

**Fostering Global Citizenship: Reconciling the Economic and
Intercultural Needs of Today's Youth for Tomorrow's Global Citizens**

A Paper for ATHGO International

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To become productive Global Citizens young people in the Third World need not only better economic opportunities, but greater exposure to peoples and cultures outside their traditional sphere of existence. The much touted Millennium Development Goals, through an ambitious set of initiatives and specialized targets, have done well thus far in addressing at least one part of this need. It is the latter aspect, better intercultural exposure, that hasn't largely been factored into the MDGs – specifically Goal 8, Target 16¹. This is perhaps to be expected since the popular school of thought maintains a separation between the more economic/health oriented MDG targets and the equally relevant but often separated issue of global security. Yet, in at least this instance, there is ample opportunity to conjoin the two in a practical and meaningful way, by forming a distinct bond between economic opportunity and intercultural exchange.

The label of “Global Citizen” should not be limited to future world leaders and CEOs. This is a title that just as easily applies to young people in the Third World who may have no aspirations for college, opting rather for a working class lifestyle and a more common form of citizenship. These 15 to 24 year olds² often have very little understanding of their peers on the ‘other side’ save for preconceived notions imbedded in them by their local sphere of influence. They have immediate economic needs to be sure, and thankfully many organizations are doing much to address this. But the real question is how we address both economic and intercultural need in concert with one another, especially in light of the latter’s implication on global security. Fortunately a new school of thought is emerging that sheds some light on this dilemma.

Let’s start by taking a look at some of the current initiatives underway. Organizations such as UNICEF, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Youth Employment Network have begun addressing Target 16. One particularly noteworthy example is the Life

¹ In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth

² Demographic classification used by International Labor Organization in their report on, “Decent Work and the Millennium Development Goals”

Skills Based Education (LSBE) being promoted by UNICEF[†]. It expands upon work skills based education by adding a broad range of courses on interpersonal skills³, which as we all know are equally important in developing productive workers and healthy members of society.

A report from the ILO[†] has made some other noteworthy observations, “There is a proven link between youth unemployment and social exclusion. An inability to find employment creates a sense of vulnerability, uselessness and idleness among young people and can heighten the attraction of engaging in illegal activities.” It also points out that, “Unless the potential of young people can be used in a productive way, neither youth nor economies as a whole will face a bright future.” I would add to this line of reasoning that unless young people can be positively introduced to young members of other cultures, especially those with a traditionally confrontational stance toward their own, we neglect a very real opportunity to undermine future intercultural conflict. Please allow me to introduce what I believe is a practical way to accomplish this.

The first part requires the modification of existing initiatives, such as the LSBE program, to produce real world job assignments that create specifically multicultural work environments. It’s my considered view that by forcing young people to engage in work assignments with those from other cultures, while reinforcing the values already associated with such programs, we can lay some very powerful foundations for future peace and conflict resolution that might not otherwise emerge. For example, imagine a work program in which traditionally opposed young people worked together to accomplish daily tasks & assignments. Having gone into such assignments with the life skills training previously introduced, they will encounter real-world opportunities to apply their newfound interpersonal skills on people and situations that have

³ Curriculum includes skills such as Empathy-Ability to listen and understand another’s needs and circumstances and express that understanding; Cooperation and Teamwork-Expressing respect for others’ contributions and different styles; Decision Making-Evaluating future consequences of present actions for self and others

more sustainable regional implications. There is much to be said of the value of daily interaction in a work environment in which a sense of mutual accomplishment is gained in tandem with those who were previously thought of as ‘the other.’ Suddenly, the preconceived notions of ‘enemy’ and ‘opponent’ are broken down by the stark yet liberating realization that the ‘other’ is much more like us than previously thought.

Such an approach, as I envision it, not only furthers the aim of Target 16 in economic terms, but makes great strides toward regional and, potentially global security. Imagine also the ripple effect that such programs might have at the local level, as young people go back home to their families and communities to talk about the positive experiences they shared with their co-workers, perpetuating also the realization that those ‘different’ individuals have lives, families and values not too unlike their own.

To maximize the effectiveness of this approach nations involved must be willing to promote these newly modified programs all the way down to the local level, providing encouragement through leadership and, if need be, financial incentives. Managers on the ground need to be better trained to identify opportunities for joint assignments and given the leadership skills necessary to discourage instances of self-segregation.

Young people with a hope in their future and an understanding of the ‘other’ can and will make a tremendous contribution to global security. Let us enhance the lives and hopes of young adults in the Third World by laying down a positive foundation for future interaction with societies other than their own. This innovation to the Millennium Development Goals can be readily encouraged through practical, hands-on measures, and serves as a wonderful example of a very promising new structural paradigm known as the Global Third Way[‡].

^{*} Taken from <http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index.html>

[†] Taken from the ILO report, “Global Employment Trends for Youth”

[‡] Introduced by the Nongovernmental Organization ATHGO International

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