17 november 2021

Strengthening Civil Society: YOUTH!

Dear reader,
As the new Youth Ambassador for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Bodily Autonomy and Gender Equality I am honored to write the introduction of this newsletter, which centers around youth!

In anticipation of World Children’s Day on November 20, we highlight the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our partners to safeguard happy and healthy futures for the new generation. As a young person myself I feel a lot of passion and power to improve the position of young people. It is inspiring and motivating to learn about the many other initiatives young people are working on, such as the Youth Advisory Committee of the Dutch MFA, young people’s participation in the many strategic partnerships, the UN Our Common Agenda and Gen G’s Youth Board - learn more about them in this letter!

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is committed to put young people at the heart of our policies and programmes for international cooperation. Not to work for young people as mere beneficiaries, but to work with them as leaders and partners. This is precisely my task the coming year: To make sure young people’s voices are heard in policy-making and decision-making, both nationally and internationally. I am deeply committed to this task as a person and ambassador. Besides my active participation in events and decision-making processes, I am looking forward to working with colleagues and partners worldwide, on including young people’s voices. Reach out if you want to bounce ideas, share experiences or keep me up to date about your work. Almost a year has passed since the start of the policy framework Strengthening Civil Society. I am curious to learn how you, our colleagues and partners worldwide, have young people at the forefront and collaboratively grow.

Personally, I dedicate myself to improving young people’s sexual and reproductive rights. I have chosen to focus on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and period poverty. Why? Because I believe that CSE is a great way to help young people make more informed choices about their lives and bodies. The recent Truth Gap report by Plan International – handed to Karen Burbach, head of the Task Force Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, and me on Girls’ Day – draws attention to the fact that unequal access to reliable online information and digital illiteracy means that girls in many countries do not have access to information about menstruation, pregnancy, contraception or safe abortion. In an era of online
misinformation and disinformation, CSE is more important than ever. Plus period poverty is something that is often forgotten, but still a persistent problem – also in the Netherlands.

I will do my utmost best to help solve these issues and meaningfully include young people in the process. At the Dutch MFA, we have already started a small working group on CSE, and I am beyond excited to see what this and other youth-led and youth-initiated initiatives will bring.

Don’t forget, if you have feedback, ideas, or other interesting thoughts, feel free to contact me!

Laura Bas

1 - Starting soon: the Youth Advisory Committee

In line with the ambition to have young people at the heart of our policies and programmes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently working closely with the Dutch National Youth Council (NJR) to set up a youth advisory committee. This committee – comprising around ten young people from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Uganda, South Sudan and the Netherlands – will advise on the delivery of the Youth at Heart strategy and on wider policies.
impacting young people. As such, it will provide a platform for ongoing dialogue between international youth and policy makers within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The committee will become operational by the end of this year. Opportunities for our partners to get to know the Youth Advisory Committee will be shared in future editions of this newsletter.

During the ‘One Year Youth at Heart – Youth in the Lead’ event on Monday November 22 between 3-4:45 PM CET, the committee will be launched. The event will present results of Dutch policy, programs and diplomacy with a focus on meaningful youth participation, and we'll have a dialogue with youth and international partners on efforts and needs towards the future. As such, it will act as a platform achievements and lessons learned along the way. This one-off event is for both colleagues and partners and we welcome you to join us! Please sign up via this link. If you cannot attend the event, do share your experiences and successes with us. We are very interested to hear and learn from your experiences and best practices on meaningful youth participation in your own organisations and networks!

2 - Power of Youth Voices: How do you engage young people?

Throughout history, young people have always been at the forefront of change. They are creative, inventive and sharp when it comes to challenging inequalities and injustices and prompting social change. As such, it is paramount for young people to be front and center in civil society and in decision-making. Yet, many young people worldwide still remain underrepresented, excluded and unheard. Cultural factors, power structures that maintain the status quo of an older generation, and changing political leadership may form obstacles to youth engagement. The Strengthening Civil Society programmes provide an important opportunity for meaningful engagement of young people as leaders and partners in lobby and advocacy and in strategic decision-making. What is the status of youth participation amongst our Strengthening Civil Society partners?

A first analysis of youth engagement and empowerment partnerships, focusing specifically on those within Power of Voices, shows that almost all partnerships recognise the importance of meaningfully engaging young people. Many partnerships aim to include young people in planning and execution of the lobby and advocacy initiatives. However, the degree to which young people are involved in strategic programme management or decision-making differs greatly, from almost absent in some cases to having a Youth Board in place. Also, defending the
rights of young people receives little mention. As civic space is under pressure worldwide, addressing the specific risks, threats and challenges that young human rights activists face is crucial. The findings from this first analysis can be used to reflect on the level of youth engagement in your own work, and as an inspiration to share good practices. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is excited to contribute to these efforts and interested to see how partnerships will further strengthen the power of youth voices!

3 – Insights from a partner: Rutgers' Youth Board Gen G

How do our partners meaningfully engage young people in policy-making and decision-making?

The Generation G(ender) Youth Board serves as a great example.

The Generation G partnership, an initiative of our partner Rutgers International, addresses the root causes of gender inequality by engaging youth leaders and civil society organisations, and shaking existing gender norms in parts of Africa, the Middle-East and Asia. Geoffry Ariong Ochieng, co-chair of the Generation G Youth Board, explains and shares his experiences.

Generation G’s Youth Board comprises of seven youth leaders from seven countries: Uganda, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Indonesia, Rwanda and South Africa. We have a 5-year mandate, which means we are able to track progress and make sure change actually follows through. Young people form a huge part of the world population, but we need to claim a seat in spaces where decisions are made. Only then can we shake things, to make sure we are beneficiaries and not victims of existing structures and norms.

How we work? The Board’s aim is to enable meaningful and inclusive participation of young people at all levels of the programme, including at the highest level of decision-making at the strategic global level and at the highest global operational level. The board is led by Nelvia Rawheath (the South African chair) and me. We
participate on equal terms with the rest of the adult members to ensure that young people’s needs, interests and lived realities are addressed and put at the forefront.

At a personal level, this has been a great opportunity to represent youth voices, both at country level decision-making and at the global level. Occupying this space is an indication that there is urgent need for adjustment among organisations, global and local programs to engage youths as co-designers, creators and decision-makers on issues and programmes that affect the diverse young people. This can only be done through elevating youth participation from the basic beneficiary levels to implementers and decision-makers.

At the moment, the Youth Board is co-organising a global dialogue on meaningful and inclusive youth participation with all global partners, together with Rutgers, as well as organising and co-facilitating the annual linking and learning event in December 2021. It feels good to play a role in shaping our own future. If you want to get in touch, don’t hesitate to send me an email: ariongeof@gmail.com

4 - Communication: Stay up to date!

- Between Girls’ Day (October 8) and International Women’s Day (March 8), we highlight a number of ways in which the Netherlands supports the futures of women and girls worldwide, under the hashtag #LetGirlsGrow. We dive into i.a. access to quality and inclusive education, amplifying girls’ and women’s voices and movements, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, highlighting the important work of civil society organisations, multilateral actors and individuals. Follow #LetGirlsGrow on our Instagram.
- Do you have news about youth related issues that deserve coverage, interesting updates, personal stories or surprising (good) examples of projects on Youth, Education and Work? Please reach out to us! If you have youth-related news you’d like to share with a wider audience, we may include such stories on the Youth At Heart website.
- Follow, like and share our Twitter channels and new Instagram page of the Ambassador for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and Director Social Development Pascalle Grotenhuis.
**Instagram:**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [@MinBZ](https://www.instagram.com/minbz/)

Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality: [@Nlambassadorgenderequality](https://www.instagram.com/nlambassadorgenderequality/)

Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work: [@TijmenRooseboom](https://www.instagram.com/tijmenrooseboom/)

**Twitter:**

Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [@DutchMFA](https://twitter.com/DutchMFA)

Minister of Foreign Affairs & Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation: [@ministerBZ](https://twitter.com/ministerBZ)

Civil Society Division: [@NLCivilSociety](https://twitter.com/NLCivilSociety)

Taskforce on Women's Rights and Gender Equality: [@NLWomensRights](https://twitter.com/NLWomensRights)

Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality: [@PMGrotenhuis](https://twitter.com/PMGrotenhuis)

Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work: [@Tijmenrooseboom](https://twitter.com/Tijmenrooseboom)

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![Let Girls Grow](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Today marks International Girls' Day! Between now and International Women's Day on 8 March 2022, we will highlight a number of ways in which the Netherlands supports the futures of women and girls worldwide. Go to my Instagram to learn more! @nlambassadorgenderequality
On the 22nd of November, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs will organise the ‘One Year Youth at Heart – Youth in the Lead’ event for both colleagues and partners, as announced earlier in this newsletter. Interested? You can sign up here!

From the 25th of November to the 10th of December, the global campaign “Orange the World: 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” will run from the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25/11) to the International Human Rights Day (10/12). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs joins the campaign online and offline, from The Hague and from our missions. Follow us on Twitter (@NLWomensRights) for updates on our activities and daily infographics, in which we highlight our partners’ work in the fight against GBV.

On the 30th of November 2021 it is time for the 2nd Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) online dialogue, virtually bringing together the many people involved in the SCS policy framework to get to know each other, connect with each other across disciplines and tap into the collective knowledge. The first SCS online dialogue took place in June 2021 and focused on power dynamics and (local) ownership. The November edition continues the conversation with a closely related theme: Strategic partnership. What does strategic partnership mean in practice to the many people who work in the context of SCS? How can we all make the most of our working relationships for our shared purpose to achieve the goals of our programmes? We hope to see many of you in this participatory event that is all about your voices and perspectives. Sign up for the last spots here!

You may have heard about Guided Implementation, a series of webinars and online support programme for all partners who would like some extra help on publishing in IATI. The third webinar, on January 10 2022, will be dedicated to results, including the basket indicators. If you have questions regarding reporting on results, join us for that webinar. All info is available here.

In February 2022, the Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development (DCDD) will host the first of three meet-up sessions on disability inclusion. An important part of strengthening civil society is making space for and amplifying the voices of persons with disabilities to be heard, in society as well as in the design and implementation of development programmes. Therefore, in collaboration with DCDD we would like to invite CSO partners (receiving funding under the Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) policy framework) that have a (intersectional) focus on disability in their
programme, to get together for a series of meet-ups in which we are going to exchange and explore the most effective ways to make disability inclusion happen. Please register your interest to join before December 15th!

- In 2022, RHRN2 partnership will organize a follow-up session for its partners on Local Ownership and Power Dynamics, building upon the lessons learned from the first dialogue of September 2021. The first dialogue focused on understanding what local ownership looked like according to each participant in the context of their practice. In the second edition, the focus will be specifically on power dynamics within country coalitions, and in particular on country ownership and inclusive country leadership. A Ways of Working (WOW) working group will be established, consisting of representatives from various countries and organisations, and will be responsible for assessing the partnership’s ways of working in terms of power dynamics, local ownership and the values RHRN2 aims to uphold.

- You can now listen to the new episode of The Power of Voices Podcast on Spotify and Apple Podcasts! In the second episode host Jeroen Kelderhuis, Head of the Civil Society and Education Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, talks to Charles Kojo Vandyck of the West Africa Civil Society Institute and Jenny Hodgson of the Global Fund for Community Foundation about the #ShiftThePower movement, the changes required for this and the role of international donors. Stay tuned for the third episode coming out in December 2021 on youth and strategic partnership!
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Colofon: Department for Social Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (DSO@minbuza.nl)