



CASE STUDY ON YOUTH PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON EDUCATION QUALITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES, LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

December 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Special thanks go to the numerous youth researchers and supervisors who responded in Kosovo and Tajikistan. Additional thanks go to the UNICEF staff, consultants and contractors who responded to the case study questionnaire and provided documents needed for this report. Final thanks go to the following for their additional support: Gezim Hasani, Marina Zhukova, Aferdita Spahiu, Barno Mukhamadieva, Rrezart Halili, Zainab Babaeva, Zarina Alizoda, Jane Lowicki-Zucca, Amir Haxhikadrija, UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo and the Kosovar Youth Council.

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ACRONYMS

CEE/CIS	Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
EEPCT	Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-governmental organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people often report that they are not given the opportunity to participate in processes that affect their lives. Excluding youth can result in a range of consequences – from ineffective policies to alienation, which in turn can lead to more serious societal consequences. Even when they are given opportunities to be engaged, young people often feel their participation is not meaningful enough.

This case study looks at the methodology and key findings behind ‘A Study of Adolescent and Youth Perspectives on Education Quality in the Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States Region’, commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS).

This innovative research study focused on promoting the direct participation of adolescents and youth in research, advocacy and programming. Youth were engaged at many levels, including: planning and research, media and communications efforts to strengthen youth influence on decision makers and policies, and follow-up activities to the study. The youth programme focused specifically on Chechnya (Russian Federation), Georgia, Kosovo and Tajikistan.

The study was supported by the Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition (EEPCT) programme at UNICEF, which is in the final year of a five-year partnership with the Government of the Netherlands, with additional support from the European Commission.

The purpose of the study (henceforth referred to as the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’) was:

- To investigate the impact of fragility on education quality in Chechnya (Russian Federation), Georgia, Kosovo and Tajikistan, and its impact on adolescents and youth;
- To analyse adolescent and youth views from a regional perspective in order to identify cross-cutting regional trends concerning the impact of fragility on education quality; and
- To identify the areas of education quality in most urgent need of attention in each geographic context.

Youth researchers were trained to interview their peers and conduct focus group discussions to document the perspectives of stakeholders in the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research.’

The case study looked at promising and innovative practices, weaknesses and lessons learned through implementing the research programme. It found that young people have the capacity to use complex research methodologies and processes, as long as care is taken to train them well and address their ideas, needs and expectations.

The young participants demonstrated that research offers an opportunity to build capacity, engage the marginalized, inspire action and highlight youth capabilities. The involvement of youth throughout the study, even at operational levels, was a highlight of how the study was designed and implemented. Youth identified the main issues to be explored, developed the questions, and tested and revised the research tools. They developed advocacy statements and provided suggestions for how to address education challenges.

The research teams comprised both international and local experts, contextualizing the design and process of the study while maintaining consistency throughout all four countries. Youth researchers were selected from throughout their countries, representing various locations, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, gender and age groups. This diversity ensured more capacity and fostered greater trust with peers.

The youth researchers strongly believed that the young people being interviewed were more likely to discuss their problems with people of the same age and background. This “safe space” allowed young people to speak freely and explore issues important to them. Conversely, many youth, especially younger adolescents and girls, were afraid to speak openly in front of adults and authority figures. A further strength was the application of the girl-to-girl and boy-to-boy methodology. The peer-to-peer methodology not only contributed to the effectiveness of the study as a whole but it also empowered the youth researchers.

This case study helps to strengthen the future use of youth participatory designs in UNICEF programming. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’ methodology and process, particularly as part of broader EEPCT efforts, UNICEF is better positioned to more effectively implement current and future efforts that meaningfully involve youth.

The ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’ and the case study are strong steps towards keeping the promise to young people that their future dreams and educational needs will be realized. They are also strong reminders that youth participation is more than an effective and strategic approach; it is a wise investment in young people.

INTRODUCTION

The Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition (EEPCT) programme at UNICEF is in the final year of a five-year partnership with the Government of the Netherlands, with additional support from the European Commission. The EEPCT programme aims to “put education in emergency and post-crisis transition countries on a viable path of sustainable progress toward quality basic education for all.”¹

Partnership activities currently focus on evidence-building and programme consolidation to develop a more systematic approach to managing future innovation and learning, and to evaluate the impacts of those interventions. Among these evidence-building initiatives is the production of a series of case studies looking at hallmark interventions supported by the EEPCT programme. The case studies actively investigate and document the perspectives of stakeholders on the promising and innovative practices, weaknesses and lessons learned from the individual education projects.

‘A Study of Adolescent and Youth Perspectives on Education Quality in the Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States Region’, commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS)², has been selected as one of the case studies to be documented and reviewed.

The UNICEF regional office and four country offices conducted this innovative research study focusing on and promoting the direct participation of adolescents and youth in research, advocacy and programming. Youth were engaged at many levels, including planning and research, media and communications efforts to strengthen youth influence on decision makers and policies, and follow-up activities to the study. The youth programme focused specifically on Chechnya (Russian Federation), Georgia, Kosovo and Tajikistan.

The purpose of the study (henceforth referred to as the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’) was:

- To investigate the impact of fragility on education quality in Chechnya (Russian Federation), Georgia, Kosovo and Tajikistan, and its impact on adolescents and youth;
- To analyse adolescent and youth views from a regional perspective in order to identify cross-cutting regional trends concerning the impact of fragility on education quality; and

¹ United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Terms of Reference: Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition (EEPCT) case study on youth participatory research in CEE/CIS’, UNICEF, New York.

² The Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region is a UNICEF-defined geographic conglomeration, encompassing 22 countries divided into four subregions: The Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Western Commonwealth of Independent States (Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine), Central and South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

- To identify the areas of education quality in most urgent need of attention in each geographic context.

The study used qualitative research methods developed in collaboration with youth and was implemented by youth to access a wide range of perspectives and engage adolescents and youth whose voices are often not heard.

This case study serves to document the perspectives of stakeholders in the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' on the promising and innovative practices, weaknesses and lessons learned through implementing the research programme. The case study examines the research methodology, process and implementation in Kosovo and Tajikistan; highlights challenges identified from the research implementation; and offers recommendations about the feasibility for continuation, scale-up or replication by other UNICEF country programmes and partners around the world.

For the purpose of this case study (as well as for the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research'), youth is defined as people aged 13–24. This group is further broken down into two subgroups: early youth (ages 13–18) and late youth (ages 19–24). This definition was developed based on existing definitions of the United Nations General Assembly, which defines youth as people aged 15–24, and UNICEF, which uses the term 'adolescent' to define people aged 10–19. It should be noted that these age groups are used for research purposes. In reality the sub-categories are fluid. The characteristics of youth and their ages can vary between countries, between different subnational groups and between individuals and their experiences.³

Background on education quality in CEE/CIS

Research undertaken by the UNICEF Regional Office in 2007 and 2009 revealed troubling indicators of deteriorating education quality in the CEE/CIS region, with distinct effects on adolescents and youth.⁴ In particular, education quality in the region is faced with three overarching problems.⁵

- Despite evidence of need, national and international discourses on education have not adequately addressed the challenges facing adolescents and youth as a distinct group, especially in situations of fragility.

³ United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 'Concept Note: A study of adolescent and youth perspectives on the impact of fragility on education quality in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States', UNICEF, Geneva, 2009.

⁴ Two studies conducted by UNICEF indicate the need for the regional youth study: 'Education for Some More Than Others?: A regional study on education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS)', published by the CEE/CIS Regional Office in 2007, confirms a trend towards a deterioration of education, notably in the areas of access and equity, learning and labour market outcomes, and financing and governance; and 'Learning Achievement in the CEE/CIS Region: A comparative analysis of the results from the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment', published by the CEE/CIS Regional Office in 2009, confirms that education quality in the region has not kept pace with its economic development.

⁵ 'Concept Note'.

- Adolescent and youth perspectives are largely absent from discussions of education quality improvement.
- There has been little concrete investigation of the impact of fragility on education quality for adolescents and youth in the region.

Meaningful youth participation

According to the Youth Employment Network, a partnership between the United Nations, International Labour Organization, and the World Bank, "there is still a failure by decision-makers to recognize the value of young people's contributions to programme development and policymaking. The perception that policymaking is an activity that is for 'experts' and that young citizens do not have the necessary skills, expertise or knowledge, continues to prevail."⁶ Excluding youth can result in a range of consequences – from ineffective policies to the alienation of youth, which in itself can lead to more serious consequences for society.

Youth frequently report that even when they are given opportunities to be engaged, their participation is often not meaningful. Involvement may also have a positive or negative personal effect on youth. One must further consider which youth are participating; if one cohort is selected over another, there may be community implications and impacts on the research outcomes.⁷

Conversely, encouraging and emphasizing youth and adolescent participation in social, economic and political structures has the potential to contribute positively toward community development and peacebuilding.⁸ One such example, from another context, was the creation of a Children's Parliament in the Maluku Province of Indonesia. The Children's Parliament built relationships of trust and laid the groundwork for long-term peacebuilding between Muslim and Christian communities. The UNICEF Youth Education, Development and Participation Programme led this initiative and trained adolescents in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution skills.⁹

Meaningful youth participation can: increase awareness of children's and young people's rights; promote conflict resolution, tolerance and democratic principles; and develop young people's skills in negotiation, problem solving, critical thinking and communication. Participation can help build self-esteem, teamwork and social responsibility.¹⁰ Furthermore, successful outcomes of youth participation are often self-perpetuating or self-replicating.

⁶ Youth Consultative Group of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network, 'Joining Forces with Young People: A practical guide to collaboration for youth employment', Youth Employment Network, New York, 2007.

⁷ Family Health International in collaboration with Advocates for Youth, 'Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation', Family Health International, North Carolina, USA, 2008.

⁸ Save the Children, 'Practice Standards in Children's Participation', Save the Children, London, 2005.

⁹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Adolescent Programming Experiences During Conflict and Post-Conflict', UNICEF, New York, 2004.

¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund, 'The participation of children and young people in UNICEF country programme and national committee activities', Desk Review, UNICEF, New York, 2009.

When developing a youth study, it is important that young people are kept at the centre of the process. This may not always mean their direct involvement, although assessments benefit from meaningfully involving youth as often and as much as possible.¹¹ In an attempt to address these concerns and opportunities, the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' incorporated many youth-participation practices into its design, including information-sharing, consultation, and participatory decision-making, implementation and resource control.¹²

The study also fulfilled many of the central goals of youth participatory design, including engaging youth and developing partnerships; building skills; creating a sense of membership; establishing norms and expectations; fostering positive adult-youth relationships; and giving youth an opportunity to inform and serve their community.¹³

RESULTS FRAMEWORK OF THE INTERVENTION

The 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' sought to improve education quality for adolescents and youth in situations of fragility in the CEE/CIS region and address the challenges described above. UNICEF conducted a series of nationally representative, participatory studies on youth perspectives on education quality. Youth were at the heart of this work, researching and describing their understanding and experiences of education quality and its drivers. Youth were offered the opportunity and responsibility to "assess youth opinions about education quality based principally on their most recent experiences with formal education systems but also experiences in the more distant past, including before, during and after armed conflict."¹⁴

Peer-to-peer discussions centred on questions about the state of education quality, what factors affected it, and priorities and suggestions for improving it. Findings from the research served to provide valuable information about how youth (aged 13–24) "define, rate and prioritize improvements for education quality that are relevant for immediate follow-up" by UNICEF, the government, implementing partners, donors, communities and youth themselves in each country.¹⁵

Furthermore, by conducting the study using this unique approach, methodology and process, the international team and UNICEF hoped to increase and improve knowledge about the relationship among fragility, education quality and youth; inform and promote further research and action to improve education quality for youth in situations of fragility;

¹¹ 'Youth Participation Guide'.

¹² Adapted from Hart, Jason, 'Children's Participation in Humanitarian Action: Learning from zones of armed conflict; Synthesis report prepared for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)', Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2004; and 'Joining Forces with Young People: A practical guide to collaboration for youth employment'.

¹³ Academy for Educational Development, 'Best Practices: Positive youth development', Center for Youth Development and Engagement at the Academy for Educational Development, 2011.

¹⁴ Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, 'Draft Report - Fragility, Education Quality and Youth in the CEE/CIS Region: A comparison of youth perspectives on education quality in Kosovo, Georgia and Tajikistan', United Nations Children's Fund, Geneva, 2011.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and create opportunities and a platform for youth contributions to education policy and programme decision-making.¹⁶

DATA COLLECTION APPROACH FOR THIS CASE STUDY REPORT

Under the supervision of the UNICEF EEPCT project manager and the CEE/CIS regional education advisor, the consultant for this case study documented the stakeholders' perspectives on the strengths, weaknesses and lessons learned through the process of implementation of the Youth Participatory Research Programme.

Principal methodology

- Documentation of the study's Youth Participatory Research Programme implementation process, strategies and methods via review of the study reports and research instruments.
- Structured, focused one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and short, structured questionnaires for UNICEF staff and consultants involved with implementation of the original study (see Appendix 1).

Selecting the case-study stakeholders

There were two main categories of stakeholders: youth research teams and UNICEF. The youth research teams included youth researchers and youth supervisors. Youth researchers were selected for their unique and specific roles in implementing the national youth survey and focus groups, and for their contribution to the advocacy youth statement and earlier youth consultations. Youth supervisors served as a bridge between the communities of youth and young adults. They were adults who regularly partnered with youth and youth organizations in their community, and who fulfilled roles similar to the youth researchers in the original study.

UNICEF stakeholders consisted of UNICEF country and regional office staff, international and local consultants hired by the CEE/CIS regional office during the original national youth surveys. They provided a professional perspective on: the study's overall implementation as compared to other studies they had worked on in the past; national or regional impact; and implications for future scale-up or replication of similar programmes.

To select participants from the list of potential research team stakeholders, the case study investigator sent a request to UNICEF country offices in Kosovo and Tajikistan asking all of the former youth researchers and supervisors if they were available and willing to be interviewed. UNICEF stakeholders were selected based on their roles in the original 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research'. All stakeholder participation was voluntary and anonymous. The final number of 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' stakeholders interviewed or completing questionnaires in Kosovo and Tajikistan included:

- 21 youth researchers,

¹⁶ 'Concept Note'.

- 5 supervisors,
- 6 UNICEF education or youth protection officers,
- 1 local consultant,
- the UNICEF regional education officer, and
- the lead consultant responsible for the original study.

Limitations

Limitations were inherent in the sampling process of this case study and the completion of interviews. The sampling process involved securing interviews with stakeholders who were available and willing to meet with the lead investigator, and the case study period coincided with summer break and vacation for students and many professionals. The final sample, therefore, could not include those who were travelling; unable to get time off from work; occupied with religious observances; or physically, logistically or electronically inaccessible.

An additional and important limitation to note was the decision to select the primary consultant for the original 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' as the lead investigator for the case study. In order to address this limitation, the case study investigator emphasized at the beginning of each interview the need for stakeholders' honesty, to which they agreed. Additionally, by using confidential questionnaires completed by adult stakeholders in their own time, the case study investigator created a space through which the respondents could answer questions anonymously and honestly.

'ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVES RESEARCH' PROCESS, STRATEGIES AND METHODS¹⁷

This section describes the methodology, research set-up, process and implementation of the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' and a light analysis of each component. Although there are many components to the methodology, they can be summarized as follows:

- A. Stakeholder analyses
- B. Youth consultations
- C. National research team recruitment
- D. Youth researcher trainings
- E. Data collection process
- F. Sample development
- G. Youth advocacy statement development

The 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' research team consisted of youth researchers, research supervisors, a lead consultant and secondary lead consultant,

¹⁷ Text for this entire section is reprinted and adapted from Emry, Matthew, 'Four-Country Progress Report', United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Geneva, 2010.

local researchers, staff members from logistical organizations, data entry officers and a United States-based intern. The research team was supported by three international partners: UNICEF provided the overall coordination, logistical support and technical guidance to all consultants; and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provided additional technical assistance.

A. Stakeholder analyses

In consultation with UNICEF country offices, local researchers developed stakeholder analyses to: determine specific youth target groups, potential partnership arrangements and potential project partner roles; identify where stakeholder contributions could be utilized; and anticipate and address threats to the study's success. The stakeholder analyses identified all potential stakeholders in the study; their estimated importance to and influence on the study; their expertise and resources; their expectations and their likely main study role; the potential risks, problems or obstacles they might create; and the relationship between stakeholders. This step was important in deciding how to compose the youth research teams and how they could provide input into the study methodology.¹⁸

B. Youth consultations

Youth consultations served a four-fold purpose: 1) to develop a foundation for the questionnaires and focus groups; 2) to ensure strong youth participation and ownership of the research process; 3) to serve as a recruitment mechanism for identifying potential youth researchers; and 4) to build interest for the study among youth partners in each country.

The one-day youth consultations were held with youth aged 13–24 at each of the research sites early in the study's initial development and preparation phase. The youth consultation process provided the participants with an open space to capture and organize information about youth and education quality so that it could be used effectively in the study. Participating youth identified and defined key education quality and youth issues, and developed research questions they wanted to see incorporated into the study's structured survey and focus group discussions.

C. National research team recruitment

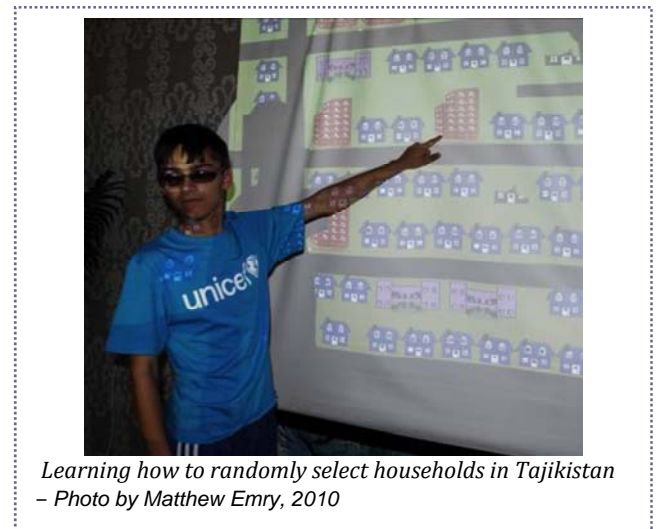
The local UNICEF consultants and the contracted local logistical organizations in each country recruited country-specific teams of youth researchers and supervisors to implement the study at each site. Notices were circulated through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth, newspaper, radio, and school and university networks. The team sought to recruit youth researchers between the ages of 18 and 24 with strong proven verbal, written communication and interpersonal skills. Preference was given to those with research experience and prior involvement or interest in activism on youth and education issues. Age exceptions for younger youth researchers were made for specific young people with strong skills and motivation. Given the structured nature of the survey, youth were not required to have extensive experience or training in qualitative methods.

¹⁸ Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, Op cit.

Recruiting an even mix of female and male researchers ensured adequate coverage for same-sex interviewing. Seeking researchers from a variety of geographic locations in each country facilitated project implementation in randomly selected locations and ensured a variety of language skills and ease of social interaction throughout the territories. The Kosovo Youth Research Team comprised 10 female and 12 male youth ranging in age from 17 to 24 and representing Albanian, Serb and minority communities. The Tajikistan Youth Research Team comprised 21 female and 21 male youth from each of Tajikistan's five regions. Like the youth researchers, the youth supervisors came from areas across each country to facilitate logistics and ease of social interaction.

D. Youth researcher training

Youth research teams at each site received a five-day training conducted by the study's lead researcher, supporting the secondary lead consultant and the national consultant. The primary goal was to ensure that the youth researchers, research team supervisors, and lead research teams (consultants and logistical organizations) understood their individual responsibilities, the survey methodologies, research instruments and logistical processes. The training also provided the research team – particularly the youth researchers – with an opportunity to pilot test, debate, revise and directly influence the structured survey questionnaire, focus-group questions and process prior to launching the study locally. This process ensured that the questionnaire fit the context and needs of youth and education quality in their country. The research team also identified and assigned focus group themes during the training.



Summary of training activities

The training team and individual youth researchers conducted regular team-building exercises throughout the training. Several youth researchers were selected by their peers as point people to gather daily confidential feedback on the training processes and on trainee needs and concerns. At the end of the training, the youth research team and supervisors worked with the international research team, local researcher and implementation partners to develop a detailed team implementation plan. Two-person subgroups of each of the larger youth research teams and research supervisors took responsibility for implementing the survey in specific geographic areas. They also committed to organizing and conducting focus groups with youth across their countries. Youth involved in designing and implementing the study were invited to participate in a one-day event to develop a youth advocacy statement, which will be described further below.

E. Data collection process

Youth researchers were deployed to conduct the participatory, nationally representative two-stage cluster surveys of youth. The studies were large-N surveys, ranging from 500 to 1,200 adolescents and youth in each site. Where youth inputs were largely similar in

each case, the questionnaires were structured and worded as similarly as possible to enhance comparability. At the same time, each contained questions and wording specific to the circumstances and interests of the youth in these areas.¹⁹

Participatory nationally representative two-stage cluster surveys

Youth research teams were always comprised of equal numbers of female and male youth (with one exception in Kosovo). Youth researchers were deployed in two-person subgroups to areas assigned based on a range of factors including location, size and language of the community.

Female researchers interviewed female respondents, and male researchers interviewed male respondents. Younger researchers (18–20) were always paired in sub-teams with older members of the research team (21 and older) to ensure mentorship from an older peer, enhance safety and address age discrimination. Research supervisors were female and male individuals, 25 or older. They were responsible for ensuring adherence to research protocol; supervising the accurate entry and coding of data; guaranteeing secure storage and transfer to the collection point; and overseeing the safety and security of the youth researchers.

In the field, the researchers were expected to follow the research protocols to ensure the random selection of youth respondents. The youth researchers interviewed youth between 13 and 24 years of age currently living in a household by asking questions from the standardized questionnaire. All interviews were conducted anonymously. Researchers informed all respondents of their rights, the purpose of the study and the assurance of confidentiality. Researchers had to acquire verbal parental consent for all respondents 17 years or younger.

Each team was given a budget to cover expenses related to travel and communication, a small daily per diem and a lockable bag to carry research supplies and completed questionnaires. Each researcher was given a UNICEF uniform and identification badge, as well as an explanatory letter from UNICEF in case authorities should ask about the research. Researchers were expected to arrange their own transportation, but received logistical support from their supervisor and the lead research team as needed. Research teams carried cell phones and were expected to communicate daily with either their supervisor or the lead research team to address any logistical, technical, protocol or security concerns and questions.

Focus groups

In addition to the questionnaires, each two-person subgroup was responsible for conducting focus groups with subsections of larger youth populations in their respective country. These group discussions, held with eight to ten participants for up to one-and-a-half hours, were facilitated by the two-member subgroups from each country-based youth research team. Discussions centred on learning more qualitative detail about youth experiences, needs and ideas to improve the situation for youth and education quality in each country. Groups included a wide range of in-

¹⁹ Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, Op cit.

school and out-of-school youth: those who had completed formal education and those who had dropped out; particular ethnic groups; urban and rural youth; youth education activists; parents; and others. The focus groups were also conducted anonymously.

F. Sample development²⁰

The approach to sampling for respondents to the questionnaire allowed UNICEF, youth and other stakeholders to generalize the study to the population of 13- to 24-year-olds in each country, making the study more scientifically sound. The methodology ensured a level of national representation via the randomly selected youth interviewed. The sampling also allowed for urban-to-rural comparisons, and in the case of Kosovo, ethnic comparisons, in addition to being highly representative overall. The Statistical Office of Kosovo and M-Vector in Tajikistan designed samples in collaboration with the lead consultant. In Kosovo, the sample was also designed to allow UNICEF to make inferences about youth 13–24 living in two geographic areas: one where the Kosovo Education System serves the vast majority of learners in Kosovo, and the other where the Republic of Serbia Education System serves the majority of the Serb population in Kosovo. A multistage method of sampling was used to design the samples.²¹

The sampling and the household selection methodology ensured access to a wide range of youth respondents, including but not limited to: adolescents and youth from all major ethnic and linguistic groups; in-school and out-of school adolescents and youth; employed and unemployed adolescents and youth; adolescents and youth living in rural and urban areas; adolescents and youth from two age subgroups, ages 13–18 and ages 19–24; internally displaced adolescents and youth, where relevant; and female and male youth.²²

G. Youth advocacy statements

Development of a youth call to action or youth advocacy statement was added to the overall project, but was not directly part of the data collection process. It served to give young people an additional platform to voice their opinions and ideas about the state of education quality and how to improve it. It is hoped that youth, UNICEF and other stakeholders will use the document expressing young people's views to promote the improvement of education quality for adolescents and youth locally, nationally and internationally.

Youth were also encouraged to develop creative follow-up strategies to capitalize on the study's eventual findings and to encourage UNICEF to maintain its support of youth-led initiatives. The youth ideas can be used to inform ongoing efforts to improve education quality by local youth organizations, local government and civil society stakeholders, and

²⁰ Text here reprinted and adapted from Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, Op cit.

²¹ Stratification was conducted first by region and then by settlement type (urban/rural). The sample sizes calculated were distributed among those strata proportional to their population size in Tajikistan, and in Kosovo, proportional to the distribution of households within randomly selected Enumeration Areas (without replacement). Households were randomly selected at the second stage of sampling. Eligible youth within these households were identified and randomly sampled using a protocol developed by the lead consultant and the Statistical Office of Kosovo and using the Kish table in Tajikistan. After the structured survey was implemented, the Statistical Office of Kosovo and M-Vector reweighted the samples based on actual response rates. (Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, Op cit.)

²² Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, Op cit.

by UNICEF and its partners. To see what type of follow-up has been developed in response to the study itself and the calls to action, refer to Appendix 2.

PROGRAMME MONITORING PROCESS AND DATA²³

The 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' did not develop a formal performance monitoring plan, but the study's processes, methodology and research instruments involved many of the requirements of one. The international and local consultants had Terms of Reference and deliverables that could be tracked and recorded, as did the youth researchers, supervisors and implementing partners.

In collaboration with the local researchers, the secondary lead consultant and the lead consultant, the implementing partners were responsible for supervising the work of the youth researchers and supervisors. The supervisory processes served as a performance monitoring mechanism during the data collection and reporting. Youth researchers had explicit timelines, clear procedures, standard daily reporting forms, daily telephone check-ins and opportunities for feedback in multiple directions. Research protocols were additionally checked through the data entry process. A data entry officer verified that all questions had been completed and checked for any anomalies that would point to youth researchers' non-adherence to proper research procedures and protocols.

PROMISING AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' was its development and use of promising and innovative practices. The youth researchers, youth supervisors, UNICEF staff and consultants agreed that the study was effective and would likely have a more meaningful impact as a result of using:

- Youth-centred processes from the study's early inception through design and implementation;
- A balanced and diverse team composition;
- Participatory training methodologies;
- Empowering, youth-approved research implementation processes;
- Methodologies ensuring diverse national and local youth perspectives;
- A confidential peer-to-peer approach;
- A coinciding workshop to develop youth calls to action on education quality.

Youth-centred processes from the study's early inception through design and implementation

As expressed by the youth researchers and UNICEF staff and consultants, the involvement of youth throughout the study's process, even at operational levels, was a highlight of how the study was designed and implemented. Youth identified the main

²³ Text here reprinted and adapted from an email communication with Lead Consultant Jane Lowicki-Zucca in August 2011.

education and youth issues to be explored, developed the questions, and tested and revised the research tools. They developed advocacy statements and provided suggestions for how to address education challenges.

A balanced and diverse team composition

The lead research team comprised both international and local experts, contextualizing the design and process of the study while maintaining consistency throughout all four countries. Youth researchers were selected from throughout their country; represented various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups; were equally female and male; were 16 to 24 years old; had directly experienced conflict and displacement; were youth activists or had never worked on youth issues; were from urban and rural communities; were in school or out of school; and were employed or without work. This diversity ensured more research team capacity and fostered greater trust with peers.

Participatory training methodologies

The training used many visual aids that made the methodology and processes easier to understand. The lead trainers treated the youth as professionals, valued them as researchers and implemented their suggestions. The youth also gained many new skills and capacities in research, interview processes, communication and problem solving; the implementation "promoted learning at the individual level". The youth researchers said that the trainers also remained connected to the youth on a personal level, while "other trainers were always too distant and were not really interested in us as youth". Several youth researchers expressed particular pleasure that they not only received a certificate of completion, but also received letters of recommendation from the trainers upon request.

Empowering youth-approved research implementation processes

The youth researchers liked that the research teams always consisted of one female and one male, and that one was always older than the other, helping them address potential concerns in the field. They also found it useful to complete and submit daily reports explaining their progress and any challenges they faced. This urged them to reflect on what they had accomplished that day. These continuous and daily monitoring processes and opportunities to work alone "helped to build [their] self-confidence and skills, and motivated [them] to do high-quality work". The youth researchers also appreciated the continued presence of international trainers after the workshop to provide supervision, respond to challenges and regularly visit the youth researchers in the field.

Methodologies ensuring diverse national and local youth perspectives

The random household and youth selection methodology ensured that all youth in the cluster areas had an equal likelihood of being selected and interviewed, so that youth of many backgrounds got to voice their opinions and present their ideas.

"Based on the methodology, we were supposed to interview a handicapped girl. The family said we should instead interview her 'smarter' sister, but we said, 'No, we have to interview the handicapped girl because of the methodology we are using.' It was her first chance ever to speak about issues important to her and to express her ideas and opinions."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

A confidential peer-to-peer approach

The youth researchers strongly believed that youth were more likely to discuss their problems with youth of the same age and background. This allowed young people to speak freely and explore ideas about issues important to them. Many youth, especially younger adolescents and girls, were afraid to speak openly in front of adults and authority figures. A further strength was the application of the girl-to-girl and boy-to-boy methodology. The youth researchers postulated further that, "adult researchers (adults in general) do not really listen to young people or care about or have the patience to hear what youth really want to say". The youth researchers universally felt that the peer-to-peer methodology was the greatest strength of the study.

A coinciding workshop to develop youth calls to action on education quality

The youth researchers appreciated assembling again for the advocacy youth statement workshop. This gave them an opportunity to share experiences, discuss what they had learned, develop a youth message focusing on their concerns and presenting ideas to national leaders, and learn new advocacy skills and processes.

LESSONS LEARNED

UNICEF staff and consultants stated unequivocally that the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' provided a unique and strong entry point for discussion with their ministries of education. The study was the "first time ever for this kind and level of focused research". It provided a first glimpse at post-primary education needs and their specific differences from primary education. The research filled gaps in existing reliable data, and the information gained was ever more important because it "comes directly from youth" and "is grounded on young people's realities and opinions". The data provided information that would enable education officials and stakeholders to "better understand the commonalities and differences between education systems [or how they are managed sub-regionally]" and the "educational experience of specific ethnic groups, regions and communities". UNICEF officers explained that partners and donors (United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, European Commission, German Agency for International Cooperation, and Aga Khan Foundation) all expressed great interest in learning more about the findings and developing strategic responses.

The youth opinions expressed through the study will help shape the future work of UNICEF in strengthening education quality locally and regionally. The study's process also empowers young people and builds their capacity to positively contribute to their society and education system. The overall success of the research implementation further encourages UNICEF and its partners to look more favourably on the process of youth participation, and offers UNICEF an important opportunity to advocate for strengthening and expanding youth participatory practices.

Creating a platform for youth to voice and document their perspectives

The success of the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’ provides compelling evidence that youth are capable of conducting complex research processes. Youth should be given opportunities to contribute to and control research methodologies. When given such opportunities, youth will take their roles seriously because they are personally invested. Adolescents and youth are eager to speak about and compare their experiences, challenges and ideas. For this reason, it is important to deploy and survey a highly diverse range of youth (socio-economic, regional, gender-related, ethnic, rural/urban, in-school/out- of-school, etc.).

One of the most unique and noteworthy aspects of the study was its youth-centred approach. Youth researchers, youth supervisors, UNICEF staff and consultants all pointed to the study's design as a landmark moment in education and youth research. In the words of one UNICEF officer, "It created an important precedent for youth participation in education reform processes and research," proving adolescents and young people could conduct high-quality research studies. Country offices need to "reflect on how to build on this model throughout its various programmes beyond education, not only from a research perspective, but with programmatic objectives in mind".

"The study methodology has allowed us for the first time in the history of education analysis and research [in our country] to use youth as researchers to find out what their peers think about education."

—UNICEF staff

"The study provided a rare opportunity when young people were meaningfully participating in the implementation of the research from very early stages of its design until its final implementation in the field. For young people, this meant both a great learning experience while working together with their peers in designing research instruments as well as higher ownership in the research process, which is not usually the case with other studies, where young people are considered for and consulted only purely as respondents."

—UNICEF staff

"The study teaches us that youth need to always be involved at the beginning of processes and that it is always better to involve youth in youth issues. It is important to train and involve youth as leaders. Youth are capable of doing research and drafting education policy content."

—UNICEF staff

"By UNICEF involving youth and youth groups, it has elevated the status of youth and their ability to engage the community and even the government. It shows the sophistication youth have to be engaged in such a way and at such a level."

—Youth researcher in Kosovo

As one youth researcher in Kosovo said, "Youth were involved in three ways: those working directly as researchers and supervisors; those who were interviewed; and those

who are related to us or are friends and were therefore aware of the study and interested in the process we used." Another youth researcher expressed the same sentiment, saying that even more youth were involved and benefited, "informally through passive watching [seeing their sibling being interviewed] or by helping to organize the process".²⁴ For many, the youth-centred experience was so new and so important that, as another youth researcher in Kosovo noted, "focus group participants didn't want to stop their discussion and continued even after the formal session was over".

According to one youth researcher in Kosovo, the study ensured that "a wide range of youth from around the country, including those from communities who are often neglected or afraid, could participate and express themselves for the first time". This idea was expressed in other countries as well.

"It was great to see youth who are very young and without experience provide input into the process and questionnaire. It was also good to see an equal number of girls and boys."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

"I [interviewed] a 22-year-old boy with mental impairment. I listened to him even though it was not easy to do. So it is good that we listened to everyone."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

"The study has inspired other youth to begin to voice their opinion or to ask others [for] theirs. Some youth said they would also conduct their own focus groups to discuss how to improve education."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

Perhaps the greatest lessons to come out of the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' were the changes in personal attitude within UNICEF itself:

"I have to admit that at the beginning we had doubts that youth were qualified enough to facilitate discussions around education quality with their peers and complete questionnaires/record focus group discussion outcomes in an objective and fair manner. As we progressed, it became clear the methodology was working well, and in fact interviewees felt more confident in expressing their opinions about the current state of education to their peers."

—UNICEF staff

As one youth researcher in Tajikistan said, "It is good that the government is aware that young people did the study and really contributed."

The personal responsibility felt by the youth researchers was as important as the opportunity. A youth researcher in Tajikistan stated, "I understood that our educational

²⁴ In both Georgia and Kosovo, those hired to manage the study's daily logistics were themselves younger than 25 years. Of particular note was the use of the Kosovar Youth Council as the main UNICEF implementing partner. Kosovar Youth Council, a youth-led organization, exemplifies the capacity of young people to be meaningfully engaged at the highest levels. Giving youth-led organizations high-level roles ensures that young people lead strategic processes.

future was in my hands. I felt great responsibility to collect proper information to give to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and UNICEF. The youth got really involved because they saw the importance of their information being passed to others. Even the siblings of respondents recognized the opportunity and wanted to be interviewed."

As several youth researchers explained, however, the quality of participation really depended on an individual's capacity and experience. According to one youth researcher in Tajikistan, "People prefer and are taught to keep their ideas in their head, especially children, [but] youth really enjoyed getting to express themselves. Some didn't even want us [researchers] to leave. If they see us in the street they come up and say hello and ask about the project." Youth researchers in both countries said that this was most evident among rural youth.

Providing a crucial youth-centred knowledge base for future action

A well-crafted nationally representative study can provide information to compare and contrast educational experiences between localities and provide structured information and data in fragmented and transitional societies. Given the opportunity, youth were able to highlight concerns, needs and sensitive issues that challenge the assumptions of education professionals, and they provided an opening for discussions at higher levels. The youth study also provided strong evidence that UNICEF needs to place more of its resources and attention into addressing post-primary education issues.

UNICEF country offices have received the final and complete databases from the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research'. With the database, each country office can conduct further analyses to develop unique projects tailored to sub-regions and specific populations. In the case of Kosovo, UNICEF and education stakeholders will also be able to focus on issues of parallel education and the politicization of education brought on by conflict and unresolved tensions. Furthermore, as expressed by one youth researcher in Kosovo:

"By nature, post-conflict communities are very unstructured and fragmented and most information about them or concerning them is equally unstructured, as it comes from disjointed and different angles. The methodology, process and implementation of our survey will enable us to provide a structured analysis, information and potentially structured responses to the government and NGOs. We can use the structured style of the information we gained to work in a more concrete way with NGOs and the government in post-conflict communities."

—Youth researcher in Kosovo

Youth researchers and UNICEF staff and consultants believed that the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' provided information that could not have been easily gained through other processes or sources because of its sensitive nature. This, they said, will lead to new procedural insights to address issues authorities have "been reluctant to ask about or have refused to acknowledge".

At the local level, the study provided "a fascinating focus on corruption, which had not been on UNICEF's radar before". And more generally, it helped UNICEF "identify issues not previously targeted or prioritized" by UNICEF or its partners. Particularly surprising to UNICEF officers in both countries was the study's finding of the youth's "overestimation of

One youth researcher's experience

Using youth as principal researchers provides young people with real-world opportunities for personal growth and empowerment. One example is a female youth researcher in Tajikistan who, despite her training, felt self-doubt and fear about venturing into a region with which she was unfamiliar. Her self-doubt came from a personal history of rejection and lack of involvement in her community, despite her passion and intelligence. Her mother convinced her to apply for the youth researcher position in hopes of building the young woman's self-confidence in a traditional society that does not always believe in the capacity of girls. At the end of the five-day training, and upon learning her site assignments, the young woman began to panic. She said she was not capable of going to the remote regions of Tajikistan and wanted to drop out of the study. After some encouragement and assurance from the secondary lead consultant and the national consultant, the young woman agreed to continue with her assignment. The consultants made sure to accompany the young woman and her team early in the study's implementation.

"I recognized my own capacity. I found my identity. Before participating in the study I honestly thought I would just end up being someone's housewife, but now I see that I have ambition to do so much more. I lost my fear. I created goals for myself to get more young people to work on education and other youth issues."

It was evident after a few days of research that the young woman had gained an immense amount of new self-confidence. Later during the youth advocacy statement workshop, the young woman spoke passionately about her personal experience, growth and learning while in the field. She had gained a new awareness of the conditions of young women in a part Tajik society with which she had never before engaged. She affirmed to the whole team that she now wants to do more to raise awareness of the situation of young women in that community and advocate for initiatives that will improve their lives and education. The young woman publicly thanked UNICEF for giving her a "life-changing" opportunity and believing in her when others had not. Other female and male youth researchers offered similar stories and gratitude in each of the study's countries.

Source: Emry, Matthew, 'Four-Country Progress Report', UNICEF Children's Fund Regional Office, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Geneva, 2010.

the quality of existing education". The UNICEF officers believed that this unexpected finding might come from the youth's "lack of experience and knowledge of what quality education should include and look like". The officers proposed that there might be "cultural barriers that affect youth's understanding of quality education" and that this insight warranted further investigation.

The youth researchers said that the comprehensive and focused nature of the study on many issues important to youth would "truly identify the strengths and weaknesses of education in [their]

communities" and provide a clearer picture of "how youth define their ideal education".

The youth researchers pointed to: girls' education and the specific challenges girls face in accessing education; school infrastructure (heating, electricity and sanitation); lack of resources in the classroom (computers, books, lab equipment and visual aids); teacher quality and the reported prevalence of informal fees posing additional hardship and further limiting access; the specific socio-economic challenges and barriers to rural youth; and uncertainty over if and how education officials used financial resources. The youth researchers also said that the study provided a unique glimpse into how religion and education interacted with one another. Other youth researchers expressed that the study offered their countries a new appreciation for minority experiences in education, such as those of the Bosnian, Roma, Turkish or Uzbek communities.

These windows into under-addressed issues and communities "force educators at the national level to recognize education realities and develop sound and informed responses based on real experiences".

"The study will hopefully make the MOE feel that they are being watched and observed. It provides real life information that the government can't refute because it comes from the United Nations, which holds a lot of weight and provides actual evidence. It will put pressure on them that they can't ignore."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

In terms of larger regional data, the study's findings provide UNICEF with strong evidence that "educational programming needs to consider interventions beyond basic education – the usual UNICEF field". Youth researchers specifically highlighted the study's evidence that "rural areas need more assistance, particularly because they are more fragile than urban areas, and face more complex issues" and that "there are important differences in educational experiences between people in different areas of the country".

Innovating future UNICEF research processes, methodologies and implementation

A youth-centred research approach builds pride among youth participants. A peer-to-peer methodology is not only beneficial for a study, it is also empowering for the youth researchers. Furthermore, a strong study results from youth-centred training that engages youth as professionals and builds their skills. Confidentiality and the lack of adult presence free youth to express themselves.

In taking action to improve education quality, UNICEF and its partners should consider the success of the peer-to-peer methodology a significant lesson learned. Every youth researcher interviewed for this case study stated unequivocally that the peer-to-peer method freed youth to express themselves. They would have been afraid to speak if adults had been the interviewers or had been present. The guarantee of confidentiality and the absence of an adult presence during the interviews and focus groups gave both the youth researchers and youth interviewees a sense of empowerment and control. It also reassured interviewees that their participation would not get them into trouble with authorities or their teachers.

"As youth we could get others to speak. If adults had done it, the youth would have just sat there. Youth were engaged at all levels and were also very young. I think this was intentional because, you see, youth will speak to other youth. Even if there was hesitation at first, they felt comfortable because we were peers and so they felt freer to express themselves."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

"Because we made parents leave the room and explained that the MOE wouldn't know who they are [...], the youth really expressed themselves and demonstrated that they were saying what they really feel and not just what their parents would want them to say."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

The peer-to-peer methodology was not only beneficial for the study, it was empowering for the youth researchers. A youth researcher in Tajikistan said, "The young people really wanted to talk and be listened to; it made me feel good that I could offer them this opportunity... One girl really wanted to do the study and spoke a long time about education. As a girl myself, I felt special that she could really participate and open up to me."

Youth researchers in both Kosovo and Tajikistan indicated youth respondents felt proud to be involved in such an important study, and attributed this in part to the training process and how they were "taken seriously". Youth researchers felt that UNICEF and its partners need to learn from the study's training process as they develop future initiatives to address any youth issue.

"During the training, if we raised issues, the trainers took our comments seriously and adjusted the training format, environment and methodologies."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

"[Our] training really taught us all the correct procedures and skills, and helped us understand why we need to follow certain procedures. People were treated professionally and we took their job seriously. It allowed youth from all different regions to share, learn and work together. It was a voyage through our whole country."

—Youth researcher in Tajikistan

Encouraging UNICEF to pre-plan follow-up strategies with and for youth

The youth researchers and UNICEF country office staff had different expectations and priorities for the study. Youth expected more follow-up to the study's implementation, while UNICEF had not adequately prepared to meet this expectation. Youth researchers had their own 'findings' from the study and developed their own responses, activities and projects. Without proper follow-up, youth will become cynical and disengaged, and UNICEF will lose them as valuable partners and sources of energy. The empowering process of youth research is as important as the data collected.

UNICEF entered into the study with education research as a principal priority, seeking valuable information that could inform future education strategies. By intent and design, UNICEF used a youth participatory methodology, which itself fulfilled a second objective. The youth participatory strategy served as youth programming, but as a UNICEF country officer noted, this aspect had not been at the forefront of the strategic planning process.

"There are some limitations to the youth participation aspect of this initiative, simply because it was conceptualized as a study. Naturally, the focus of this kind of initiative shifts to publishing a polished and peer-reviewed report. The risk is that in such an initiative the research objectives overtake the programmatic objectives, which is what has happened in this instance. Building on the example of this study, there is scope to use a similar approach across the programme, but with programmatic objectives as a driver. This would lead to participation that is more sustained and would turn research into action more smoothly."

—UNICEF country officer

In addition to information gathering, innovative youth participatory research serves the second purpose of youth empowerment. Therefore stakeholders need to plan activities and strategies, either, well in advance, or immediately after the study is complete. It should be noted that UNICEF regional and country offices had begun to develop substantive follow-up strategies and programmes; these had not, however, been communicated to or understood by the youth. The follow-up initiatives of both youth researchers and UNICEF are detailed in Appendix 2, and represent the wide array of steps taken to incorporate the study's preliminary learning and youth perspectives into the youth's own programming and personal actions.

Youth researchers develop their own follow-up to the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’ results – ‘Youth of the 21st Century’ in Kulyab, Tajikistan

How did the study help you identify the education challenges your peers are experiencing?

As youth researchers we conducted interviews and focus groups with many of our peers to identify and define the challenges other young people face in education across Tajikistan. The study gave us good first-hand knowledge about what youth are experiencing. We discovered that there are many youth facing unique and difficult health challenges preventing their access to education. We were so surprised and moved by the stories of disabled youth, especially those from poor families. They expressed a deep desire to finish their studies and go to university. The parents also wanted more for their children but felt powerless. They articulated a desire for accessible and fully stocked libraries, the freedom to choose and participate in sports activities, as well as to fully realize their potential and dreams. Together the disabled youth, and we researchers have created a circle of "What I and you can do!"

How have you decided to help your peers?

Several of us researchers are members of a youth-led NGO, ‘Youth of the 21st Century’ in Kulyab. We work to strengthen youth opportunities, conduct workshops, trainings, round tables, volunteer events, and summer and fall camps. We heard that the United States Embassy announced an open grant for young people with disabilities. Upon completing the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’, we discussed how we could specifically help disabled youth. We urgently wrote a project proposal titled ‘Summer school for children and youth with disabilities’.

What is the aim of your youth-led initiative?

The aim of this project is to identify those children and youth with disabilities and help them reach their potential and hopes. We have already begun to conduct specialized workshops at our summer camp on issues of leadership, the rights of the disabled, and much more. We have tried to make the activities as entertaining as possible and even bring the youth together in the evening to debate and watch movies. We will also provide disabled students with an accessible library, learning materials, computers, and organize athletic activities for them such as swimming. Without the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’, we may have never identified these issues, and because of it, we are now working to improve the lives and education of our peers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the key messages expressed by the youth researchers and UNICEF staff was: "Conduct this youth study with as many youth and in as many places as you can." The designers and implementers of the study should feel a sense of pride and accomplishment after such praise; however, the youth researchers also challenged UNICEF to consider ways to strengthen the study's methodology, process and implementation for future use.

If the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’ is to be continued, scaled up or replicated, a few recommendations should be considered:²⁵

²⁵ Note that the recommendations do not imply that nothing was done to address or consider methodological and implementation challenges identified by stakeholders during the original implementation phase of the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’. In some cases, recommendations simply point out the need to increase or strengthen procedures that were used in the ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’.

1. Improve and expand on the youth researcher and supervisor recruitment and selection process to ensure greater diversity and commitment of potential team members;
2. Adjust the timing and locations of the research to maximize participation and minimize hardships to participants;
3. Improve sampling procedures, expand participation processes and consider focusing on additional and overlapping research themes to capture even more youth perspectives and address more defined youth concerns;
4. Set clearer logistical and financial management structures and expectations; ensure adequate UNICEF funding and enlist more human resources in order to prevent unnecessary constraints on the research implementation;
5. Improve security procedures and ensure timely notification of local and national authorities to maximize youth researcher support and safety; and
6. Plan for and design more immediate follow-up strategies and activities to capitalize on the motivation and ideas of youth participants.

The following section will detail these specific recommendations from youth researchers, youth supervisors and UNICEF staff and consultants.

Improve and expand on youth researcher and supervisor recruitment and selection processes to ensure greater diversity and commitment from potential team members.

- Partner with smaller and more localized and regional youth organizations and centres rather than only with national-level youth NGOs. This will ensure greater diversity of youth researcher involvement and better representation of minority, ethnic and marginalized populations.
- Conduct face-to-face interviews with potential research team members to weed out applicants who are not truly committed. Speak to past employers of youth supervisors to ensure they will perform their duties completely. Use youth researchers who have a mixed background of experiences and qualifications, and consider their locations.
- Make sure the youth research teams have the language skills needed for their clusters.

Adjust the timing and locations of the research to maximize participation and minimize hardships to participants.

- Consider the time of year the study is implemented to maximize youth participation and minimize hardship to the research team. Consider factors such as weather, the academic year, summer vacation, and other studies.
- Consider diversifying locations of the youth researchers so that one youth is always from or familiar with the cluster area. Continue allowing other youth to experience new areas of their country, but increase security and capacity.

Improve sampling procedures, expand participation processes and consider focusing on additional and overlapping research themes to capture even more youth perspectives and address more defined youth concerns.

- Ensure that sampling is recent and representative of the youth population.

- Consider conducting focus groups in schools during the school year, but take steps to ensure a safe space and confidentiality for participants.
- Consider interviewing respondents' parents simultaneously and separately. This would add to the data the research gathers, allow for interesting comparisons and increasing youth respondent confidentiality.
- Find ways to increase the number of youth who can participate in the study, especially siblings and neighbors who also want to be included.
- Wait to assign focus-group themes to research teams until after the youth researchers have begun to conduct interviews. Teams will then better understand what themes make the most sense for their cluster populations.
- Consider the length of the questionnaire so that it is not too long, but still covers all necessary issues and questions. Also consider the language and terminology used in the questionnaire, which may alienate less educated or experienced households.
- Consider ways to make the focus-group structure less formal. Implement this approach with a coinciding workshop and training on education rights and youth participation.
- Focus not only on the lack of education quality, but on the root causes.
- Explicitly conduct cross-sectoral studies. Expand to consider non-formal and informal education.

Set clearer logistical and financial management structures and expectations, ensure adequate UNICEF funding and enlist more human resources in order to prevent unnecessary constraints on the research implementation.

- In managing research logistics, consider using experienced national NGOs with demonstrated investment in youth issues and participation, rather than for-profit or professional research companies.
- Make sure interpreters and translators are of the highest quality. All research instruments and documents must be translated properly to avoid confusion and frustration.
- Make sure UNICEF and MOE officials spend more time at the training.
- Provide more assistance to the youth researchers on budgeting, communication and transportation logistics. Do not assume the youth can manage this alone. Before the training begins, prepare budgets, travel distances, communication systems, etc.

Improve security procedures and ensure timely notification of local and national authorities to maximize youth researcher support and safety.

- Make sure that all authorities in cluster areas have been notified well in advance of the study and that they are prepared to assist with security issues.
- Discuss with the youth researchers their concerns and challenges in advance of the training. Address early and build into the training and research design any issues not pre-identified by the lead research team. Consider the specific security and cultural concerns for girls without minimizing their opportunity or capacity.
- Make sure that each two-person research team has a supervisor committed to her or his role and responsibilities. UNICEF budgeting needs to reflect this. Have the supervisor meet with the parents of the youth researchers to discuss any concerns and reinforce supervisor commitment.

- Ensure each team has more than adequate funds in advance to pay for transportation, lodging and potential emergencies. Youth researchers should have accurate maps of their cluster areas. Do not rely on the Internet for these maps.

Plan for and design more immediate follow-up strategies and activities to capitalize on the motivation and ideas of youth participants.

- Encourage and develop youth participation not only in the research, but also in longer-term UNICEF strategies. Make sure the research is not just gathering data about education quality, but part of a bigger picture. Keep the youth researchers engaged after the study is implemented to maintain them as supporters and partners.
- Ensure the government's full involvement throughout the planning and implementation process. This will increase the likelihood that the study results will be accepted and fully utilized to improve MOE education planning and management processes. Put monitoring systems in place to ensure youth recommendations and concerns are addressed.
- Spend quality time in advance of the study considering what follow-up UNICEF wants to conduct so that offices are prepared to more immediately implement these measures. Youth researchers need to be a part of this dialogue and decision-making process.
- Develop local monitoring projects to coincide with the period immediately after the study's implementation. Revisit each cluster area and meet with the youth interviewees, parents, educators and local leaders to discuss the results and next steps.

CONCLUSIONS

The 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' supported by EEPCT demonstrates the effectiveness and innovation of a youth peer-to-peer methodology. A youth-led process enables policymakers and agencies to approach sensitive topics that may otherwise remain too taboo to discuss. Young people are more willing to share openly with peers of the same background and experience than with adults. Engaging youth in meaningful ways also empowers young people with new skills, capacities and experiences they can use beyond the research, to further their own goals.

Young people prefer not to go it alone. They recognize the need for a synergy between themselves and dedicated adults. They only ask that adult partners trust and support them.

It is highly important to engage the often hidden local youth NGOs that represent minority groups and the underprivileged, less experienced or marginalized. Efforts will be more fruitful and representative with more diversity among the youth involved in research and programming.

Young people have the capacity to use complex methodologies and processes, as long as care is taken to train them well and address their ideas, needs and expectations.

Conducting a youth participatory study also raises awareness about the meaning of education quality and inspires dialogue among its participants.

Youth have demonstrated that research is more than the gathering of valuable data. It is an opportunity to build youth capacity, engage the marginalized, inspire action and highlight what youth are capable of in terms of leading and accomplishing. It is the responsibility of adult partners, including UNICEF, to maximize the energy and opportunity that youth present and provide. Involving youth at all stages and levels of research design, development and implementation is an innovative practice, as is planning with youth in advance how to capitalize on the findings and resulting activities. It is a promising practice to continue to engage youth individually, locally and nationally to ensure that their voices are not lost, their visions not forgotten.

UNICEF has a responsibility to the communities in which the study was conducted. The study not only increases knowledge, but also raises local expectations that something will be done with the responses and ideas given by the youth. Parents and young people feel new levels of empowerment and hope. Even if changes are made at national levels, there should be clear evidence that the changes can be felt locally. It is important that UNICEF meets with the individual communities to discuss the findings and potential follow-up strategies and initiatives. To neglect this step would sow the seeds of cynicism.

UNICEF and its partners can benefit from the lessons contained in the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research', specifically regarding how youth engagement can contribute to strengthening and stabilizing UNICEF programming and the nations themselves.

It should not go without saying that although there are many benefits to using innovative youth participatory processes, involving youth at this level and to this degree is challenging. Such initiatives involve many human and material resources and require in-depth critical thinking and planning from their earliest stages. Youth participatory practices should be approached with foresight, and with strategies to address the inherent challenges. Experts in youth participation should be included at multiple levels and stages.

Despite the risks, challenges and demands on resources, youth participatory approaches can be immensely beneficial to youth, UNICEF and the community itself. This case study helps to strengthen the future use of youth participatory designs in UNICEF programming. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' methodology and process, particularly as part of broader EEPCT efforts, UNICEF is positioned to learn how to improve upon future efforts to meaningfully involve youth effectively.

The findings in this case study have already encouraged UNICEF country offices to step up their efforts to keep the youth researchers involved in future activities to improve education quality. The process of researching this EEPCT-supported case study has itself helped UNICEF staff to reaffirm their commitment to youth, keeping young people central to (implementing) the mission of UNICEF work.

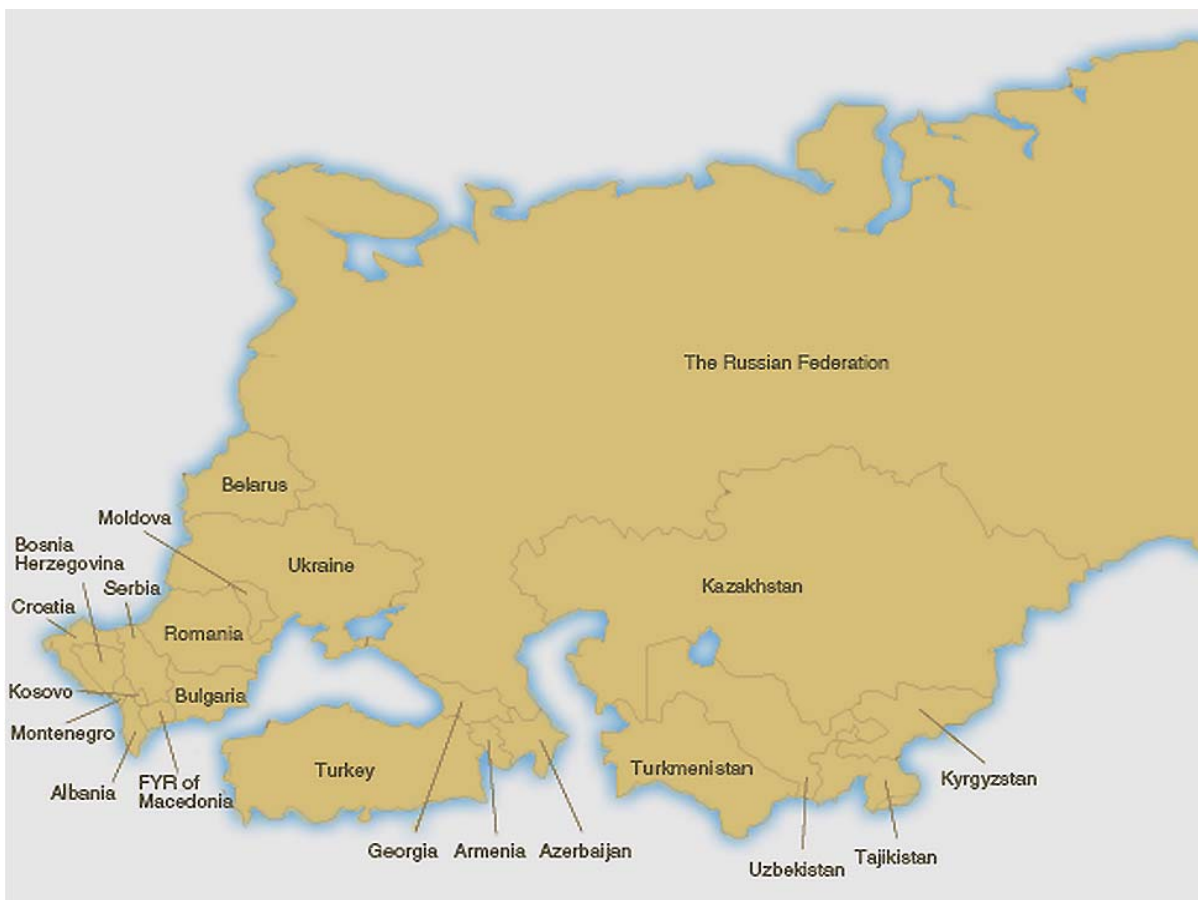
Undoubtedly, there is much still to be done to elevate the status and role of youth within their communities and in education, but the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' and the case study are strong steps towards keeping our promise to young people that we will continue to invest in their future dreams and present educational needs. They are also strong reminders that youth participation is more than an effective and strategic approach; it is also a wise investment in our young people.

The sense of accomplishment, empowerment and hope inspired by the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' is a testament to the hard work that went into the development and implementation of the groundbreaking processes and methodologies. A special mention should be made of the vision, capacity and dedication of numerous individuals who recognized not only that education quality at the secondary and tertiary level needed special focus, but also that young people themselves should have an active and leading role in addressing the challenges they face.

The 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' lead researcher and the UNICEF regional office education officer and coordinator deserve special credit for leveraging EEPCT funds to promote the unique processes and methodologies used to elevate the level of education dialogue and the status of youth.

The countless youth researchers and youth participants deserve the greatest credit for so boldly and enthusiastically embracing the challenge and opportunity to express themselves, confronting misconceptions about youth and the education they receive. Without the youth, we would have not learned such valuable lessons, identified the most innovative practices or reflected on ways to expand and improve research processes and education quality.

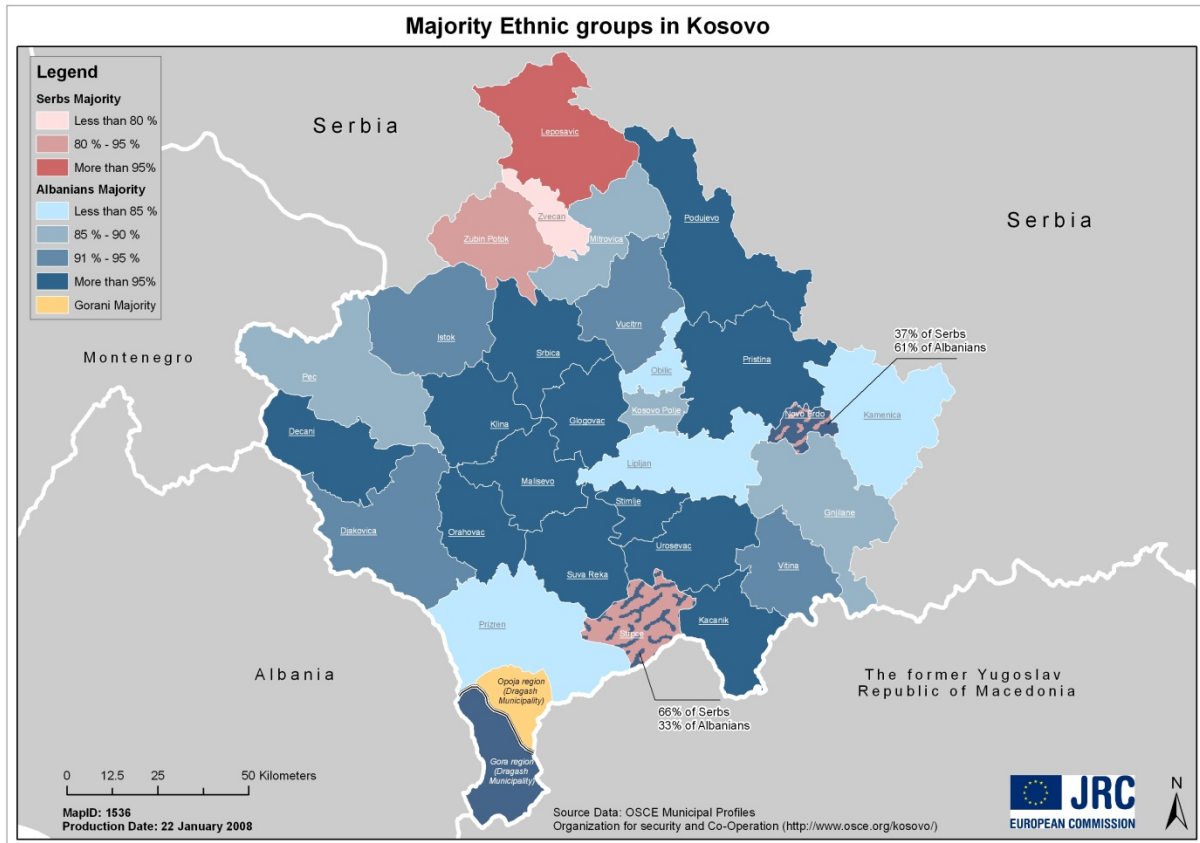
Annex 1: Maps



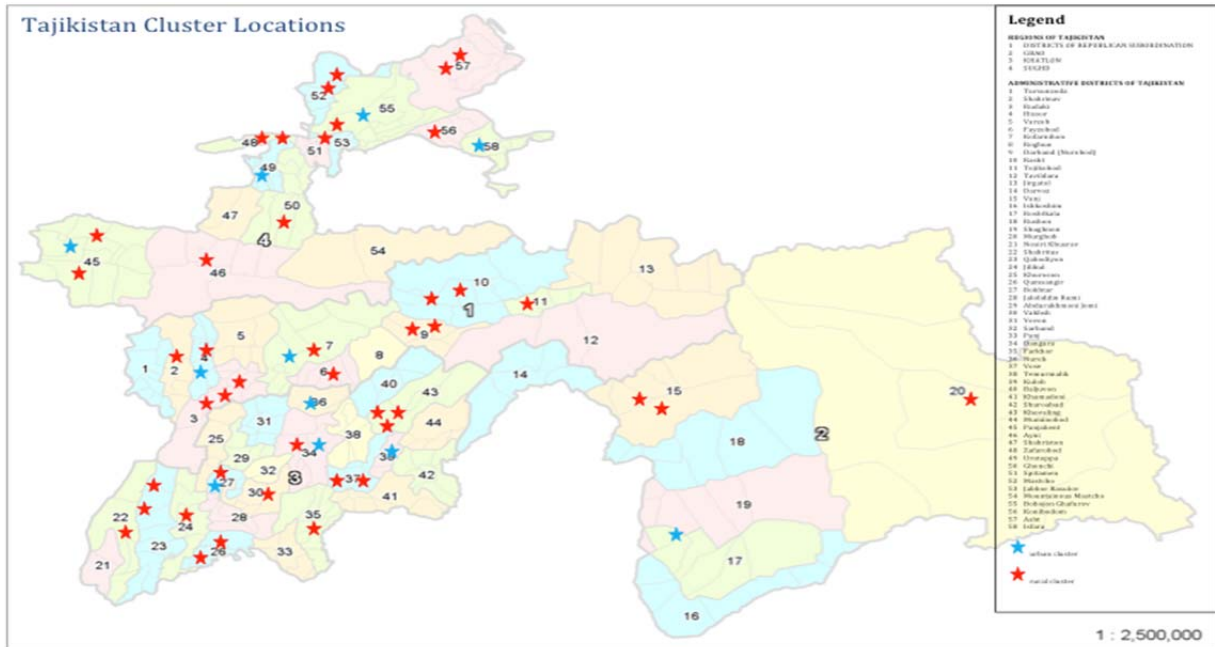
Composition of the UNICEF CEE/CIS region

**The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.*

Map of Kosovo, delineating major ethnic groups



Tajikistan youth and education quality study primary sampling units



Source: Reprinted from Lowicki-Zucca, Jane, 'Draft Report – Fragility, Education Quality and Youth in the CEE/CIS Region: A comparison of youth perspectives on education quality in Kosovo, Georgia and Tajikistan', United Nations Children's Fund, Geneva, 2011.

Annex 2: Calendar of ‘Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research’ programme implementation

Date	Location	Primary Research Activity
November 2009	International	Literature review
January–March 2010	International	Trend analysis
December 2009	Kosovo and Tajikistan	Stakeholder analyses
January 2010 (Kosovo) March 2010 (Tajikistan)	Kosovo and Tajikistan	Youth consultations
January 2010 (Kosovo) June 2010 (Tajikistan)	Kosovo and Tajikistan	National research team recruitment
January 2010 (Kosovo) June 2010 (Tajikistan)	Kosovo and Tajikistan	Sample development
November 2009–February 2010 (Kosovo) November 2009–July 2010 (Tajikistan)	Kosovo and Tajikistan	Methodology and research instrument development
February 2010 (Kosovo) July 2010 (Tajikistan)	Kosovo and Tajikistan	Youth researcher trainings; data collection process: Participatory nationally representative two-stage cluster surveys (questionnaires) and focus groups; youth advocacy statement development
March–September 2010	International	Data analysis

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview handout and questions

Introduction and Explanation of the Case Study Purpose and Process²⁶

You have been selected to be interviewed as part of a follow-up to the 'Study of Adolescent and Youth Perspectives on The Impact of Fragility on Education Quality in The Region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States' Survey conducted in 2010.

You participated in the original youth study as a youth researcher, supervisor, consultant or UNICEF officer. It is also possible that you may have not participated directly, but instead were aware of the study's implementation and process.

Thank you for your participation. This follow-up case study is being supported by UNICEF to document the stakeholders' perspectives of the strengths, weaknesses and lessons learned through the process of implementation of the Youth Participatory Research Programme conducted in 2010. The interview/questionnaire process should only take up to an hour. Participation in this interview (completion of this questionnaire) is anonymous. Your name will not be asked, taken or reported in any form. Confidentiality will also be maintained at all levels. The interviewer will ask and take note of your answers but they will not be attributed to you directly. If there is a translator present, s/he has been instructed and legally obligated to maintain strict adherence to all confidentiality protocols.

The questions are not particularly sensitive. We do not anticipate risks to participants of any kind. Although we hope all participants will complete the interview/questionnaire process, you are free to stop the interview at any time. Again, however, we do not anticipate particularly sensitive issues. For young people under 18, consent from both the young person and their parent or guardian is required.

The findings of the interviews/questionnaire to be conducted/completed will be analyzed and compiled in a UNICEF case study report. The case study report and its findings will be released and promoted, and will include your recommendations for how to improve and expand youth participation in research processes addressing education quality or similar program areas. Your input is critical. Thank you very much for your participation!

If you would like to be involved in efforts to improve education quality in COUNTRY, please contact UNICEF at CONTACT.

²⁶ The 'Introduction and Explanation' and the 'Interview Release' listed here were given to the youth researchers at the beginning of their interview. A similar version accompanied the questionnaires given to the UNICEF stakeholders.

Interview Release Agreement

By accepting this release form, I understand and agree to be interviewed and audio recorded by the **United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)**. I also recognize that I have the right to refuse to be audio recorded, but still be interviewed and have my comments noted by the UNICEF Researcher in written form only.

I understand that the purpose of this interview is to document my perspectives of the strengths, weaknesses and lessons learned through the process of implementing the youth participatory research study ‘A Study of Adolescent and Youth Perspectives on The Impact of Fragility on Education Quality in The Region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States’ originally implemented by UNICEF in 2010.

The audio recording will be used to supplement the researcher's note taking. The audio recording itself will not be disseminated or published. My participation will be kept anonymous, and no personally identifying information will be collected. UNICEF will not ask for my name or location.

By accepting this release form, I grant to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) the right to interview and audio record me and to publish my comments in UNICEF printed publications, for all time, in any media, anywhere in the world without identifying my name or personally identifying information, to promote other UNICEF information and fundraising. I affirm that I am NOT a UNICEF-contracted employee. I affirm that my interview is voluntary and that my decision to participate in the interview process is not influenced by fear that refusal to volunteer may affect my, or a member of my family’s well-being, legal rights, studies, employment or care.

Central questions and sub-questions asked during the case study interviews

- 1. How did this study involve youth voices into national education reform efforts, interventions by the international community and international discourse on education development?**
 - In what ways do you feel youth were involved in the national study that was implemented in 2010? What roles did youth have?
 - Were the roles that youth had in this study a real opportunity to be involved or just symbolic opportunities?
 - What are additional ways youth could have been involved in the study?
 - What did you personally gain from participating in the study?

- 2. What did this study contribute to concrete investigation of the impact of fragility on education quality for adolescents and youth in the CEE/CIS region?**
 - Are there any indications that the study will have an impact?
 - Now that you have participated did it affect the way you look at education and what it means for you personally?

- 3. Did this study promote local discussions on improving education quality for adolescents and youth, for future research on adolescent and youth issues and for future action by youth, governments, UNICEF and partner organizations?**
 - Has there been any change in the local level of discussion about education or youth issues because of the study?
 - Have you or others become more involved locally in improving education or other youth issues because of the study? How?

- 4. Did this study create a platform for adolescents and youth to voice their perspectives, and document these perspectives so that they may be integrated into local and international discussions of education improvement?**
 - Do you feel that this study created a base/opportunity for youth to present their perspectives and ideas on education quality? How and why or why not?
 - Was this study different from other studies you have participated in?

- 5. What critical knowledge base did this study contribute to UNICEF's strategy for future action and advocacy towards improving education quality for adolescents and youth living in situations of fragility? (What lessons learned did this study provide that UNICEF can use to improve education quality in communities experiencing challenges?)**

- 6. What critical knowledge base did this study contribute to UNICEF's strategy for future action and advocacy towards involving youth voices into national education reform efforts and interventions?**
 - What are the main lessons UNICEF should learn from the study's process about involving youth in addressing education quality? How should UNICEF use these lessons learned?

- 7. Did the national youth study help you to strategically frame future work with youth (or in general)? What are your plans for using the national youth study and/or developing future work with youth?**
 - Did the national youth study help you or others to develop future projects/activities with and for youth? What are these plans?

- 8. If this study were to be replicated or expanded, what crucial advice and suggestions would you offer to improve its process and implementation?**
 - Were there any particular weaknesses to the study's, methodology, process or implementation? Any strengths? How would you improve upon the study?

- 9. What message would you send to youth about education and about youth participation?**

Questionnaire for UNICEF staff, consultants and contractors

1. What did this study contribute to the investigation of education quality for adolescents and youth in your country?
2. Are there any current indications that there will be important impacts from the study on education quality for adolescents and youth in your country?
3. How did this study create a platform for adolescents and youth to voice and document their perspectives?
4. Can you provide a specific example of how the youth perspectives raised in the study have been integrated into UNICEF, local or international discussions of education improvement because of the study? Who was involved in those discussions, youth, UNICEF, government, researchers?
5. UNICEF country offices were insistent that we not use the term 'fragility' despite the study being about the impact of 'fragility' on education quality. Why do you think this is? What word would you use to replace the term 'fragility?' Why?
6. What knowledge, if any, did this study contribute to UNICEF's (Kosovo or Tajikistan) strategy for future action towards improving education quality for adolescents and youth living in situation of fragility? What are your plans for using the national youth study and/or developing future work with youth?
7. What were particular strengths of the study's design, process and implementation that should be replicated or expanded upon in other countries and programs?
8. If this study were to be replicated or expanded, what crucial advice and suggestions would you offer to improve its process and implementation? What do you feel was a particular challenge in the study's design, process or implementation? How would you improve upon the study?

Appendix 2: Resulting follow-up actions and plans

UNICEF Regional Office, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

The UNICEF regional office is currently working to build on the research findings to create more opportunities for youth participation in education improvements. An international launch of the country reports in late 2011 will highlight the role of youth throughout the study. Youth researchers themselves will be central presenters and participants.

The regional office has also been building support to fund youth-proposed projects developed specifically in response to the study's findings.

UNICEF Kosovo Country Office

Upon finalization of the study, an official launch will publicly present the youth perspectives to key education stakeholders in Kosovo. In the meantime, linkages have been identified between UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo²⁷ and issues raised by the youth in the study, such as youth empowerment through participation, increased learning opportunities, creation of job opportunities and so on.

Furthermore, as a result of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Kosovar Youth Council's involvement as both youth researchers and the study's principal implementing partner, secondary school students and the Ministry of Education (MOE) held a round-table discussion related to the draft Kosovo Curriculum Framework.

UNICEF Tajikistan Country Office

As a direct follow-up to the study, in September 2011 UNICEF Tajikistan will call on youth NGOs to submit proposals for innovative projects addressing education quality and engaging youth for the improvement of their education systems. UNICEF Tajikistan will focus on youth needs (in contrast to younger children) in its future work plans with the MOE. Additionally, UNICEF Tajikistan has begun internal discussions related to the study's finding that youth report prevalent corruption in the education system. UNICEF is planning to hold discussions with the MOE and youth committee.

UNICEF Tajikistan is also preparing a national launch of the study, after which discussions will expand beyond UNICEF to influence or encourage local and national institutions and other stakeholders to include youth perspectives.

Future strategies

Both UNICEF country offices have explicitly indicated intentions to develop customized responses to unique issues raised in the study's findings, including both education and socio-economic inequalities affecting education access and quality. Both country offices

²⁷ UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo is a youth-run programme that cultivates innovations for the benefit of Kosovo youth. 'By Youth for Youth' projects are a chance for Kosovo youth to influence their own lives and those of their peers. 'The Design Center' directly designs and implements technological innovations for Kosovo institutions that work on behalf of youth and children. Find the Innovations Lab at <<http://kosovoinnovations.org>> and <www.facebook.com/KosovoInnovations>.

are considering how to use a similar study design or youth participatory process to address other sector areas such as protection, health, gender, and livelihoods.

Youth-led initiatives

Presently, the most significant impact from the study may be at the local and personal level – the process of awareness raising and critical thinking by young people involved in the research and their follow-up with concrete youth-led activities.

Kosovo youth

Youth researchers in Kosovo have used the study's process or 'findings' to individually:

- Restart a project on domestic violence and getting girls to return to school with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
- Create a support group to directly and personally help other students get the books they need and offer tutoring.
- Begin designing a study on Roma education using the strategies and methodologies from the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research'.
- Develop an organizational work plan to improve youth involvement in drafting education policies, organize youth round tables and disseminate the study's findings to the MOE and youth.
- Lead student council meetings to speak with municipal leaders and teachers about the youth-identified challenges in education, such as transportation and girls' education access and enrollment.
- Develop organizational trainings for a local youth NGO and use focus group methodologies to conduct additional meetings with youth members.
- Incorporate methods from the study to develop NGO work plans.
- Consider examining rural versus urban youth issues in their NGO strategies.
- Hold private and personal meetings with the local mayor to discuss school computer lab resources.
- Change the topic of family conversation to issues such as smoking or drinking and school.

Tajikistan youth

Youth researchers in Tajikistan have used the study's process or 'findings' to individually:

- Introduce education to their debate group, when before they had only discussed other issues.
- Defend peers abused by the education system by speaking directly to the education department in their community.
- Meet with and motivate a newly elected Parliament representative to speak to youth gatherings, use language from the 'Adolescent and Youth Perspectives Research' and cite examples of locally inadequate education.
- Work with the Dutch government to conduct advocacy work on 'community decision-making processes'.
- Change personal teaching styles and methodologies to adapt to the needs and preferences of students.
- Start an initiative to help disabled students.
- Develop NGO strategies to address gender and education issues.
- Provide peer-based tutoring and material assistance to impoverished school girls.

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December 2011