**Paper 11: Youth and Student’s Organising**

**How has Youth and Student Organising evolved? Strategies and way forward in Youth and Students organising within the movement and beyond**

Despite strong assumptions of an apathetic youth cohort, young people are at the helm of many social movements, leaders in their own communities, and main movers and shakers in their schools and universities. All of which occurred during and beyond COVID-19.

On the World Assembly agenda, are strategies for youth and students' organising within the movement and beyond. This aspect will cover how youth and students' activism has changed and evolved and will serve as the official launch of the Global Youth and Students' Organising Report and accompanying toolkit. The discussions will highlight youth voices and policy recommendations emerging from the research and how the movement can engage youth and students moving forward.

1. **Contextual Analysis: Youth and Students’ Organising and Activism**

Against the backdrop of an adult-dominated world, acts of activism challenge what has been described as ‘youth deficit’ thinking prevalent within discussions on youth political engagement. Young people and students are often seen as apathetic, frustrated, and disenchanted. When they do organise, their work is devalued because they are thought of as inexperienced, troubled, and at-risk for being derailed from responsible adulthood.

During the pandemic, there were many negative stereotyping references like young people being averse to getting vaccinated or too stubborn to follow COVID-19 rules. Still, their movements exist even against the backdrop of shrinking civil society spaces that meet youth activism with unfair criminalisation, surveillance, and policing. Young people’s and students’ social action persists even in moments of multiple crises exacerbated by the pandemic and the challenge of growing inequalities, the climate emergency, unemployment, and continuing conflicts and wars.

There is overwhelming evidence on the complex and multiple impact of the pandemic on young people’s education and employment. However, little is known about how COVID-19 has influenced youth and student organising and activism.

The Youth and Student Report titled ***“Setting Spaces for Youth and Students Engagement”*** brings fresh insight on the realities and experiences of youth and student organisers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws from a desk review and semi-structured interviews with youth and student organisers, stakeholders, and regional leaders from the GCE’s youth and student networks in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East & North Africa, and South East Asia.

This research demonstrates that youth and student organisers are innovators and creative-thinkers, unafraid of breaking the mould and challenging the status quo – regardless of limited resources, new challenges, and punitive responses from state and non-state actors. During fast-paced and intersecting crises during the pandemic, young people take matters into their own hands and responsively adapt  their work to the needs.

1. **Key Findings of the Research Report**

Unpacking the state of youth and student organising during the pandemic, the Report presents the following key findings:

* **Moving across platforms shifts in tools and modes of organising**

While many youth and student activists turned to virtual and online spaces to protest, raise awareness, and conduct activities, several maintained face-to-face interactions and hybrid forms of organising.

* **Recalibrating aims and advocacy priorities**

The complex impact facilitated by the pandemic influenced young people to shift their focus to respond to the realities at that time

* **Changing resourcing and funding landscapes**

Youth and student organisers needed to navigate a funding landscape that shifted its focus to financing immediate responses to the pandemic,  tech-based interventions to education.

* **Increased demand for genuine and meaningful participation**

Young people are pushing back against tokenism and non-representative spaces for dialogue on criminalisation, policing, and control. Young people, stakeholders, and regional leaders have highlighted the importance of meaningful youth engagement and representation in policy dialogues that impact their lives.

* **COVID-19 has had multidimensional impacts to youth and student organisers**

While common discourse has focussed on young people’s contribution to pandemic responses, this Report highlights the complex physical, mental, and economic impact of the pandemic on young people’s personal lives, livelihoods, and schooling. Student and youth organisers are also vulnerable to trauma and violence during their activism.

* **The pandemic has helped facilitate borderless solidarity**

The pandemic became a shared experience that facilitated solidarity and inspired youth and students – regionally and internationally, to collaboratively find solutions to local problems. The collaborations and linkages provided opportunities for learning and sharing best practices.

Within that context the GCE makes four key policy recommendations aimed at government, policy makers, international organisations, and civil society organisations:

* Define and ensure genuine and meaningful participation and advocacy  in domestic policy and international bodies.
* Build back better by increasing capacity and digital access for youth and student organisers.
* Invest in youth organising, through flexible funding mechanisms, resourcing, and spending for an inclusive and resilient recovery.
* Invest in mental  health and psycho-social support programmes and activities for activists particularly in emergency contexts.

1. **Key Discussion Questions**

* What strategies are youth and students implementing in organising, advocacy and activism in different contexts across the movement?
* How can the GCE movement hold policymakers accountable to the policy recommendations on youth and student engagement?
* What are the strides being made by the movement towards mental health and what more can be done?
* How can the GCE movement leverage digital access for youth and student organising?

**IV. Reference documents**

GCE Research Report on Youth and Student Organising\_Setting Spaces for Youth and Students’ Advocacy