Youth, Governance, Peacebuilding and the Role of Social Media

Victoria, B.C., Canada
June 26 – 27, 2012

Michelle Zilio – Rapporteur
July 2, 2012

Conference Report

Executive Summary

The University of Victoria's Centre for Global Studies (CFGS) and Institute for International Child Rights and Development (IICRD) co-hosted the Youth, Governance, Peacebuilding and the Role of Social Media conference from June 26 to 27 in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. A group of over 50 activists, academics, students, youth, government, non-governmental organization, and private sector representatives gathered for two days to discuss how technology, social media and ICT (Information, Communication Technologies) are used by youth to build democracy, promote peacebuilding and have an effect on governance in recent and ongoing global youth movements. Conference photos and video can be found at:
http://youngpartnersindevelopment.org/group/youth-governance-peace-building-social-media

With more young people in the world than ever before, the group agreed that this conference needed to discuss not only the youth-led social movements sweeping the globe, but also produce a set of tangible solutions youth can use as they call for change during one of the most pivotal times in modern history.

The three general aims of the conference were to:

1. Share youth led innovation in the areas of governance, peacebuilding and the role of social media.

2. Connect networks of youth led organizations with adult allies working in government, United Nations (UN) agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and universities.

3. Explore the value added that universities can bring to this emerging arena of range social change.

Even with these expectations, Jon Ramer of the Compassionate Action Network outlined: "If this conference turns out the way we want it to be, it would be a failure. We want something unimaginable to happen." This set the stage for an innovative meeting where people of all ages came together to discuss how to best promote youth leadership.

The conference began with a welcome address from local First Nations leaders. The role of Canadian First Nations in this seminar was prominent, as Chief Phil Lane Jr. of the Yankton Dakota and Chickasaw tribes and his son, Tiger, joined the group.

The conference was divided into six sessions, during which a group of panelists posed questions. The first day examined various topics such as the

recent development of e-governance, how to create lasting change in post-revolutionary societies and the use of ICT in conflict zones.

The second day's discussions examined the "dark side," or risks and protections, associated with ICT and social media. The group also considered the notion of moving forward and how sectors, such as academic institutions, can partner with young activists as they begin to navigate this new paradigm.

In summary, the conference made a number of key findings. First, participants agreed that youth must be patient with their governments as they attempt to keep up. However, capacity building is needed at the youth as well as government level because there is a concern that politicians are not even inclined to respond to youth in the first place.

A major part of the conference focused developing tangible tools and ideas for young people to grasp as they embark on youth-led social movements. One of those tools was education, especially at the university and college level where students are being taught "colonist" concepts through "colonialist" methods. Post-secondary institutions need to set a new precedent for innovative approaches to education so that marginalized and rural groups can engage with academic discussions.

This notion of "decolonialist" education naturally tied in with some of the overarching themes of the conference – First Nations peoples, rural communities and young activists. The last portion of the conference molded the main ideas for a first-of-its-kind post-secondary education program that encourages youth activists to continue their practitioner role in the community while earning a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. IICRD and Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC are working with the Young Partners in Development (YPID) to premier this program at the bachelor's level in 2013.

Readers are encouraged to visit the YPID social networking site to receive information about the upcoming YPID Google+ Hangout series Empowered Youth, Empowering Society. The series is an opportunity to discover and engage with youth that are demonstrating leadership and empowerment and who are discovering how to creatively share knowledge, experiences, and resources for overcoming challenges to create change. The first Hang Out will be held July 31 at 9 a.m. PDT and joined by Barbara Jefferson of Generation Wake Up.

The premise of the conference was to find ways to keep the youth already engaged continually engaged and to find ways to engage others, from all age groups and walks of life, in this new paradigm shift and youth-led movement. In the words of Cloud to Street creator Farhan Ladhani, "If people feel like their voice is being heard and is making an impact, they will stay engaged."

This report will present the general discussions that took place about the youth-led paradigm shift, the pressures on government from youth, the risks and protections associated with ICT and social media, and a synopsis of real-world solutions for all parties to grasp as today's youth rise up and demand more.

The Youth-Led Paradigm Shift

For today's youth, it's a pivotal moment. In the last 100 years, humankind has consumed more natural resources than any other time in human history. Global wealth is increasingly polarized and humanity is facing greed at the highest level of authority and leadership. As fears of a complete economic meltdown sweep the globe, one conference participant, Barbara Jefferson of Generation Wake Up, stated the case as: "We're talking about a financial recession we're in but we've been in a social recession a lot longer than that."

Whether it's in terms of climate change concerns, educational rights or the right to free speech, youth across the world are taking notice of the decade-old problems – and they're using ICT and social media to create change more effectively and rapidly than ever.

Throughout the meeting, the group was joined by many youth activists and leaders both in person and via web conferencing. From the streets of Seattle, Washington where Generation Waking Up is using multimedia presentations to inspire youth to lead a sustainable world, to the Arab Spring in the Middle East, to the troubled neighbourhoods of Colombia where La Famalia Araya is using hip-hop to reintegrate youth from drug gangs into society, these youth leaders shared their experiences as activists, the challenges involved, and how they overcame them. For youth-led social movements, it is about bringing together the old and new, the elders and youth, to create a conversation.

Bridging the Gap Between the Old and New Paradigm: Governments Under Pressure

As youth-led social movements demand more of their leaders, the reality is that governments facing youth criticism are not prepared to deal with the demands. When governments are receiving thousands of social media messages, emails and dealing with protestors on the streets, they simply do not have the resources to respond effectively. Thus one issue for governments is finding the resources to listen to and address the concerns of youth.

One conclusion reached at the conference was that citizens want to engage, but governments are not prepared to deal with the sudden and overwhelming demands from youth as well as with the added responsibility of understanding a political constituency whose time has come – young citizens.

Knowledge as Power, led by Sarah Schacht, encourages citizens to engage with government while helping governments, which she said are about five years behind youth in terms of social media and ICT understanding, to absorb this increased capacity of citizen engagement. For example, when 200,000 student protestors took to the streets in Montreal, the police force was simply not equipped to deal with the numbers. "Governments are not prepared to deal with the capacity citizens carry in their pockets … Citizens don't

understand who to talk to ... how to make their voices heard in a direct manner," said Schacht.

In response to the pressures stemming from the global youth movement, Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the UN announced in January that he would make it one of his priorities in his second term in office. To ensure this, a Special Representative to the Secretary General on youth will be appointed and a system-wide action plan on youth issues across the UN is in the works.

Despite the criticism governments and global institutions face, there are some organizations making a legitimate effort to engage with youth. For example, the World Bank's participatory budgeting program breaks off a portion of its budget and allows the public to have their say on how the money should be spent. Ideas are posted online, people can vote, the most popular ideas are chosen and the government then hits the ground running. This program led to increased public interest in the World Bank's budgeting. Schacht said such uses of Open Document Formats are crucial because they allow civil society to read decision-making documents without having to be experts.

Participants agreed that youth must be patient with their governments as they attempt to catch up. "The real thing we need to learn is how governments can talk to us ... Be patient with your governments," said David Stevenson, Executive Director of the [Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Capacity](). Capacity building must focus on governments as well as youth because both parties need to have the tools and skills to listen. Youth need to know they are being heard.

As discussion wrapped up, Smith raised an important point that left participants thinking about the prior conclusions met. While governments appear to have inadequate resources to deal with the youth-led social movement, perhaps one should ask if political leaders feel any need to respond to youth at all. "It's the politicians not wanting to let go in my view," said Smith. This is where the presence of youth in government roles came into play. This notion is discussed later in this report.

The Dark Side: ICT Risks and Protections

While the majority of the conference explored the innovative opportunities social media and ICT have provided for youth, a portion of the meeting recognized the risks associated with the use of these technologies, especially for children. Social media and ICT have a dark side that is concerning for parents, advocates, police forces, judiciary, private sector companies and many people across the world.

These risks are ending up in the hands of governments. For government systems and police forces, ICT have exposed a whole new set of problems in two online industries – child abuse images and child luring. As youth call for open and

free Internet access, government and police forces show hesitancy because, for them, it is hard to distinguish between activists with good intentions and those posing as activists who actually have intentions of abusing children online. This tension is evident in the recent talks surrounding Internet privacy laws.

Since law enforcement moved from an offline to online industry in 2003, various tools have been created by Canadian and international police forces to monitor the dangers of the online world. In Canada, people can access www.cybertip.ca to report online exploitation or contact the Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children at the RCMP, which works to control, protect and raise the awareness of online child abuse images and luring.

At the international level, online child abuse in any country can be reported to the Virtual Global Taskforce. Concerned individuals can also refer to In Hope for contact information to report such abuses in various countries. As someone who sits along the "middle of the fence," Roberta Sinclair of the RCMP understood the desire for open Internet access, but expressed concerns about the dangers of social media and ICT for children who don't know any better.

Academics are also researching the notion of online protection for youth. The Child Protection Partnership (CPP), operating under IICRD, works across many sectors to protect children from sexual exploitation enabled by worldwide use of ICT. The partnership works with Canadian and international law enforcement to inform and educate youth about the dangers of online sexual exploitation. More recently, CPP worked with academic institutions in countries such as Thailand and Brazil where online child exploitation is a major issue. CPP is designed to provide police and academic forces with the tools they need to eventually work independently.

Conference participants agreed that education is the most powerful tool when it comes to making children aware of the risks associated with ICT and social media. For two teenagers who attended the event, educating parents as well as children is important. For both parties, the information needs to be simple, effective and disseminated on platforms that youth and parents actually use.

Based on the collaboration between CPP, academic institutions, police forces and youth, it was agreed that working across sectors is the most effective way to prevent these dangers.

Tangible Solutions for Parties in the Real World

Throughout the conference, the group's ultimate goal was to develop a collection of tangible solutions youth activists can use as they lead the transition into a new paradigm. This section provides a synopsis of these ideas for each party involved – academic institutions, indigenous or rural communities, governments, civil society, corporations, fellow youth, and law.

<u>Academic Institutions</u>

The last portion of the conference examined the role academic institutions can play in supporting youth-led activism. It was agreed that there is not an adequate knowledge base in the academic field that reflects the current aspirations of young people. The basis of current university and college education is "colonialist," according to Royal Roads University's Greg Cran. He pointed out that universities and colleges are simply "importing students and exporting our ways," instead of making an effort to decolonize the approach to academic thinking. Since universities are the creators of knowledge, they are the starting block for a new approach to knowledge development.

IICRD and Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC are working with YPID to develop a program that will allow youth activists to pursue a university degree while continuing their community-based practitioner activities. For example, a student who works in the field promoting Canadian indigenous rights can continue to do their work while earning their bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. This innovative approach to post-secondary education is believed to be the first of its kind and will premier at the bachelor's level in 2013.

Students at the conference were interested in this innovative program. For Kim Harvey, a First Nations Canadian who found the rigid, academic parameters of university unappealing, this hands-on degree is ideal for some First Nations Canadians who have inherent fears of the education system stemming from scarring residential school experiences.

<u>Indigenous and Rural Communities</u>

The exchange of knowledge between indigenous communities and academic institutions was a major theme throughout the conference. Royal Roads professor Wendy Drummond, who was involved with an educational program in a remote First Nations community 300 km north of Victoria, highlighted this.

As a part of a Royal Roads initiative, Drummond would travel to the area to provide the skills and tools needed. However, after visiting many times, she realized Royal Roads was learning from the First Nations community just as much as they were learning from Royal Roads. While the university worked to establish learning centres and workshops about technology, the First Nations community taught Drummond and Royal Roads about the importance of patience, collective thinking and community. Six years later, the relationship continues to thrive.

It is partnerships like these that help to close the "information gap" that exists between rural communities and the urban world. While members of urban populations have access to ICT and social media, rural populations are often the ones that need to communicate their concerns most. Participants agreed the only way to fill this information gap is by reaching out to the rural communities in

the same way Drummond did - by physically going to the communities. This was agreed to be more constructive than making them come to an unfamiliar and often frightening urban and academic setting to learn.

Government

As governments attempt to catch up with the overwhelming pace of the youth-led social movement, Schacht said young people must ensure youth are represented in government. As more young people join activist movements, however, Schacht said there is a decreasing interest in government work. For this reason, there must be a newfound focus on post-secondary public affairs programs for youth. If young people want to be leaders of the paradigm shift, they need to have representatives in politics to promote the concerns of their communities.

Civil Society

Young activists must continue to open their doors to other members of civil society and use youth-led social movements as a platform for all social issues. To do this, the global youth movement must work to break down racism, ageism and sexism, among other prejudices.

For example, student activists in Montreal, Quebec used the "casserole" protests to encourage social activists to join them on the streets daily at 8 p.m. and bang pots and pans. The accessibility of these protests meant that all activists could join and call for change important to them, such as women's or immigrants' rights.

Corporations

The role of corporations' invested interests in social media and ICT was a major concern for conference participants, particularly youth activists. For example, Facebook is a public corporation, so users no longer own the data once inputted. Even software that universities use is corporate-owned. Youth-led social movements must monitor corporations' relationship with these tools, because of the inherent focus on marketing.

Fellow Youth

Aside from the movements young people are already leading, youth can play a role as trainers as well as leaders. Young people need to step into mentorship positions so that they can influence major decisions in government and the private sector. As young leaders take on major leadership positions, they can train their peers, adopting an effective form of intergenerational leadership. They are a source of knowledge and at the same time when they build effective and horizontal relations with older generations in society we all benefit and greater change can be created.

Law

The desire for free and open Internet needs to be balanced with the concern for potential abuse on the Internet, especially against children. "How do we balance protection of youth online and the need for privacy laws online? … But also balance that with the right and the need to self-express?" asks Sinclair.

As an example, Internet privacy laws were compared to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. At one time, the freedom of the seas was generally respected but never set in stone by an international treaty. Now, there is a law for control of international waters. Internet laws are at the same point the Law of the Sea was years ago – the boundaries are generally understood but not enforced so as to prevent major issues from arising. Governments must work with youth to produce an innovative policy that protects vulnerable users, but still allows people to organize, mobilize and affect change.

Conclusions

As youth use social media and ICT to embark on social movements faster than ever, they must practice patience as "youth allies," such as governments and academia, attempt to keep up.

The major question addressed at the end of this conference was whether youth have the patience to wait. With technology at their fingertips, youth expect results quickly, especially in post-revolution societies such as Libya. "How do you ask people after 42 years of dictatorship to be patient with the change they have sacrificed so much for?" said Esma Mneina of Shabab Libya, a website considered to be the voice of the Libyan youth.

In considering the positive feedback from the conference, participants were interested in continuing the conversation. Two options were presented. First, conference participants and the public can use the YPID social network site to share their ideas and continue to communicate with fellow youth leaders around the world. Second, www.greattransitionstories.org allows people to share their stories of youth-led change in this time of "great transition."

This conference presented many ways youth can learn from youth and interact with various sectors as they enter a new paradigm. The experiences, ideas and solutions presented can be grasped at the local, national, international level and, most importantly, across borders.

Considering the incredible roadblocks that stand in the way of today's youth, the group left on a hopeful note. Barriers were broken, tough discussions were had and tangible solutions were brainstormed. In accordance with Ramer's idea of an effective conference, the outcome and response to the meeting truly was "unimaginable."

Participants concluded that the new paradigm has not been defined and probably never will be. This is the key to the youth-led social movement – no definitions, no borders, no limits. The notion of the new paradigm is ever-changing and will never be defined or reached, as it can only continue to grow.

Participants

Dr. Philip Cook	Executive Director, The International Institute for Child Rights & Development, University of Victoria
Dr. Gordon Smith	Executive Director, Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria
Adrian Hartrick	Student, University of Victoria
Alison Ramer	Grassroots Jerusalem
Amir Bajehkian	Iranian Student, University of Victoria
Ana Patel	Executive Director, Outward Bound Peacebuilding
Andrea Landry	Youth Executive, The National Association of (Indigenous) Friendship Centres
Barbara Jefferson	Generation Waking Up
Christopher Yeomans	Programs Director, IICRD
Darci Shaver	Tethr
David Stevenson	Executive Director, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
Elaina Mack	Project Manager, IICRD
Elizabeth Niland	Associate Social Affairs Officer, UN Focal Point on Youth
Esma Mneina	Shabab Libya, University of Manitoba
Farhaan Ladhani	Cloud to Street
Francisco Violich	Four Worlds International Institute
Giulietta Di Mambro	Graduate Student Activist, Quebec
Graeme Mitchell	Saanich School District

Greg Cran, Professor	Royal Roads University
Hanna Sofia Stevenson	Youth Participant
Jenn Farquharson	IICRD Volunteer
Jennifer Swift	Centre for Global Studies
Jeyffer Renteria Lozano	Executive Director, La Familia Ayara
Jocelyn Ting-Hui Hung Chien	Chair, Global Indigenous Youth Alliance
Jon Ramer	Compassionate Action Network and IICRD Associate
Karim Ahmed Kasim	UN Development Programme, Egypt
Katie Shaw-Raudoy	Project Manager – Youth Engagement, IICRD
Kim Harvey	Aboriginal Youth Leader, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
Linley Faulkner	Project Coordinator – Youth Engagement, IICRD
Mark Neufeld	Teacher, Saanich School District
Melissa Hamer	IICRD Volunteer
Michele Cook	Human Development and Wellbeing Director, IICRD
Michelle Zilio	Rapporteur
Mustafa Abousaleh	Syrian Student, University of Victoria
Nicole Garbitt	Development Coordinator Nenan Dane zaa Deh Zona Child & Family Services
Phil Lane Jr., Elder	Four Worlds International Institute
Ravi Karkara	Expert on Youth Participation, UN Habitat
Rebeccah Nelems	Associate, IICRD
Renee Lormé-Gulbrandsen	Administrative Director, IICRD
Rita Kozma	Antidote
Roberta Sinclair	Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Rod Dobell	Senior Research Associate, Centre for Global Studies
Sarah Schacht	Knowledge as Power
Serge Kapto	UN Development Programme
Simon Vickers	Student Activist, Quebec
Stephanie Gabel	Senior Advisor, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
Suzanne Williams	Child Protection Partnership Director, IICRD
Tiger Lane	Youth Participant
Wendy Drummond	Royal Roads University
Wendy Rowe	Royal Roads University, Leadership Program

Stay connected to Young Partners in Development:

Social Networking Site: http://youngpartnersindevelopment.org/

Facebook Page: http://www.facebook.com/YoungPartnersInDevelopment

Twitter Stream: https://twitter.com/YPID1