community leaders.

**HIV awareness**

Participants recognized there was a greater need for general HIV awareness and education, but that like many other issues, these were very difficult to discuss openly at home. Participants in some of the focus groups suggested that such awareness could be achieved through inclusion of HIV/AIDS education in school curricula. One of the focus groups also discussed the idea of the need for a drop in centre for young people where issues such as HIV could be discussed and where young people could go when they have questions.
Volunteer work

Focus groups indicated that when young people are fortunate enough to be engaged in activities such as volunteer projects, they also might not be recognized for the work they do by potential employers due to a lack of paid work experience. Young people are sometimes selected to attend various courses run by NGOs and institutions yet their participation in these programs are rarely recognized by employers. Young people develop several skills through volunteering and courses and such participation should be encouraged. Furthermore, these skills are transferable to the workforce and should be recognized by employers. As discussed earlier, employment can greatly influence young people’s participation in society and boost their confidence.

Linking employers with NGOs

An interview with the Port Moresby City Mission showed that an excellent model for overcoming the above problem was to link employers with NGOs, thus building long-term relationships. This allows potential employers to understand the training a typical youth volunteer would undergo with the NGO, and thus recognize any young people who have had volunteer experiences providing an entry point to paid employment.

A national youth parliament

The establishment of a national youth parliament has been heralded as a key measure of youth participation in many nations. PNG held its first National Youth Parliament in March 2007. This new initiative was designed to educate young people on parliamentary procedures and also provide an opportunity for young people to debate and discuss issues of concern. However, their influence beyond general civics education is quite limited, unless youth delegates are trained to effectively engage their local communities in the process of developing suggestions for parliamentary sittings and implementing those parliamentary decisions and recommendations within their communities. Key to this is community support, which is often very difficult for delegates to obtain.

Focus groups, interviews with NGOs and overseas cases believe that youth parliaments represent an excellent opportunity for training young people on key issues which they could take back to communities and educate peers. A model for youth parliaments or conferences which has proved effective overseas involves delegates designing community projects and being supported with resources to implement them in their communities. This has been pioneered by the Oxfam International Youth Parliament which involved delegates from over 60 nations, and has resulted in the involvement of many other young people in the local communities of the delegates along the way.

Youth consultation panels

Another model involves having issue specific youth consultation panels rather than a large-scale parliament. Groups of young people concerned about an issue could be selected to advise an authority on the development of a program to rectify the issue. An example could be a sample of students selected to advise the government on curricula development for future students.

Focus group participants generally believed they should play a greater role in the designing of youth related programs. Interviews with NGOs also highlighted this point, with many saying they already engage youth in designing solutions. However, an interview with the Department of Education revealed that its officials had never asked for young people’s opinions on curriculum development, as they were not aware of the benefits such consultation could provide. The department’s staff then indicated that they were very open to the research team’s suggestion about engaging youth in curriculum design, but had never considered it previously.

Input to school curricula

Government departments, such as the Department of Education have a large influence on the lives of young people and should be encouraged to engage young people in the design of school curricula to ensure needs and concerns are met. Increasing the relevance of the curriculum for young people has been mentioned in the PNG Youth Strategy from as early as 1996, yet the strategy does not specifically mention engaging youth for feedback on curricula.

Developing community projects

Another model for youth engagement within a community involves empowering young people to develop and run community projects. A few participants in the focus groups indicated they had ideas for helping their community and that they wanted to bring a team of young people together and implement a project. Ideas such as these were common from participants who were already part of a youth group.
One of the biggest limitations faced by participants appeared to be a lack of confidence driven by perceptions that they would not receive support from elders. If an adult was available to mentor a youth group within a community, facilitate initial meetings and support the group, many participants believed that such groups could become a sustainable manner for youth engagement. Such groups could simply be a means to organize social or sporting events, or engage in broader community projects, including recycling and small enterprise. Adult involvement can also maintain the respect for culture, since young people will be more likely to respect their elders, while elders will be more likely to recognize and respect the concerns of young people.

“I think the leaders must come to us because if we are trying to go and talk to them, they won’t respect us because they will think that we don’t have experience, and they won’t listen.”

Secondary school student, Kabuifa, EH

An example of this type of approach working in PNG was the ‘Weapons of development for Weapons of Destruction’ project run via the Ministry for Community Development. Through facilitation by adults, street youth with weapons were presented with opportunities to engage in a community project involving starting a duck pond, raising ducks for food and sale. These young people then agreed to formally handover their weapons to police officers while they focused on their new venture, the duck pond. Here the key attribute was the adults changing their approach, and taking the lead in offering young people the opportunity to participate in a new program, and then facilitating their transition from weapon owners to small enterprise owners. The ability of this program to generate income for young people is vital to its impact on their livelihoods, while other skills developed included leadership, teamwork and the ability to run projects.

Overall, the research findings suggest that young people in PNG are an untapped resource. Engaging young people effectively in society could create vast social and economical benefits.
Case Study 5.1: Eastern Highlands Youth Group

In the Akemetu Village, which has no paved road access, limited electricity and limited water, the village youth leader was unhappy with the lack of opportunities for young people to unite, learn about important issues, and develop projects together. After unsuccessfully applying for many grants, he decided that his youth group would raise the 5000 Kina needed to build a meeting place for youth so that vital facts such as HIV education could be taught.

The result is the Jungle Boys Cultural Centre, pictured on the left with the youth group. The group now generates income, renting the centre’s traditional rooms to tourists while also using it as a meeting place for youth education in the village.

“Building this was no easy task. Grants authorities turned down proposals without any explanations, in fact no help was received until after the centre was established.”

“I see this project, this cultural project as one of the community development in this community. With the cultural centre I could bring the youths together, teach them you know things that are good. Establishing the cultural centre would help bring young people together as many of our core community leaders practise corruption and don’t really look at young people.”

(Youth group leader, age 22, kumantours@global.net.pg)

This youth group is an example that young people are capable of making significant changes in their communities, whilst showing the struggles they face. Without the work of this committed young person, his village may not have had a community centre to bring young people together for extra education, or many other income generation opportunities.

Hualo Village, CP - Youth in a focus group with males and females separated. Young people enjoyed the opportunity to have their opinions heard during focus groups. Most said that it was the first opportunity they had been given to speak about their problems and ideas for solutions.
“There is donor funding that comes from all around the world from places like Japan, AusAID, and New Zealand. It comes to our government offices and we the people in rural areas don’t have a clue of where the money goes. They always tell us to form small groups and associations, and they always tell us to write proposals. We do proposals and take them to the office but we don’t get any feedback.”

“We have been trying all our best to get the leaders attention and support but it is just really hard so all our effort has been wasted and we have just given up completely, life has become so hard.”

(Village youth leader – East Highlands Province)

Case Study 5.2: Port Moresby City Mission

The Port Moresby City Mission has been helping Port Moresby’s street youth for 13 years. The mission provides vocational training programs through a screen printing shop ‘Malolo’, a farm where agricultural skills are taught to over 100 youth ‘The New Life Farm’, and several other classes on topics like literacy, grievance procedures, hygiene, respect for authority, life skills and HIV/Aids. They have recently expanded by opening a branch with similar services in Lae.

200-300 young people pass through the Mission’s programs in Port Moresby every year and many of these participants in the vocational courses are able to obtain paid employment with their new skills. The Mission attributes its success in having many participants find jobs to its established long-term relationships with employers who recognize the training provided by the Mission. This is a very unique structure where employers work collaboratively and recognize the skills learnt by participants at the Mission.

In other organisations where young people develop skills from volunteering, they find it difficult to have those skills recognized by employers. The Mission’s collaborative relationships with the employers however overcome this problem and it is a great model for consideration. Without the work of the mission, hundreds of youth on Port Moresby’s streets would not have had opportunities to acquire the skills they learnt at the mission, and many probably would not have been able to find decent employment and begin building a future.

Case Study 5.3: World Bank Open Space discussions

The Open Space concept is designed to put the agenda and the discussion in the hands of a meeting’s participants. Under the guidance of facilitator Fr Brian Bainbridge, the group of Port Moresby young people set their own agenda for the two-day event under the guiding theme: ‘Needs for our future that concerns us – the issues and opportunities.’

A large problem facing youth development today is the great chasm that exists between top-down policy formation and the actual reality of the youth situation as faced in the World Development Report (WDR) 2007 consultations. What this process lacks is a meaningful platform for youth to discover and discuss issues relevant to them, so as to better engage in meaningful dialogue with policy makers and contribute to the WDR reports.

The Youth Open Space concept was born out of the growing recognition amongst international organizations such as the World Bank that there was a need to listen to the needs and concerns of this section of society which has little voice and even less access to representation, and so incorporate the voices of youth into their policies and operations. The key in this form of dialogue is that there is no pre-determined agenda, but only a general theme. The participants themselves are the ones who set their own agenda.

Lesley Labo a participant of the Open Space session expressed this gratitude of setting his own agenda. “My issue is: lack of job employment opportunities created by the government.” He saw the concept of Open Space as an innovative model for consultations with young people all over the country.
6. Samoa

Country summary

The Polynesian nation of Samoa is situated on the eastern side of the Pacific to the east of the international date line. In 2004 Samoa had an estimated population of 44,000 young people aged 15 and 29 years. This accounts for almost a quarter of the country’s population (estimated at 183,000 persons in 2004).

![Figure 6.1: Population aged 15 – 29](image)

Source: Adapted from USP (2006)

“The Samoa National Youth Policy is like a tree which nurtures the spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, social and economic development of tomorrow’s youth.”

**Samoa National Youth Policy 2001-2010**

Estimated youth population at a glance

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 6.1: Key youth statistics</th>
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<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29 as % of total:</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29 as % of total:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Source:</strong> USP 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed youth aged 15-24:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net primary school enrolment:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross secondary school enrolment:</td>
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<td><strong>Source:</strong> World Bank 2006c</td>
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</table>

The population projections for Samoa indicate that the youth population will slowly increase over the next twenty years to an estimated 51,000 youths in 2029. As much of the employment, business and government infrastructure is concentrated in Apia, population growth could fuel urbanization.

**Main youth issues**

The priority issues identified in the Samoa National Youth Policy 2001-2010 are youth unemployment, lack of alternative educational pathways for school drop outs, youth suicide, limited access to health services and information, lack of data and research on youth, social isolation of disadvantaged young people, high rates of criminal activity amongst youth and limited involvement of youth in environmental conservation programs.

**Government and youth policy**

- The Division for Youth (DFY) of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development is the government office responsible for youth issues in Samoa. The Youth Division employs project and policy officers who work closely with the United Nations agencies in implementing the strategies identified in the National Youth Policy (NYP). The Youth Division has outlined six key objectives as benchmarks indicating progress over the policy period:
  1. To improve the self-worth of Samoan youth through education and building the long term physical and psychological capacity of youth (aged 12 to 29 years).
  2. To foster flexible and inclusive learning environments conducive to school retention, skills formation and career choice for youth in formal and informal education by 2008.
  3. To increase employment and income generation opportunities for urban and rural youth in formal and informal sectors by 2008.
  4. To strengthen the capacity of DFY in managing the implementation of the Samoa National Youth Policy through the T.A.L.A.V.O.U. Program.
  5. To strengthen partnerships and promote greater collaboration between the DFY, Government Ministries, young people, stakeholders, and development agencies in implementing innovative youth initiatives.
  6. To promote active participation of young people in local, national, regional and international decision-making processes on youth issues.

- The NYP of Samoa has been a key factor in the planning of Program II: Challenge Pacifica, Pacific Youth Strategy 2005. This program has brought together various organization around Samoa, including Department of Education (DOE), Ministry of Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs (MYSCA), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Justice (DOJ), Samoa United Nations Association (SUNA), to address youth issues including:
  1. Education
  2. Employment
  3. Youth Health
  4. Environment
  5. Juvenile Delinquency
  6. Promotion of Peace

The Samoa National Youth Policy is a comprehensive document that details priorities to support the large youth population of Samoa. The key stakeholders of the policy include development and donor agencies, government ministries, educational institutions, religious organizations and NGOs. In 2004, the Government of Samoa in collaboration with the Samoa Umbrella for NGOs (SUNGO) and the United Nations signed an agreement to deliver a joint national program that responds to the National Youth Policy. The TALAVOU program provides a framework for the joint delivery of projects and initiatives that directly addresses the priority issues identified in the NYP. The program is currently being implemented with demonstration projects being trialed across the country.

The National Youth Policy has developed a specific policy response to youth participation to “promote equitable access and meaningful participation of youth in all areas that affect their lives”. The key policy outcome is to achieve full and active participation of youth with specific objectives being:

- To promote the use of recognized channels for youth participation in decision making.
- To establish an annual National Youth Forum to facilitate open communication and sharing of information amongst youth.
- To encourage an understanding of the interconnectedness of local and global concerns.
- To propose youth representation in forums where youth concerns are discussed.

Non Government Organizations (NGOs) and youth

SUNGO is the peak representative body for NGOs in Samoa and has a good working relationship with UN agencies. Although SUNGO does not have a youth-specific sub-group, the majority of SUNGO members’ services and programs are accessed by young people. Examples of NGOs working with young people include:

- Samoa Boy’s Brigade
- Samoa Girl’s Brigade
- Apia Rotaract
- Damao Red Cross Society
- Sautiamai
- Women in Business
- YMCA/YWCA
- Youth for Christ
- Faataua le Ola (Lifeline)

Samoa national study

Background

Young people between the ages of 10 and 29 make up approximately 39 per cent of the population of Samoa. Investing in the nation’s large youth population is vital for the social and economic development of this Polynesian country of just over 185,000 people.

This study found that many Samoan youth believe they are not recognized for the contribution they make within the family, the village or the church. Only adults participate in decision-making processes (usually those with matai - chief - status) while young people must carry out the decisions. Since questioning the decisions made by people in authority is culturally forbidden, Samoan youth have no choice but to do as they are told. *Faa Samoa* – the Samoan way of life – has an enormous influence in defining roles, responsibilities and relationships within the family and the village. As some respondents pointed out, *faa Samoa* can reinforce the culture and identity of Samoans; yet it can also be a barrier to participation in decision making.

Becoming a pastor, getting married and starting a family, securing formal employment and running a business were common aspirations. In terms of employment, many felt that job opportunities were limited with young people were unable to find employment that matched their career ambitions and skills. Authoritarian forms of parenting were identified, as well as cultural protocols and beliefs about young people, and limited services and avenues available for young people to talk about their issues as the reasons for youth marginalisation and voicelessness in Samoa. While some expressed frustrations because their parents and church leaders fail to understand or acknowledge the issues faced by youth, others seemed to accept (or identify) people in authority as people they would turn to if they had problems.

Generally, young people believed their community and its leaders considered youth needs and were well informed about youth problems and issues. Female respondents were more likely than the male respondents to think their community leaders were well informed about youth issues. However, in most cases, very little action is undertaken by the community leaders to address concerns.

Summary

Key findings of the consultations:

1. Young people identified authoritarian forms of parenting, cultural protocols and beliefs about young people, and limited services and avenues available for young people to talk about their issues as being the reasons for youth marginalization and voicelessness in Samoa.

2. Young people in Samoa prefer to have their voices heard through formal and informal mechanisms such as meetings, workshops and youth groups. They recognized village meetings as a culturally appropriate means of voicing their concerns to community leaders but knew that these meetings were not always comfortable or suitable for young people. They are interested in participating in government consultations but they want to be given feedback and post-consultation follow up so that they know exactly how they have contributed.

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3. Practical ways of promoting youth participation in Samoa include providing opportunities for young people to set up and manage their own projects with assistance from the government, NGOs and community. Encouraging young people to take up management and leadership positions within schools, churches and workplace has been suggested by the young people as a starting point for promoting youth participation.

4. This research has found that Samoa has some very forward-looking youth initiatives, which while they may require further refinement and improvements (including in the area of youth participation and outreach) set an example for other countries in the Pacific.

Recommendations

Policy development and building institutional capacity to support youth participation
- Promote collaboration between all stakeholders
- Develop a youth consultation policy
- Recognize the role of NGOs
- Establish a Samoa National Youth Advisory Board.

Youth participation in education and lifelong learning
- Encourage the development of community education and training institutions
- Allocate and fund a youth television program.

Youth participation in employment and training
- Establish a nationally recognized volunteer program
- Establish a nation-wide microfinance scheme for young entrepreneurs.

About the sample

A total of 107 young people took part in the questionnaire with 110 participating in focus group sessions conducted in Apia and Maninioa (Upolu island) and Samaleulu, Fusi and Lalomalava (Savaii island). Of the 107 respondents, 95 were from villages outside of Apia (including rural villages within and outside of Upolu) whilst the remaining 12 were from Apia. Upolu is characterized by pockets of urban villages, some centred around tourism and surfing (Maninioa). On the other hand, Savaii is considered to be rural with pockets of tourist accommodation covering the coastline of Savaii.
Face to face interviews were carried out with representatives from civil society organizations as well as with the Youth Division of Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. The age and gender composition of the respondents who completed the questionnaire is presented in Table 6.2. Throughout this chapter, references are made to urban and rural respondents. Urban respondents are those who live in Apia whilst rural includes all other areas outside of Apia.

**Table 6.2 Respondent characteristics by age and gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| * Four respondents did not specify their age

**Figure 6.2: Employment and volunteering by rural & urban locality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 33%</td>
<td>Yes 45%</td>
<td>Yes 75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 30%</td>
<td>Yes 37%</td>
<td>Yes 38%</td>
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Note: Urban n=12; Rural n=95
Most respondents felt that job opportunities in Samoa were limited with young people being unable to find jobs that matched their career ambitions and skills. As illustrated in Figure 6.2, respondents in Apia were more likely to have had a paid job compared to those outside of Apia.

Focus groups commented that even when young people were able to find a job, the low salaries were inadequate to support their families. Most young people were volunteering in church-related activities as part of their obligation and commitment to their church. Some students from the National University of Samoa believed that Samoan youth would need to go overseas to find work.

**What youth say about their dreams, goals and issues**

It is not surprising that most young men indicated their dream of becoming a pastor since the Samoan society prescribes a high social status to pastors who are likely to be wealthy. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many Samoan parents wish their daughters to marry church pastors for these reasons.

The focus group sessions conducted in rural villages revealed that young men commonly aspire to establish their own businesses in agriculture, fisheries or tourism. However, as most Samoans practice subsistence farming, young people want greater support from the government to provide the basic infrastructure required to establish commercially driven farming ventures. Support such as delivering training programs and subsidizing the costs of equipment and machinery was seen as the type of assistance that the government could provide to increase opportunities for young farmers.

**Who should be told about youth concerns?**

Authoritarian forms of parenting and decision-making are two of the main factors contributing to a feeling of youth voicelessness in Samoa. Some expressed frustrations because their parents and church leaders failed to understand issues faced by the young people. Most respondents felt that parents and pastors were people they would likely turn to, but not all were confident about approaching them because of the fear of being punished or the possibility of not being able to maintain their anonymity.

“*The church pastor is not very supportive. Youths do not trust him as a counselor to their problems and privacy because usually the whole congregation and village will know the next day if you share a private issue with the pastor!*”

(A young person, Maninoa)
As can be seen in Figure 6.3, respondents living outside of Apia were more likely than those living in Apia to think that their community and community leaders considered youth needs and were well informed about youth issues.

Out of a total number of respondents, 75 per cent living outside of Apia thought their community and community leaders were well informed about youth issues compared to 18 per cent for their counterparts in Apia. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that villages in Apia are more urbanized and are exposed to modern influences than those outside of Apia.

**Figure 6.3: Awareness of youth issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community considers the needs of young people and plans to give them the best opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community &amp; community leaders are well informed about the problems &amp; issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: First set of figures - Urban n = 85; Rural = 22. Second set of figures – Urban n=72; Rural n=32

Although community leaders may be aware of the issues, very little action is taken to solve issues. Quite often the community leaders were likely to dismiss or shame those who spoke out about their needs. Youth for Christ’s Friday Night Youth Rally is an example of how young people have created an avenue for young people to discuss problems without the fear of being shamed in front of community leaders (see Case Study below). Other than offering alternative activities to clubbing, the Youth Rally enables young people to talk about issues with their peers in a safe environment. Through this process, the young people build confidence and skills in developing solutions to their own problems.
How do young people access information and how do they express themselves?

There were evident differences in the main sources of information used by young people in urban and rural areas (see Figure 6.4). Internet was the most common source of information for respondents in Apia (83 per cent), followed by radio (50 per cent), newspaper (50 per cent) and television (50 per cent). In contrast, the common responses among young people in rural areas were television (71 per cent), friends (65 per cent), radio (64 per cent) and newspaper (57 per cent). Although it is not surprising to find that young people in Apia were more likely to indicate Internet as a source of information than young people in rural areas, what was astonishing was the fact that young people in Apia rated friends as the least likely source for accessing information.

Figure 6.4: Main sources of information

An example of an effective television show that had a large audience of young people across the country is the ‘Battle of the Minds’ quiz competition organized by young members of the Rotaract Club of Apia. Sponsored by Telecom Samoa and aired on SBC TV One, the quiz competition was aimed at making preparation for secondary certificate exams fun and enjoyable. The program was well received by high school students all over Samoa and even students in rural areas were able to learn from watching the quiz show, an opportunity that they would not otherwise have. Another initiative that invests in youth media is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) youth media training workshops in film production, video making and journalism. The workshops have been conducted in several other Polynesian and Melanesian countries.

Pursuing a career in the creative professions

Just like many other teenagers around the world, Samoan youth like to dress in the latest fashion or in traditional attire such as a puletasi or a lavalava.

Some of the male respondents who participated in the focus group discussion in Apia were very keen to pursue a career in fashion design. However they mentioned that their parents frowned upon the idea of them becoming fashion designers. “My family isn’t very supportive but it just proves another point,” one respondent noted with a heavy sigh. “They see that kind of stuff as not worth pursuing because it’s not a proper job.” They mentioned that their parents were pushing them to study law or medicine.

Samoan fashion designers such as Lindah Lepou were an inspiration to some of the focus group participants who wanted to go and study fashion design. Lindah Lepou is a fashion designer who was named the winner of the Style Pasifika Fashion Awards in 2006 for her unique garment made out of carved coconut-shell rings. As Pacific arts and fashion gradually become known around the world, creative professions may be recognized as another career pathway for young people in Samoa.
Both the questionnaires and focus groups indicated that most young people believed that community leaders, chiefs, parents and church leaders would be in the best position to inform community leaders on youth issues. As can be seen in the figure below, 43 per cent of respondents from rural areas identified community leaders as the best people to inform about youth issues whilst 55 per cent of urban respondents mentioned other people such as teachers, friends, NGOs and church youth groups.

Figure 6.5: Who are the best people to inform community leaders about youth issues?

Using the media and talking directly with community leaders were seen as the best ways for informing community leaders about youth issues. The focus group discussions found that village meetings were recognized as a culturally appropriate mechanism for young people to channel their concerns to people in authority. Many young people respected the purpose of the village meetings and why it was important for young people to listen to people in authority. Whether or not the village meetings resulted in any positive outcomes, they were always questioned by participants of focus groups. In short, the findings from the youth consultations support the 'culture of silence' mentioned in the literature review, whereby young people's views are ignored or oppressed simply because they are required to obey people in authority.

A number of participants from the focus group sessions noted that young people were embarrassed or scared of being scolded by parents and elders if they spoke out. Despite having such feelings, the participants recognized the importance of respecting their elders, as they too had to abide by the rules and customs to earn their status within the community.

“When faced by problems, feelings of shame usually hold back emotions and make it hard for youth to share their problems… [when seeing the elders] it’s usually a tongue lashing which tends to intensify the problem and may lead to feelings of hopelessness.”

(A young person, Lalomalava)
How do young people perceive the role of government, community and family in achieving their goals?

Generally, young people saw the role of government, community and family as being important in assisting them to achieve their life goals.

It was evident from the focus group discussions that the respondents from rural and urban areas had a negative view of the government and they said corruption, nepotism and mismanagement were contributing factors to youth issues in Samoa. For example, unemployment in rural areas was seen to be a direct result of government lack of investment in youth business and employment initiatives. Some young people stated that it was only government employees who were able to attend conferences and seminars overseas and very rarely were ordinary young people given access to such opportunities.

Generally, many young people wanted to work together with the government on issues affecting young people in their communities. However, some of the young people in Savaii felt that they had been over consulted by the government and they were frustrated because there was no follow up after the consultations. They were disappointed that the funding promises made to them by the government at the consultations were never kept. It is worthwhile noting that whilst some young people may experience consultation fatigue, others are unaware or have limited opportunity to participate in government consultation sessions.

Despite the respondents’ frustration with government and political processes, they were very supportive of the concept of having younger politicians represented in parliament. This was seen as a positive step forward for encouraging young people to take up leadership positions and to ensure that youth needs were adequately represented in the government’s decision-making processes. Having a greater representation of young people in parliament would be beneficial in supporting the next generation of leaders.

Finally, families were thought to be the main providers of care and financial support to help young people achieve their life goals. The Samoan young people in this study showed great respect for their parents even though they did not always approve of their career choices. In many cases, the young people wanted to go to university or gain secure employment to support their siblings and family members. Thus, involving young people in family as well as in village affairs will be beneficial in developing essential life skills that would prepare them for supporting and establishing their own families.

Case Study 6.1: Youth for Christ’s Friday night youth rally

Youth for Christ (YFC) is a non-government youth organization that provides support to young people in enhancing their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Drawing on a membership of young people across different villages and denominations, YFC organizes social and recreational activities as an outlet for young people who are experiencing hardship or difficulties at home. The Friday Night Youth Rally is an event that encourages young people to have a fun night out without having to go to a nightclub.

Young people take part in planning, organising and running the Friday Night Rally. They make their own choices about what games will be played, what bible readings will be read and what activities will take place. It also provides an opportunity for young people to sit around in a circle (as done by the village chiefs when they discuss important issues) and share their problems with others. More experienced youth become mentors for the younger ones, giving them spiritual guidance to help them overcome their problems.

A couple of members from YFC explained:

“Churches have different expectation of youth but at Youth for Christ, it’s all about young people. In church, the young people have to obey the pastors and their decisions. At Youth for Christ, it’s all about bringing the young people together to create solutions and make decisions.”

“Pastors may not understand. Young people can’t talk directly to pastors. At church there are boundaries but at Youth for Christ students feel open to share their own personal problems.”

Providing the opportunity for young people to take control of their own decisions about how to go about solving their issues has made the Friday Night Youth Rally a popular alternative to clubbing. This successful model could be applied to other Pacific Island Countries.
7. Solomon Islands

Country summary

The Melanesian country of Solomon Islands is east of Papua New Guinea and consists of nearly one thousand islands. It has been inhabited by Melanesian people for at least the last 30,000 years. In 2006, the population was estimated at 534,00015.

![Figure 7.1: Population aged 15 – 29](source)

Source: Adapted from USP (2006)

**Estimated youth population at a glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.1: Key youth statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004 Population aged 15-29: 132,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Population aged 0-29: 319,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Population 15-29 as % of total: 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Population 0-29 as % of total: 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: USP 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed youth aged 15-24: 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net primary school enrolment: 56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross secondary school enrolment: 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: World Bank 2006c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 90% of the people from the Solomon Islands are Melanesians where 4% are Polynesians. Micronesians, Chinese, Europeans and other Pacific Islanders account for the remainder16. The proportion of young people aged 15-29 years is expected to double from the 2004 figure of 132,176 to 227,134 in 2029.17

15 Solomon Islands Statistics Office, 2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2005/6, Honiara
16 Solomon Islands National Youth Policy 2006
17 Adapted from the University of the South Pacific. ‘Working Paper of the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance’ Suva, Fiji, 2006
Main youth issues
Recent studies have identified the following main youth issues in Solomon Islands:\(^{18}\):

- Poor reproductive health
- Prostitution
- Limited access to education
- Domestic violence
- Teenage pregnancy
- Suicide
- Unemployment
- Lack of counselling services for young people and boredom
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)/HIV/AIDS
- Crime and juvenile delinquency
- Drug and substance abuse
- Conflict within society
- Rural to urban migration resulting in household overcrowding and homelessness

Government and youth policy
- The Solomon Islands National Youth Policy expresses the Solomon Islands Government Policy Statement and Development Strategy on Youth. It provides a platform for action, including giving young people a voice, and recommending that Government and society empower young people, regardless of race, religion, gender and disabilities. The Youth policy targets several key strategy areas including culture, educational and vocational skills training, employment, religious/spiritual/moral activities, health development, sports and recreation, youth entrepreneurship, law and order, family issues and the environment.
- The Solomon Islands National Youth Congress (NYC) was set up to bring issues concerning young men and women to the political fore-front. It resulted in the establishment of the Ministry of Youth, Women, Sports and Recreation in 1980. The skills development training programme conducted by the NYC successfully produced 760 graduates between 1994-1996 and, since 1994, 90% of the total graduates each year took up employment in either the formal/informal employment sector.\(^{19}\)
- The present Government has instigated initiatives such as Affiliation and Membership Programmes, National Youth Volunteer Service Schemes, National Youth Entrepreneur Schemes and National Skills Development Training, in order to strengthen the National Youth Council (set up in 1975). Provincial governments and churches established their own Youth Offices staffed by Youth Directors/Coordinators to administer manage and coordinate youth programmes. In March 2007 the Solomon Islands Government established a new ministry to address gender, youth and children’s issues: the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children.

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and youth
The Sustainable Livelihoods for Rural Youth Project (SLRYP) is a two-year project funded by AusAID and implemented by the Kastom Gaden Association (KGA - a non-government organization registered as a charitable trust in Solomon Islands). The aim of this project is to create livelihoods and opportunities based on sustainable agriculture for rural youth.\(^{20}\)

There are numerous NGOs working with and for young people in Solomon Islands. These organisations receive most of their funding from donor agencies such as AusAID and are based in Honiara. They include:

- Winds of Change
- Voice Blong Mere
- Save the Children
- Development Service Exchange
- Commonwealth Youth Programme
- Solomon Islands Christian Association
- Youth Alliance Melanesia

\(^{18}\) Source: http://www.spc.int/youth/Country_briefs/png.htm
\(^{19}\) Solomon Islands: National Youth Policy, April 2000
Solomon Islands national study

**Background**

Young people in Solomon Islands are keen to make a difference to their communities and contribute to the social and economic development of their country. For the most part, they are highly visible, especially in the capital, Honiara, where they congregate in large numbers. Often, these young people have nowhere to go and no gainful employment. The sense of crisis is heightened by urban drift with young people from the outer islands who are sent by their family to the capital in search of a better life and employment.

Meeting basic needs whilst trying to survive in a turbulent political landscape is an ongoing challenge facing young people in Solomon Islands. Since 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has made efforts to restore law and order to the population of more than 530,00021.

Respondents from outside Honiara were more likely than their Honiara counterparts to think that their community was considerate of, and informed about, youth issues. Respondents from outside Honiara were more likely than those in the capital to believe that their community considered youth needs and provided young people with the best opportunities. Similarly, the latter group was less likely than their counterparts in areas outside of Honiara to believe that community leaders were well informed about issues faced by youth.

**Summary**

Key findings of the consultation:

1. Young people believe that lack of educational and employment opportunities (leading to lack of confidence and abilities to study and work), poor governance, lack of government commitment to policy implementation and cultural perceptions about young people are the main reasons for why young people in Solomon Islands may feel marginalized and voiceless.

2. Young people in Solomon Islands would like to be engaged in decision-making and national development by being able to find out what activities and projects they can get involved in, and how they can take part in these. They also want feedback when they participate in government consultations.

3. Generally, respondents believed that the government, community and family all have a role to play in addressing youth issues and supporting the development of young people. They would like their basic needs such as access to education, health care and housing to be addressed so that they can make a meaningful contribution to society.

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Recommendations

**Policy development and building institutional capacity to support youth participation**
- Develop initiatives for supporting young women’s participation
- Strengthen collaborative partnerships
- Recognize the role of NGOs in youth development
- Review the role of the National Youth Congress.

**Youth participation in education and lifelong learning**
- Establish Community Education and Training Institutions.

**Youth participation in employment and training**
- Establish a one stop shop for youth employment and training programs
- Develop vocational training programs and internships.

“I want to be able to enjoy life without people laughing at me. That’s the dream for me.”

(A young person – Honiara)

About the sample

A total of 117 young people completed the questionnaire as described in Table 7.2, whilst 52 young people were involved in the focus group discussions held in Honiara and Gizo in November 2006. Honiara has an urban population of 50,000 people whilst Gizo (located in the Western Province) has a population of just over 6,000. Infrastructure provision in areas outside the capital is severely limited. Television coverage is only within Honiara and the outer islands are only covered by one or two radio stations. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with representatives from civil society organizations as well as with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Throughout this chapter, references are made to urban and rural respondents. Urban respondents are those who live in Honiara whilst rural includes all other areas outside of Honiara. There was almost an even number of respondents from Honiara and outside of Honiara (57 and 59 respondents respectively. There was one respondent who did not specify their location).
Table 7.2: Respondent characteristics by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One respondent did not specify their age

There were noticeable differences between respondents living in and outside of Honiara as regards being currently employed, volunteering or ever employed. Only 30 per cent of respondents were currently enrolled in education, Figure 7.2 shows that 41 per cent from the Honiara group indicated that they were currently employed, compared to only 17 per cent of those who lived outside. When asked whether they ever had a job, 65 per cent of respondents from Honiara said yes compared to only 43 per cent for those who live outside of the capital. The sample was not representative, notwithstanding this finding reflects employment patterns observed in the 1999 Census and the 2005/6 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. It suggests there is a pressing need to promote youth employment opportunities in rural areas.

**Figure 7.2: Employment and volunteer status of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 41%</td>
<td>Yes 48%</td>
<td>Yes 65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes 17%</td>
<td>Yes 44%</td>
<td>Yes 43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban n=59; Rural n=58

“Educational opportunities here don’t cater for the new skills that the labor market seeks. Hence there is a significant mismatch between what young people learn and what the labor market is seeking.”

(Representative from Development Services Exchange – Honiara)

“You are teaching all of these students and sometimes you wonder if they are going to get jobs when they graduate.”

(Principal from King George VI National Secondary School – Honiara)
Despite the difference in the percentages of respondents in Honiara and outside Honiara who were currently employed or ever had a job, almost equal percentages of respondents were involved in some form of unpaid work. Forty-seven per cent of respondents from Honiara and 44 per cent outside of Honiara indicated that they were currently volunteering. The focus group discussion held with the youth members of a NGO called Winds of Change revealed that valuable skills could be obtained through volunteering. Skills such as report writing, public speaking and conducting interviews were acquired through volunteering, and these skills are transferable to other jobs. Moreover, the high percentages of respondents involved in volunteer work indicate the willingness of young people to participate in meaningful community activity. Since there has been no research into the number of volunteers who actually progress to formal employment, it is difficult to establish whether volunteering activities do lead to some form of paid work.

What youth say about their dreams, goals and issues
Completing schooling and obtaining employment were the two most common goals mentioned by focus group participants in Honiara and Gizo. All agreed that completing secondary and tertiary education was important for their future, although lack of financial support prevented them from pursuing their studies. Those who were enrolled in tertiary or technical courses were worried that they may not be able to successfully graduate due to the financial burden placed on their families.

The majority of male participants in the focus group sessions held in Gizo indicated that they would like to become a church leader and to continue to serve their respective ministries. As the church provides most of the village-based youth activities, the participants from Gizo were heavily involved in church youth groups. The participants in the focus group aspired to follow the footsteps of church leaders because of the important role and status they have within the village, and also because it would give them an opportunity to contribute to their communities.

Only one participant, a male from a semi-urban settlement in Honiara, wanted to establish his own business. His dream was to run a tourism venture in his village. His parents disapproved and directed him to study medicine instead. Similarly, others in the same focus group discussion noted that their future is often decided by the parents, which seldom matches the participants’ own career goals.

Who should be told about youth concerns?
Respondents outside Honiara were more likely than their Honiara counterparts to think that their community was considerate of and informed about youth issues. Figure 7.3 shows that 72 per cent of respondents in rural areas outside Honiara believed that their community considered youth needs and provided young people with the best opportunities. This proportion was nine percent less for those who live in Honiara (63 per cent). In addition when the respondents were asked if they thought their community and community leaders were well informed about the youth issues, 62 per cent from outside Honiara said yes as opposed to 46 per cent for those who live in Honiara.
Focus group sessions held in Gizo, the capital of the Western Province, indicated that young people outside the capital were actively involved in church and village activities and therefore they seemed to be in more regular contact with church and village leaders than the respondents in Honiara.

The reasons why some of the respondents did not think that their community considered youth needs and gave youth the best opportunities include:

“Maybe because they [community leaders] don’t have any education so they don’t know the needs and plans of youths.”

(A young person, Gizo)

“Because of lack of awareness as to what the potential of youth is – it’s the ignorance of the leaders.”

(A young person, Honiara)

“Because of the titles they have as leaders so we have to follow their ideas. There is also a lack of communication between leaders and youths in the community.”

(A young person, Honiara).

Throughout the interviews with various NGOs, it was evident that young women in Solomon Islands had fewer opportunities to voice their concerns in both the public and private domains. Gender inequality at home and in the workplace was seen as contributing to the marginalization of women, particularly young women. There were concerns over sexual violence, and it was said that because young women are unable to speak out they often turned to drugs and alcohol as an act of despair. Several NGO staff members said that the NGO sector in Solomon Islands was too focused on raising awareness of issues such as violence against women and HIV/AIDS, but not enough on-the-ground action was being undertaken to change people’s actual behavior and attitudes.
“There is a stereotype that when young girls speak out, people say ‘she’s just a girl’. They think of girls as not belonging to the tribe because girls marry off and go to their husband’s tribe. So some people say women are the ‘devils from the other tribe’. From an early age, this stereotype is instilled.”

(A NGO staff member)

The unequal treatment of young women can potentially lead to lack of confidence and inability to speak out about problems. This is supported by Figure 7.4 which shows the type of action undertaken by the respondents to inform their community leaders about the issues that were affecting young people in their community. The first three categories indicate passive forms of taking action, in which the respondents approached other young people and youth leaders, community leaders or parents. Direct action indicates that the respondent went ahead and sought solutions to problems. Figure 7.4 shows that female respondents were more likely than male respondents to engage in passive forms of action rather than taking direct action. Half of the female respondents who took no action said that it was because they lacked confidence and self-esteem.

**Figure 7.4**: What the young people did to inform leaders and anyone else in a position of responsibility about problems that were affecting young people in their community

Note: Male n=32, Female n=13
How do young people access information and how do they express themselves?

Radio was the most common source of information mentioned, followed by friends and newspaper. Ninety seven percent of respondents from Honiara indicated radio as their primary source and 98 per cent of respondents outside Honiara. Given that the television coverage is only within Honiara, it is not surprising that 61 per cent of respondents from Honiara but only 33 per cent of respondents outside of Honiara indicated that they rely on television for information. Respondents living both in and outside of Honiara rated friends as their second most common source of information (90 per cent). Moreover, 86 per cent of respondents in Honiara and 78 per cent of respondents outside Honiara said they read the newspaper to obtain information.

![Figure 7.5: Sources of information](image)

Note: Urban n=59; Rural n=58

Just as the respondents outside Honiara were more likely to rely on verbal sources of information (i.e. radio and friends as indicated in Figure 7.5), they were also a little more likely than their urban counterparts to talk to individuals (85 per cent) or hold meetings and group discussions (40 per cent) if they wanted to inform their community leaders about youth issues (see Figure 7.6). Seventy nine percent of respondents in Honiara stated that they would speak to individuals and 30 per cent stated that they would discuss youth issues through meetings and group discussions. Additionally, the respondents from Honiara stated that they would use other methods like informing NGOs presumably because there is better representation of such organizations in Honiara. As a participant from a focus group discussion held in Honiara commented:

"I need to concentrate on Honiara district and getting together with all the leaders here. I think there should be citizens’ associations that connect young people to society, community and the government. It should be in the constitution for such associations to exist."
How do young people perceive the role of government, community and family in achieving their goals?

All of the participants in the focus group sessions believed that government, community and family have a role to play in supporting young people in the achievement of their dreams and life goals. There was a clear distinction in regards to the role these institutions should play. The government was seen as being responsible for providing educational and employment opportunities such as offering scholarships and delivering youth programs to young people in Solomon Islands. The participants believed that the community’s role was to cultivate a safe, understanding and healthy environment for young people to develop. The family was seen as a provider of food, care and financial assistance. This three-tiered model of support for young people was clearly summarized by a young man in a focus group session held in Honiara:

“If I am part of a good family, then I am part of a good community. If there is a good community, this will filter into good government.”

In regards to youth participation in policy making, some of the participants in the Gizo focus group session were disappointed about not receiving any feedback from the government about their involvement in the consultation for the National Youth Policy:

“The Government has come here to Gizo to do a consultation but nothing has happened and no feedback has been given.”

A young person, Gizo
When the Ministry of Home Affairs took part in the interview, they indicated their plans to review the National Youth Policy (NYP) and involve young people and NGOs in all provinces in the review process. They had recognized that reaching out to the outer provinces was challenging, particularly as the Ministry has had very little contact with civil society organizations active in rural areas. As a representative from the Youth Division of the Ministry commented:

“The youth sector doesn’t always talk to the Ministry. Perhaps the sector mistrusts the government’s financial management.”

The National Youth Policy of the Solomon Islands sets out a clear role for the Youth Division, the National Youth Congress and NGOs to work together to address youth issues. However in reality, there is limited communication and coordination between these stakeholders. The National Youth Congress, which has been delegated the task of implementing the decisions of the Youth Division, has been generally inactive with only one person running the Congress for over 20 years. The recent recruitment of young people as youth officers within the Youth Division is expected to expand the operations of the Youth Division to the outer islands and strengthen ties with civil society organizations to coordinate youth activities around the country. This change of structure is a positive step forward for promoting the activities of the Youth Division to communities outside of Honiara. Moreover, employing young people within the Division allows for the youth officers to better engage with other young people in the community and obtain a more accurate and open feedback into their policy development activities.

Case Study 7.1: Building leadership through the radio - Voice Blong Mere

Voice Blong Mere (Women’s Voice) is a non-profit media organisation working towards providing a strong voice for the women of the Solomon Islands. Its mission is to advance the status of Solomon Island women by linking them through radio and sharing information.

The Voice Blong Mere media office is based in the China Town District of Honiara and has a dedicated staff of workers and volunteers working around the clock to broadcast the voice of women. Over the years, Voice Blong Mere has been educating the general public about the importance of the international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the Convention on the Discrimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979 (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC). According to Voice Blong Mere, these instruments are often misunderstood by chiefs and village leaders, who see them as a challenge to their authority and status. “People here thought the CRC is allowing young people to get big headed about their rights!” a representative from Voice Blong Mere explained.

To ensure that people are fully aware of the importance and the messages of human rights, Voice Blong Mere trains rural young women in the design and running of their own radio programmes. Through radio, more and more women are becoming informed about their rights and how they should be treated. In the lead up to the 2006 elections, the first since the mobilisation of RAMSI, Voice Blong Mere along with other women’s organisations and NGOs campaigned to elect female leaders into parliament. Although 2006 saw the highest number of female candidates at any election (26 out of 453 candidates), none won a seat. “People think women haven’t proven themselves of being capable of taking up leadership positions,” said a young woman from Honiara. Similarly, a woman in Honiara exclaimed: “People don’t realize that women are born leaders already!”

Voice Blong Mere is an example of how young women in Solomon Islands are using the radio as a medium to encourage discussion, thinking and debate on issues about human rights and gender equality. As a number of young women involved in Voice Blong Mere have been selected to represent their country at international and regional forums, Voice Blong Mere also supports leadership and professional development of young women across the country.
Case Study 7.2: Cleaner votes, cleaner politics

Winds of Change is a NGO established in 2004 with a global network of volunteers committed to building trust amongst people from different backgrounds. Winds of Change has a strong presence in the Solomon Islands and attracts many young volunteers. A recent example of one of its campaigns is the National Clean Election Campaign which was aimed at raising people’s understanding of why elections free from corruption and intimidation are vitally important.

The campaign was led predominantly by young people who were supported by adult mentors. A series of train the trainer workshops were held to build the skills of the youth volunteers.

Through the use of cartoons, radio programs, newspapers and press releases, the campaign’s message was communicated across nine provinces in 30 different languages. One innovative campaign method was the voters’ pledges, which required people to make a personal pledge which read:

“I pledge that I will not … accept bribes, accept any false promises, sell my vote, involve in any corrupt activity before, during or after the elections. I pledge that I will use my full conscience to decide my vote, listen to God to help me decide my vote and vote for an honest leader.”

By the end of the campaign, over 20,000 pledges had been distributed of which 4,000 were signed and returned to Winds of Change. The organisation continues to attract young people who are passionate about promoting civic and political rights to the people of Solomon Islands. Further work is being carried out by the Winds of Change to improve the campaign methods for future national elections.
8. Tonga

Country summary

The Polynesian Kingdom of Tonga had an estimated population of 99,000\(^{22}\) in 2006, spread over 36 islands in a chain of 176. Tongan culture is Polynesian and traditional values still permeate the everyday life of most Tongans.

![Figure 8.1: Population aged 15 – 29](image)

Source: Adapted from USP (2006)

**Estimated youth population at a glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.1: Key youth statistics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29 as % of total:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29 as % of total:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: USP 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed youth aged 15-24:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net primary school enrolment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross secondary school enrolment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: World Bank 2006c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tonga has a youthful population with almost 28% aged 15 – 29. Tonga has one of the highest rates of primary school completion in the South Pacific due to compulsory primary schooling\(^{23}\). It is estimated that 16% of male youth are unemployed (not working but seeking employment) and a further 5% are inactive (outside the workforce and not studying) (AusAID, 2006).

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22 Derived from the Secretariat of the South Pacific Community
23 Adapted from the University of the South Pacific “Working Papers of the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance” Suva, Fiji, 2006
“Community and Faith-based Youth organizations are important forums for developing skills necessary for effective participation in society, promoting tolerance and increased cooperation and exchanges between youth organizations and young people. It is in these organizations that young people can have access to additional intellectual, spiritual, and emotional nurturing.”

Tonga National Youth Policy

Main youth issues

Tonga’s youth are facing not only a transition to adulthood but also a transition to a more urban lifestyle that brings new challenges for families and individuals. In a youth empowerment forum run in 1999 by the Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC), participants identified several key challenges facing young people including employability, dropping out of school at an early age, low self-esteem, sexuality and relationships, drugs and alcohol, crime and delinquency, environmental issues, HIV/AIDS/STDs and health problems, personal/family/religious conflicts and cultural changes.

Government and youth policy

- The Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sports is the ministry responsible for the development and implementation of policy to assist Tonga’s youth. The Ministry responded to a recommendation of the Tongan Youth Parliament in 2005 to develop a comprehensive youth policy which aims to prioritize the development of youth, joining government, civil society and community stakeholders together in the approach. Healthy lifestyles, employment, educational opportunities, community service and national pride are identified as key areas for the policy. The Ministry also conducts several vocational skills training programs for youth which have been successful in leading to employment opportunities for the participants.

- The Tonga Youth Parliament is managed by the TNYC. The Youth Parliament brings 100 Tongan youth from around the country together in Nuku’alofa for one week each year to express their concerns on youth and ideas for the future. There have been four Youth Parliaments since 2002. Although some NGOs have criticized youth parliament delegates’ level of engagement with youth from their communities, the Youth Parliaments have suggested a variety of strategies, from reducing the voting age to 18 to calling for a national youth policy (which was subsequently taken up by the Government).

- Future Farmers – a joint project between the Ministry for Agriculture & Food and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which focuses on training rural youth in agriculture and equipping them with the skills and resources to establish their own community based agricultural businesses.

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and youth

A host of locally created and international NGOs provide many vital services and programs to help young people in Tonga. Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) are also very active in helping young people. Some of the main NGOs involved with young people include:

- The Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC) - The TNYC is an independent organisation which works collaboratively with many government ministries, international agencies and grassroots youth groups. The TNYC is the primary partner of the Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sports. Run predominantly by local youth, the TNYC links over 100 youth organisations and runs several important programs for youth including the Tonga National Volunteer Service, a life skills program, HIV/AIDS awareness programs and youth media programs.

- Fili Tonu Drama Group (Translates to The Right Choice) – With a successful five-year history, the Fili Tonu Drama Group engages young people to create dramas about key youth issues and perform in front of many youth, raising awareness on such issues as HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and community service.

- The Tonga Family Health Association (TFHA) – The TFHA educates young people about health concerns and provides a counselling service, sexual and reproductive health services, a drop in centre, and a health issues hotline.

- Centre for Women and Youth (CWY) – The CWY provides services designed to prevent violence against women, children and youth, including counselling services, and awareness programs.

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24 http://www.spc.int/youth/Country_briefs/tonga.htm
25 ‘Youth Unemployment and Crime Rates’ Government of Tonga Website, 1 June 2005
26 http://www.matangitonga.to/article/youth/votes231104.shtml
Tonga national study

**Background**

Young people in Tonga young have a strong regard for their culture and respect for their elders. They want to contribute to the political, social and economic progress of the country and build on the strengths of cultural traditions. Participations in this study want to become doctors, designers, musicians, and to continue to further education, yet they face the difficult task of juggling modern and traditional influences. The youth riot that occurred in Tonga’s capital of Nuku’alofa in November 2006 can be seen as a backdrop to the plight of youth, as well as an indication of public support for democracy in the country.

**Summary**

Key findings of the consultations:

1. Tonga has several active programs in its youth sector, with many supported through the Tonga National Youth Congress and other NGOs. Young Tongans are proactive and have ideas to build stronger communities but need the support of youth media programs to implement their ideas. They would also like youth friendly grant schemes, youth drop-in centers, well-trained peer educators and be supported by adults who are willing to mentor youth groups. These ideas, together with a strengthening of existing structures such as the Tonga Youth Parliament have the potential to improve the livelihoods of Tonga’s youth and allow their voices to be heard.

2. Decision makers and communities were aware of youth concerns but did not take sufficient action on the problems or understand the root causes. Respondents were concerned that cultural attitudes discourage young people from voicing their opinions. They want more youth-friendly avenues for them to communicate their ideas and suggestions to decision makers.

3. Young Tongans involved want to communicate their thoughts and concerns directly, and were keen to take part in existing mechanisms such as village meetings, or potential future possibilities such as government focus groups and youth panels. First, they wanted to feel confident that adult decision makers would be empathetic towards their ideas and that action would be taken to resolve their concerns.

**Recommendations**

**Policy development and building institutional capacity to support youth participation**

- Encourage adults to take the initial lead in youth engagement
- Develop a system to encourage adults to mentor youth groups and organizations
- Leverage on the success of the youth parliament
- Support drop in centers
- Increase support for drama groups and youth focused media
- Establish a fund for youth led projects
- Expand capacity building programs for peer trainers.

**Youth participation in education and lifelong learning**

- Change teaching practices
- Increase life skills and health education at schools.

**Youth participation in employment and training**

- Expand volunteering opportunities for young people
- Expand support structures for youth entrepreneurs.
About the sample

For this study, a total of 90 young people in Tonga completed the questionnaire as described in Table 8.2. Of these, 27 were from the capital Nuku’alofa and the remaining 63 were from areas outside of the capital on the islands of Tongatapu and Vava’u. Forty-two youth participated in focus groups in Tongatapu and 34 in the Vava’u Islands.

Table 8.2: Respondent characteristics by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group*</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two respondents did not specify their age

Consistent with the other countries in this study, the questionnaire respondents from Nuku’alofa had a higher proportion of those who were employed (33 per cent), and those who were volunteering (52 per cent) compared to the respondents from Tongatapu and in Vava’u.

Overall, 55 per cent of respondents mentioned they had been employed at some stage. In Figure 8.2, urban areas refer to respondents from Nuku’alofa and rural areas refer to all other areas.

“There should be some program for leaders to learn about the problems regarding youth. If they know of the problems, then maybe they will start supporting youth,”

(Youth, Rural Vava’u)

“We, as young people, have to stand up for what we believe in, voice our opinions and concerns…and take our places in our communities…not just as young people, but as equal citizens.”

Tonga Youth Parliament participant, Nuku’alofa

Figure 8.2: Employment and volunteering by urban & rural

Currently Employed | Currently Volunteering | Employed at some stage
Urban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban n=27; Rural n=63
“For us to just approach a town officer just like that is disrespectful… to show respect we keep away.”
Youth, Nuku’alofa

“Some community leaders know all the issues but are too lazy to take action, however, most of them don’t understand.”
Rural youth, Vava’u

**Dreams, goals and issues of youth**

The goals and dreams identified by the focus group participants in Tonga included furthering their studies, obtaining good jobs and setting up businesses. Many lacked the confidence to express their ambitions and had given no thought to being asked (or been asked) about their dreams and ambitions.

A large majority of the participants also expressed their concerns in relation to unemployment, high costs of school fees, HIV/AIDS and a lack of opportunity to communicate their problems with adults. These issues were seen as barriers affecting young people in the country. Another common concern raised especially in interviews with NGOs, is that there is little young people can do in their spare time which leads to boredom. This particular problem was raised in the focus group session with village adults, who felt that when bored, youth are more likely to commit crimes and be violent.

Youth currently engaged in volunteering, employment or running their own businesses were focused on their careers and knew what they wanted to do in life. Youth micro-finance recipients aimed to grow their businesses and employ more youth, while those volunteering as peer educators and trainers wanted to continue assisting youth in need. These examples highlighted the benefits of volunteering, especially as an alternative when there are few paid jobs to build skills for youth and give them a focus in life. Participants in the adult focus group acknowledged that significant youth issues were prevalent, including unemployment, a need for education fee support and health issues like diabetes and obesity. The adult focus group also commented on a need for increased opportunities for youth to be occupied through community groups, volunteering or employment.
Who should be told about youth concerns?

When asked to whom they preferred to speak about their concerns, young people indicated a preference for peer groups. They wanted to be able to take their concerns to community leaders such as chiefs, regional leaders and school principals in the hope that they would take action as summarized in Figure 8.3. Talking to parents and church leaders about concerns was not a popular option, especially in the rural areas. In an interview, the Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sports acknowledged that some parents were not interested in hearing their children’s thoughts and ideas.

Figure 8.3: Who are the best people to inform about youth issues?

Note: Other includes teachers, non-government organisations, regional bodies, schools and other informal networks. Urban n=23; Rural n=52

This view was echoed in the course of other several NGO interviews. Adults in a focus group acknowledged the limitations of this cultural practice saying that: “it starts from our culture where youth have no input to parents, and leaders don’t accept the voice of youth, but if the leaders and parents do accept the voice of youth, it will be very helpful.”

Although respondents indicated that conveying their concerns to community leaders was a high preference, focus groups revealed this is rarely possible due to the low status given to young people. This reinforces the culture of silence where young people are seen but not heard.

Most respondents felt there was good awareness of youth issues within their communities, with 70 per cent of respondents indicating that their communities consider youth needs and 73 per cent indicating that their communities and community leaders were well informed about youth problems (refer to Figure 8.4). The responses were stronger in rural areas where higher proportions of respondents indicated their communities understood youth issues.

Most decision makers realize the importance of youth issues, but they may not understand how to deal with, prioritize or act on these concerns. Indecisiveness causes frustration and disappointment among young people.

Decision makers include not only parents but also anyone who may impact on the lives of young people including chiefs, school principals and government officials. Opening up communication channels between young people and the decision makers would enable the young people to contribute proactively.

Case Study 8.3 is one example where young people have strongly felt that elders and communities do not understand their concerns. This was illustrated by a group of young entrepreneurs from Vava’u who received micro-finance loans to start small businesses. These young people mentioned that members of their family and friends might claim the services of their businesses without payment. This is an extremely difficult situation to avoid given the strong cultural emphasis placed on providing for one’s extended families.
Another example where decision makers did not adequately understand the concerns of young people was found in secondary schools where one participant admitted to being consistently absent from class due to harsh punishments carried out by the teachers including hitting students, a concern echoed by other students in the focus groups.

Some adults do understand some of the problems confronting young people, having either worked in a field where they study youth issues or because they are younger adults and have had first-hand experience. At a focus group with adults, many participants commented on the importance of proper health education for young people due to several problems including diabetes, HIV/AIDS and unsafe health practices such as poor diets. These comments were supported by NGOs interviewed for this study. The adult focus group expressed sincere concern for young people, including the poor employment prospects they face, and that without many activities to occupy them, boredom emerges which could lead to the uptake of criminal or disruptive activities.

**How do young people access information and how do they express themselves?**

Seventy-three percent of respondents thought community leaders and communities were well informed about the problems faced by young people. It was noted in the focus group sessions that although leaders were thought to be well informed about the issues, they did not understand how to take positive steps to solve these issues at a local level.

Seventy-six percent of total respondents expressed a desire to further inform community leaders about youth concerns. Sixty per cent had done something about this and had broken with the culture of silence to voice their ideas and concerns. Out of these, less than half achieved the results they wanted after informing decision makers about their concerns.

When asked why they didn’t get the results they wanted, 44 per cent of respondents commented that leaders did not trust them. Of those who kept silent about their concerns, 19 per cent said that it would be pointless due to inaction by decision makers. A further 19 per cent said that they lacked the self-esteem to approach their decision makers, while 15 per cent indicated that cultural reasons prevented them from voicing their concerns.

Over 80 per cent of respondents above the age of 20 wanted to further inform community leaders about their concerns, a proportion which rises with age as shown in Figure 8.5.
When asked about their main sources of finding information and news, respondents preferred using the internet, and peer group. Radio also ranked strongly as shown in Figure 8.6, which mirrors the experience in most of the countries in this study.

The media can be harnessed to teach young people about important development issues whilst also providing them with a way to participate in sharing ideas, and expressing their concerns.

The ‘On the Spot’ radio program (see Case Study 8.1) is an eight part series on the Millennium Development Goals run by youth for youth. It engaged a variety of young people to communicate information about the Goals and was very effective in spreading the message. Future programs like this need to be encouraged.

Another effective method of communication is youth drama which has been used to communicate key social messages to young people. In Tonga, the ‘Fili Tonu’ drama group run by young people, for young people, operates from Tongatapu. The group travels around the island educating youth through drama about health issues, the importance of education and values such as non-violence. Groups like these need to be supported and made accessible to wider audiences of young people since they are a very effective way of conveying the message on various youth problems.
When asked about their preferred method of communicating with decision makers and the community and expressing their concerns, young people preferred direct methods as seen in Figure 8.7.

Ninety-seven per cent said they would like to speak directly with leaders while 23 per cent said they would like to attend meetings and convey their thoughts as a group. These starkly contrasted to indirect methods such as writing letters which were unpopular.

Although direct communication channels are preferred, few young people would use them because they tend to feel it would be pointless, or to do so would be culturally unacceptable. Yet, there are clear benefits in young people engaging in dialogue with older generations, in terms of skills development, learning from elders, better communication of problems and the development of joint solutions.

**Figure 8.7: What are the best ways to inform community leaders about youth issues?**

Note: n=75
“Maybe they [leaders] don’t know how to relate to us.”

“Our problems might not be their priority.”

“They talk a lot about problems young people have but don’t do anything about it.”

“. . . but they don’t talk directly with young people.”

Focus Group Participant, Nuku’alofa

How do young people perceive the role of government, community and family in achieving their goals?

Young Tongans engaged in this study believed in a collaborative approach towards achieving their goals, with governments, communities and families all playing important roles. However, they felt that at present, there were large gaps between themselves and these key stakeholders, with very little consultation and opportunities to express concerns and ideas. Many examples were found of models or programs where the gap between the adult decision makers, elders and young people had been bridged effectively leading to positive outcomes. In many instances, these examples have bridged the culture of silence, and formed strong community partnerships leading to youth development.

“Community leaders only care about stuff if they are going to benefit from it. The youth issues are not important because no body is paying them anything to care about them.”

Young person, Vava’u

Since Tongan youth are unlikely to approach decision makers in the current context, an alternative is for decision makers to lead by encourage youth participation and develop channels of communication. Simple initiatives such as youth consultation committees, allocating a portion of village meeting time for young people, or even establishing a student council could improve communication. As one young person put it: “unless you are asked for ideas, it’s hard to go up and tell them [decision makers]”. This concept also applies in the case of adult mentors.
Examples of youth engagement

Youth groups who run community projects in which adults have acted as mentors and provided active support, have achieved better results and more committed members than those groups with no adult mentoring.

One group in Vava’u established a recycling project in their village while another in Tongatapu began a village mowing service and handicraft manufacturing. The young people in these groups were guided by an adult, and with the adult’s support, became productively engaged in community projects, keeping themselves occupied, motivated, and learning vital leadership, teamwork and other skills amidst also building their self esteem. Adult involvement was also seen to build community involvement around the young people’s projects and improve the community’s perception towards youth.

Such a model could easily be replicated with little cost since there are so many youth groups which could benefit with some direction and support, and so many youth who could be organized into groups to develop such projects. The key task would be finding adults with the capacity and right attitude to mentor such groups and this could be organized through existing youth organizations such as the Tonga National Youth Congress (see Case Study 8.2). Furthermore, this type of model will close the communication gap between young people and adults by allowing for inter-generational dialogue to be created. Whether youth groups in the study had adult mentors or not, many still struggled to find financial support to undertake the development of community projects.

The abovementioned projects have several flow-on benefits including leadership skills and self esteem development for youth involved. Establishing a centralized source of support for youth related projects could prove very beneficial for such groups. To prevent youth disillusionment, however, decision makers and community leaders should use young people’s suggestions, keep in regular contact and update them on how their ideas are being implemented. As described by an adult in a focus group: “they [youth] have sent concerns to the government but when they send it, the government just leaves it there.”

Another strong example of a youth engagement initiative was the annual youth parliament convened by the Government of Tonga and the Tonga National Youth Congress (see Case Study 8.2). Tonga’s youth parliament has provided strategic advice to the Government which has resulted in the establishment of the youth ministry and youth strategy. Some focus group participants felt that they would take their concerns to their local youth parliament representative while many did not know their local representative. Similarly, some NGOs mentioned that the true concerns of young people in the community were not brought to the parliament.

In an interview, a representative from the Ministry responsible for youth indicated that they were open towards youth engagement and hearing the concerns of young people. However their preferred channel was through the Youth Parliament, which only convenes on an annual basis, which may not be frequent enough and have the ability to bring the most grass roots of concerns to the ministry. As one adult from a focus group put it: “the problem is that the government doesn’t hear the voice of the youth and don’t understand their problems.”
“The best way is to have youth joining village meetings with chief of village and town officer. And for the government leaders the best way is for us to collect the issues from the youth parliament and to then knock on the door of the government leaders to let them know the problems youth are facing.”

Rural Youth, Vava’u

“Youth issues are not important for daily life of community leaders and working with youth is really new to them. The best way to do it is to create more programs to teach older people and the community leaders so they are aware of it.”

Youth, Lematoa Village

“[I was] Supposed to be in meeting after [turning] 18 years but when I was talking they said I was young and the ideas I raised are not important.”

Youth, Vava’u

“Youth don’t have work or money so they need some type of project to spend their time on so that there will be no more time for them to do other things in the community that cause community concern. They need something to get them together. To spend their time doing projects rather than other things like violence,”

Adult focus group, Tongatapu Island

Case Study 8.1: “On The Spot” youth radio

On The Spot is a radio initiative, designed and run by young people with the aim of engaging young Tongans with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On The Spot ran a weekly program for 8 weeks focusing on a different goal each week, in a youth friendly manner with contemporary music mixed with strong messages teaching youth about important issues including health, the importance of education and gender equality. It is an excellent example of how youth friendly media can increase participation of young people. The show is made by youth with a youth focus and presentation style. The team of youth who initiated the program drive around interviewing youth around the town, in a van that is painted with the MDG themes.

The program has featured local artists, songwriters and representatives from the WHO, community health workers, doctors, teachers and youth volunteers who have spoken about some of the topics. The program has been enjoyable for all the youth involved, has taught them vital skills, has attracted attention from youth around Tonga and has taught valuable lessons to hundreds of listeners. Without the commitment of the Tongan youth leading this program, it is likely that there would have been much less awareness of the MDGs, and their vital issues amongst young people in Tonga.
Case Study 8.2: Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC) & Vava’u Youth Congress

The TNYC is an independent organisation that works collaboratively with government ministries, international agencies and grassroots youth groups. Run predominantly by local youth, the TNYC links over 100 youth organisations and groups and runs several important programs for youth. The National Office, located in Nuku’alofa, coordinates the activities implemented by its island offices, termed “Youth Congresses” in Tongatapu, Vava’u, ‘Eua, Ha’apai, Niuatoputapu and Niuafo’ou. The main national programs run by the TNYC include:

- The Tonga National Volunteer Service which annually places 15 youth volunteers of Tongan descent. These volunteers live locally or abroad, and work in organisations like the island Youth Congresses, the Tonga Red Cross Society, the Salvation Army, the Tonga Family Health Organisation, the Tonga Community Development Trust, high schools and more.
- A UNICEF funded life-skills program has trained 35 master trainers who teach skills, including those related to adolescent reproductive health, communication skills and self-esteem building.
- Youth media offers a weekly radio program, a weekly newsletter and a bi-monthly youth magazine.
- A HIV/AIDS Awareness Program operated in Tongatapu and Vava’u.
- The Tonga Youth Parliament, which has been running for 4 years. The Youth Parliament allows young people to elect their own leaders from throughout the islands. The leaders come together for a 2-week period each year to discuss issues and provide submissions to the National Legislative Assembly.
- A Small Business Development Program that includes Microfinance operates in Vava’u, Tongatapu, ‘Eua and Ha’apai.

In addition, each island Youth Congress has its own programs which are island-specific in scope rather than national. Examples include a literacy project in Niuafo’ou and the Youth Disability project in Vava’u. Without the work of the TNYC, many of the programs outside of the school system, designed to help young people in Tonga, would not be present, including the Tonga National Youth Parliament which played a vital role in instigating the National Youth Policy development process. Furthermore, the availability of life skills programs, health awareness programs and volunteering programs would have been greatly limited.

The Vava’u Youth Congress (VYC)

The VYC is the island-specific subsidiary of the Tonga National Youth Congress. It is run by volunteers, many of whom are members of the Tonga National Volunteer Service and the US Peace Corps. Its programs provide opportunities for youth that are not provided by any other organisation on the island, such as training on a variety of topics including income generation, and services for youth with disabilities. It also links together and provides support to youth groups around the islands.

The main activities include an IT training centre, a Healthy Living Program, facilitation of a monthly youth group leaders meeting, local youth micro finance, and a sports program. One of the unique programs is a greenhouse recently constructed by the NYC, funded by NZAID. Youth are trained in agricultural skills at the greenhouse and grow vegetables that they are able to sell to earn an income, thus making the program sustainable.
Case Study 8.3: Vava’u Youth Microfinance Program

The Vava’u Youth Congress (VYC) runs a successful youth microfinance project which in its first year of operation has provided 6 young people with loans to start small businesses. The program involves a strong business skills training component, with business skills and planning workshops held 4 times a year and participants encouraged to submit a business plan and then apply for a loan. The VYC named an advisory committee that developed a curriculum for their island’s business training sessions. Subsequently, training sessions have been conducted, several loans have been made and the first repayments have been received. The businesses started included a takeaway food store, a video recording business and a photography business and handicraft store. Some of the recipients have complained, however, that members of their community have a tendency to use their services for free, thus hurting their profits. Others said that it might be difficult to win community support for starting a business since communities tend to feel that youth should not be given so much responsibility.

As long as there are committed organisations such as the VYC to run microfinance schemes, they can create employment opportunities for youth. Such schemes should be encouraged and expanded. Youth microfinance recipients even spoke about their ambitions to employ other youth in the future.

“I would never have thought about running a business without the microfinance.”
Youth microfinance recipient, Vava’u
9. Vanuatu

Country summary

Vanuatu is a Melanesian archipelago located to the south of the Solomon Islands and west of Fiji. Vanuatu gained its independence from France in the early 1980s following political disputes over land ownerships. The population was estimated as 221,000 in 2006\(^5\) and the economy is based on agriculture, fisheries and tourism.

![Figure 9.1: Population 15 – 29](image)

Source: Adapted from USP (2006)

**Estimated youth population at a glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9.1: Key youth statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 15-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population aged 0-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population 15-29 as % of total:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 population 0-29 as % of total:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: USP 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed youth aged 15-24:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net primary school enrolment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross secondary school enrolment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: World Bank 2006c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vanuatu’s percentage of youth aged 15-29 is in line with the regional average. Projections forecast this percentage to remain relatively stable over the next two decades while the number of youth in this age group could rise to around 110,000 by 2029\(^7\).

“Failure in the formal system leaves negative feelings of no worth and low self-esteem. Ability to take new opportunities becomes difficult because of this sense of failure. It is difficult for them to motivate themselves again once they have lost a lot of their self-respect and their fear of further failure holds them back.”

Informant interviewed for Penumbra’s (2001) study.

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\(^27\) Derived from the Secretariat of the South Pacific Community

\(^28\) Adapted from the University of the South Pacific. Working Paper of the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance. Suva, Fiji, 2006
Main youth issues

The situation currently faced by young people in Vanuatu is alarmingly complex, as they are likely to experience a multitude of problems. Issues among young people in Vanuatu include unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, violence, sexual health problems, mental illness, homelessness, peer pressure, family breakdowns and alcohol and kava abuse.

Government and youth policy

The Ministry for Youth and Sports is the official government agency responsible for youth in Vanuatu. An interview with the Ministry showed, however, that only 10% of their budget is allocated to youth and there is no formal youth strategy or plan. At the time of the interview the Ministry was unable to identify any significant on-going youth program that it was responsible for, and there had been several different Youth Ministers over the past five years. The Ministry indicated a plan to develop a youth strategy in the future.

Non Government Organizations (NGOs) and youth

NGOs in Vanuatu provide the bulk of support services for young people’s concerns outside of formal education. There are numerous NGOs, many which are branches of international organizations. A few are locally founded and managed organizations. Most NGOs are run from offices in Port Vila and conduct regular visits to run programs in the outer islands. Some of the main NGOs working with young people are summarized below:

- **Wan Smolbag** has been successful in educating young people and the community about issues arising from clashes between traditional and modern cultures. The group utilizes drama and story-telling to raise issues of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and alcoholism.
- **Save the Children** runs a variety of essential programs for youth and children including community health, child protection, child rights and community development.
- **Youth Challenge International** – Youth Challenge engages youth volunteers from other countries such as Australia and Canada with local youth volunteers in Vanuatu to develop grass roots community development projects around the country. Local youth volunteers involved also develop essential skills and experience while participating in the programs.
- **Churches & local youth groups** – There are numerous youth groups operating at the village and town level throughout Vanuatu, mostly organized through Churches. Youth groups engage in a variety of activities from sport to music, and some have ambitions to assist their communities.

Youth voice and marginalization

**Education & training**

Penumbra (2001) identified in his baseline study of Vanuatu that lack of educational opportunities has resulted in many young people developing mental health problems such as feelings of rejection, alienation and social exclusion. Additionally, Penumbra noted that teachers were concerned about the range of issues faced by their students, but were not trained to respond to their students’ needs. The difficulties raised by Penumbra are attributable to the limited resources available to cater for the growing population of school-aged children in Vanuatu.

The World Bank has since provided technical assistance to develop the Education Master Plan, which addresses key issues in staffing and management, curriculum improvement, and access and equity to ensure the education system caters for the needs of young people. Australia has also committed to helping improve education service delivery in Vanuatu through the Joint Cooperation Development Strategy 2005-2010 and through support for the Technical and Vocational Education Training program to train young people in rural and provincial development.

**Intergenerational conflicts**

According to Penumbra (2001), young people in Vanuatu are seeking lifestyles and values that are in direct conflict with their traditional culture, due to their exposure to Western values which can cause friction within the family.

**Gender issues**

There is evidence of discrimination and violence against women in Vanuatu. Of particular concern is the rising teenage pregnancy rate, with 9.6% of all births reported in Vanuatu in 1999 being to young women between 15 and 19 years old. Strachan (2004) commented that the boy’s education in families generally takes priority over girl’s education when school fees prevent parents from sending all children to school.

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29 Source: SPC Pacific Islands Population Poster 2004
Youth crime
Limited opportunities to participate in education and employment are a major factor causing young people in Vanuatu to reported dissatisfaction with their situation. This can incite anti-social behavior including offending (usually petty crime) and alcohol and kava misuse. Young people living in squatter settlements are more likely than other young people to be marginalized and to engage in anti-social activities.

The Vanuatu Young People’s Project run by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre is currently conducting a wide study of young peoples concerns and ideas, which is scheduled for release in April 2007.

Vanuatu national study

Background
Common aspirations of youth interviewed in Vanuatu included helping their communities to improve conditions, supporting their peers and helping them to find good jobs. They called for closer communication with important decision makers in their lives and support from the government and other organizations to help them build a brighter future. Decision makers include those people who impact on the lives of young people, including parents, teachers, school principals, government youth program managers, chiefs, and NGOs. The young people who took part in this research also expressed concerns that a variety of youth issues were holding them back.

Respondents believed in a strong role for their government, communities and family in achieving their goals. They felt that the culture of silence could be overcome, and that several youth programs could be improved through the development of a national youth policy with a long term plan that engages young people in policy development, together with initiatives supporting community projects, youth media, and youth economic and social participation.

Summary
Key findings of the consultations were:
1. Young people believed that marginalisation and voicelessness was due to several factors, eg many adult decision makers were unwilling to listen to their concerns. There were also cultural expectations that young people would not speak to adults about their concerns. Many respondents did not have the self esteem to speak out and felt that decision makers would not take action on their ideas anyway.
2. Despite the culture of silence respondents preferred to communicate directly with decision makers who are deemed to have the power to take action. Opening up such communication channels could lead to much more effective policy development.
3. Numerous strategies were identified by young people and other organizations including developing a comprehensive framework for youth development, uniting the efforts of all youth sector organizations, establishing grant schemes for youth community projects, youth targeted media programs and improved access to educational and vocational opportunities.

Recommendations

Policy development and building institutional capacity to support youth participation
- Develop a national youth policy
- Improve youth sector coordination and communication
- Support drop in centers
- Support youth led projects
- Expand targeted youth media programs.

Youth participation in education and lifelong learning
- Reduce school fees
- Expand life skills and health education within schools
- Promote rural opportunities & lifestyles.
Youth participation in employment and training

- Increase volunteering opportunities
- Expand opportunities for vocational training
- Support youth entrepreneurs.

About the sample

Eighty-one respondents completed the questionnaire as described in Table 9.2. Of these, 48 were in the capital, Port Vila and 33 in other parts of Efate, and other outer islands. All focus groups were conducted on Efate with 13 participants from rural areas and 26 from Port Vila.

Compared to the other countries in the study, the Vanuatu sample included a higher proportion of young people who were currently employed (46 per cent in total) and currently volunteering (51 per cent in total) as shown in Figure 9.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group*</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two respondents did not specify their age

This is consistent with the fact that Vanuatu has the lowest level of youth unemployment out of the countries in this study with a rate of four percent. Respondents were divided into urban (those living in Port Vila) and rural (those living outside of Port Vila).

Youth are keen to discuss their problems and cooperate with government and organisations to develop strategy to address HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, unemployment and school dropouts.

“All the youth leaders within churches should come together to talk about the main youth issues like alcohol, cigarettes, smoking etc. There is not much activity about these issues outside of the churches.”

Youth – Erakor Village
Figure 9.2: Employment and volunteering by urban & rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Currently Employed</th>
<th>Currently Volunteering</th>
<th>Employed at some stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban n=48; Rural n=33

“If leaders understand young people and if young people have problems, the leaders should help them and encourage them.”

“Young people should work together and set up a national committee so their voice can go to the government from that national body.”

Students – USP

Dreams, goals and issues of youth

Participants were unused to sharing their thoughts. Despite being shy during initial meetings they soon expressed a desire to continue with further education and become doctors, designers, musicians, etc. Many wanted to contribute to their communities and become youth leaders, yet their dreams and aspirations were overshadowed by the problems they faced. Most were concerned about having to drop out of school on account of not being able to pay school fees, the lack of employment opportunities, and teenage pregnancy. Not one participant had an interest in farming, agriculture or rural industry.

Like other countries in this study, the participants were distressed by the lack of opportunities and multitude of problems. Focus group participants also complained that there were few opportunities to discuss their concerns with decision makers and leaders, with the result that youth problems received scant attention within communities.
Who should be told about youth concerns?

Respondents discussed problems with their peers because they were accessible and able to relate to their concerns. Figure 9.3 shows who respondents prefer to speak to.

Forty-nine per cent of total respondents indicated an interest to speak to community leaders such as town officers, chiefs and principals with the hope that these people would use their position to remedy problems.

Focus groups revealed a different picture. There were few opportunities to communicate with community leaders and also because participants felt that elders do not wish them to speak out about their problems.

**Figure 9.3: Who are the best people to inform about youth issues?**

![Bar chart showing preferences for informing about youth issues]

Note: Other includes teachers, non-government organisations, regional bodies, schools and other informal networks.

Urban n=45; Rural n=28

Many respondents felt they are expected to remain silent, i.e., the ‘culture of silence’ mentioned throughout in this report. Approximately 27 per cent were comfortable discussing their problems with church leaders and church based groups. Many communities had youth groups, which were usually organized through a church. These groups provided a great sense of comfort and opportunity for youth, allowing them to share their problems. Even so, both the focus groups sessions with community youth groups said that although they may have plans to undertake community projects, they were often hindered by a lack of support. Parents were not a popular option with many respondents which suggests that cultural barriers discourage such discussion with elders.

Overall, 50 per cent of respondents felt that their community and community leaders considered the best interests of young people, while overall, 61 per cent felt the aforementioned well informed about youth issues. There was a significant difference between the regions here with more rural respondents indicating they felt community leaders were well informed about youth issues than urban respondents, possibly due to smaller and tighter communities in these regions.

More urban respondents than the rural respondents believed that their communities considered the needs of youth. This was possibly due to increased services being available in the urban Port Vila area. Figure 9.4 shows the distribution by place of residence.

These relatively high percentages may also be explained by the higher number of youth in the Vanuatu sample who were employed or volunteering. The latter were more likely to feel engaged in their communities, have a stronger sense of security and thus feel that their community leaders were well informed about youth issues. This finding was also supported by focus group participants who acknowledged that boredom, and disengagement from not being employed, or in the education system can lead to several social problems among youth.

One of the girls in a focus group at the University of South Pacific stated: “If leaders do provide opportunities for young people it will use up their time instead of leaving them going around causing problems and getting involved in criminal activities… young people really do have a lot of time, they can do anything, especially if they get involved in a project or something.”
Figure 9.4: Awareness of youth issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes 56%</td>
<td>Yes 41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community & community leaders are well informed about the problems & issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes 52%</td>
<td>Yes 75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Urban: n=48; Rural n=32

Figure 9.5 presents the main reasons why leaders were thought to be poorly informed about youth issues. In the urban areas, respondents said that the main reasons included a lack of awareness on youth issues and cultural reasons which accord a low status to youth. Rural respondents listed a lack of communication between youth and community leaders as the primary issue.

Figure 9.5: Why respondents feel their communities and leaders are not well informed about youth issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Communication with Youth</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Awareness on Youth Issues</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Reasons</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Interest in Youth Issues</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Reasons</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Other reasons represented a variety of comments including other priorities for community leaders, lack of young people working together to inform community leaders and that the leaders do not have the resources to consult and understand youth issues. Urban n=21; Rural n=7

An example was seen during a focus group session at Erakor village where a youth leader was hoping to bring youth together for music and life skills lessons. Having no channels through which they could communicate their ideas to adults for fundraising, they were left to write several letters. These only came to the attention of the local Member of Parliament several months later.
NGOs presented a very different story as they had an in-depth understanding of youth concerns. NGOs working with youth often engaged young people as staff or volunteers and had adult staff who were very willing to listen to and engage young people in decision making. Many of these organizations originated overseas or were established by foreigners and as a result would have adopted management practices from foreign nations. Many NGOs were also critical of the government’s efforts on youth development, citing such examples as the lack of a national youth policy. Again, a lack of willingness for government representatives to prioritize youth issues was mentioned.

“We should approach chief leaders about our concerns, and the chief leaders should approach the government. Maybe we could have a youth group discussion and then take the results from that to the chief level and then to other leaders.”

A youth from the Wan Smolbag (WSB) Youth Centre described how he feels he should be able to communicate his concerns to the government. WSB offers drama groups, alternate education, health and life skills programs and is very popular amongst young people in Port Vila.

See the Case Study on WSB
How do young people access information and how do they express themselves?

Seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated that they had wanted to inform community leaders about the problems affecting young people in their communities. This proportion rose between respondents aged under 20 and those aged 20-24 as shown in Figure 9.6 to the right. The reason for this large proportion was found in every focus group, where youth participants suggested that improving decision makers understanding of youth issues and connecting them with young people, would vastly improve policy and programs for young people. This view was also supported by adult employees of NGOs, especially in relation to the need for the government to connect better with young people. However, they acknowledged that such developments would take time and that training would be needed before decision makers understood how to effectively engage youth.

![Figure 9.6: Proportion of respondents who have wanted to inform their community leaders about their concerns by age group](image)

Note: Under 20 n=43; 20-24 n=30; 25 and over n=5

Respondents said that they want to be part of the solution, and that youth groups should approach decision makers, discuss problems, make suggestions, and then be involved in the implementation of the resulting solutions. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents indicated that they had tried to voice their concerns or develop community solutions on issues facing young people. When asked what they did, most reported speaking amongst their peer groups, church leaders and parents.

However, focus groups revealed that the majority of participants wanted an opportunity to convey the seriousness of the issues facing their generation directly to leaders in their communities and ask for support, although in reality very few had actually done this. As one participant from Erakor Village put it:

“They [politicians] don’t normally come into the community and they don’t look much into the community. Sometimes they come and they’ll be shocked by what’s happening in the community, as they don’t normally focus within the community. And there’s plenty of youth issues now. More of the people who are focusing on youth issues are really the youth leaders in the churches.”

Figure 9.7 shows the preferred methods for respondents to inform their community leaders about youth issues and problems. Despite a culture of silence which restricts the amount of direct communication youth can have with community leaders, direct methods proved a popular preference which included respondents speaking to friends, youth leaders, community leaders and church leaders.

Other direct forms of communication such as meetings and group discussions were the second most popular category and included group-based dialogue which may involve young people, elders and chiefs. These results were consistent with findings from the focus groups.
When asked about their main sources for obtaining information and news, radio was clearly the most popular choice with over 50 per cent of respondents choosing it as seen in Figure 9.8. Many focus group participants also indicated an interest in using media to communicate their concerns to leaders and to promote youth initiated ideas. One suggestion involved a TV show dedicated to interviewing young people and voicing their ideas on the future of the nation. Youth radio programs and youth columns in local newspapers have proved effective in other countries and could be implemented with little cost in Vanuatu (see Case Study 8.1). Programs that are youth specific and youth friendly make it easier for young people to relate to and educate them on specific issues, while also being an outlet for their ideas.
What the results from this study show is that although adults and the decision makers in young people's lives may be aware of youth issues, they may not understand how to effectively develop solutions for these issues. Furthermore, the decision makers may not realize they lack understanding as to how to provide opportunities for youth engagement and develop effective programs for young people. Building channels for young people to freely discuss their ideas and problems with their communities and decision makers, could vastly improve their learning experience as young adults, build their sense of citizenship and reduce frustrations. It could also lead to flow on effects as leadership and communication skills are acquired by youth as they participate in development.

How do young people perceive the role of government, communities and family in achieving their goals?

The questionnaires and the focus group sessions showed that NGOs and community organizations are perceived as playing a vital role as providers of helpful assistance with youth development and awareness programs. Negative opinions were expressed towards government, with corruption, ineffectiveness, nepotism, disengagement and disinterest in youth issues specifically mentioned. Most focus groups reported that government policies are limited to sporting development. This attitude was also reflected in rural focus groups where participants complained that they experienced difficulty gaining government support for non-sport initiatives. While participants did acknowledge that the government is very limited in its ability to create jobs and wider education due to a poor economy, they stated that alternate opportunities needed to be given for youth to be engaged in society, learn skills and contribute to development.

“Lack of opportunity with young people comes back to parents, the fact that there is no money to pay for education which leads to unemployment and lack of opportunity.”

Focus group participant

The youth and sports departments are run jointly under the same Ministry for Youth and Sports with the youth department allocated only 10 per cent of the ministries’ budget, while also being understaffed. Focus groups with young people, interviews with NGOs, and surveys showed that most respondents were unaware of the Youth Department’s role, and were unable to identify any youth related plans or programs being run by the department.

An interview with the Youth Department within the Ministry for Youth & Sports revealed they could not name any significant current programs for young people, neither were there any planned. Furthermore, there was no youth policy or project plan for the department’s activities. Interviews with NGOs revealed there had been six youth ministers in the past three years thus resulting in no ongoing youth strategy. A lack of financial resources was another main reason for their inability to develop programs. The Youth Department acknowledged that there is currently no mechanism for young people to interact with the department and communicate their concerns or ideas. The interview also revealed that the department did not have the technical knowledge on how to develop and implement a youth policy, and that they were seeking assistance from the SPC and aiming to build a plan eventually modelled around the experience of Fiji.

The government and public sector are in a strong position to instigate such channels for youth engagement by simple initiatives such as youth consultation panels for key service providers on topics such as education,
health, sport and the youth department itself. Such panels could involve asking a sample of young people to examine a planned program or service and give their feedback on whether they feel it would meet their needs, and how to improve it. Other methods may include conducting focus groups with various youth groups when developing new initiatives ranging from new curricula, to rural health awareness projects, to planning new budget allocations for key departments.

Many NGOs interviewed thought that a youth parliament or national council of youth with a direct line of communication to the government would be useful. Vanuatu did have a national youth parliament, but this was discontinued soon after its establishment for reasons of administration. A more effective avenue might be the creation of smaller, issue focused youth advisory panels.

Youth engagement should not be limited to these ideas. Youth are a vital part of society and should therefore be engaged in all stages of social consultations, and program or policy development. This would involve youth input to community meetings, provincial governments and at the national level. Such engagement could empower Vanuatu’s young people and prevent them from feeling locked out of society, while promoting good citizenship, confidence and respect for their societies.

Case Study 9.1: Youth Challenge International Vanuatu

Youth Challenge International (YCI) is a non-profit organization based in Sydney, Australia with active programs in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and many other developing nations. YCI combines community development and youth development work with health education and environmental research in important projects conducted by teams of young volunteers.

In Vanuatu, YCI has worked alongside local volunteers, including many school drop outs, to construct and/or improve schools, health clinics and water supplies, assisted eye surgeons with sight-restoring cataract operations, worked with biologists to study and collect important environmental data, planned youth forums and conferences together with community youth leaders, and worked with the Vanuatu Ministry of Health, in assisting with the Health Educational workshops.

YCI provides five main types of training for local youth including; Leadership Life skills, a first aid course, a first step to business course, a resume writing course and a computing course. A part of their program is a leadership conference where the international and Ni-Vanuatu (local) volunteers are both involved in which normally happens during their first trainings before heading out to Field. YCI also provides returned Ni-Vanuatu volunteers with another opportunity known as the ‘Fourth Challenge’ were they are given a chance to further develop their skills through working experience and training.

YCI has engaged over 30 youth each year since 2004 and since then, 85 per cent of those volunteers are currently engaging in work or further educational studies demonstrating the impact such volunteering experiences can have on youth. A few of them still assist with YCI projects and programs.

“I feel sure that I will then use my skills and experiences learned through this program for the betterment of this country especially issues affecting young people.”

Nenneth Lolyne Garae – Volunteer, 19 years
Case Study 9.2: Wan Smolbag

Since 1989, Wan Smolbag, an innovative NGO in Port Vila, has been teaching Vanuatu’s youth about important issues in an enjoyable and creative way. The group produces dramas and movies that depict real life issues faced by young people and is often asked to perform around the Pacific. The productions are creative and funny and popular with youth. They also teach valuable lessons educating youth about issues such as HIV/AIDS, violence, human rights and the importance of voting. The Wan Smolbag centre in Port Vila has expanded and now runs other services including a health clinic, educational workshops for youth who have dropped out of school, a nutrition clinic and a computer centre. Wan Smolbag has also recently begun pioneering a youth micro enterprise scheme with young people establishing their own businesses including Kava bars and shoe repairers.

Without the work of the Wan Smolbag, it is difficult to imagine any other method which could have been implemented to teach thousands of youth about vital youth issues such HIV/AIDS and non-violent approaches to solving problems.