

Jessica:

Thank you, Basti. Good morning everyone. It's wonderful to be here. We're going to get started today with a few words from our DRG Senator, Tim Meisburger.

Tim Meisburger:

Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening wherever you are in the world. My name is Tim Meisburger and I'm the Director of the Center for Democracy Rights and Governance at USAID, and your host for a series of fireside chats we call the DRG Tipping Point, which focus on often overlooked but surprisingly critical factors that can increase the impact of DRG programming.

Tim Meisburger:

The series runs from February to June, with a new episode premiering on the first Tuesday of each month. This month we look at Youthquake, the influence and impact of youth, emerging leaders, and demographic trends on democracy rights and governance. In the DRG Center we see young people as both beneficiaries and as partners, and as a key environmental factor to consider in almost every development sector. The youth bulge in developing countries presents many challenges but also opportunities. Young people are marginalized, unemployed or underemployed, underrepresented or excluded from community and national decision-making bodies, and their pent-up frustration can explode into mass protests and demonstrations.

Tim Meisburger:

The tremendous potential energy in youth can be positive or negative, and the challenge for all of us in the DRG sector is to help youth channel this energy towards a more just, open and democratic future. In this webinar you'll learn how the DRG Center and USAID are developing better approaches to work with and engage young people through a continuum of civic education, civic engagement and leadership across DRG programming. You'll also learn more about the Positive Youth Development approach, which is both a USAID and the US Government approach to how we design effective programming with youth across various sectors.

Tim Meisburger:

This Tipping Point webinar will be an interactive opportunity to share and learn about some of our best examples and our new resources for integrating youth and emerging leaders in DRG program activities. I encourage you to participate actively in the discussions during the webinar. As always, we welcome your feedback on this and previous episodes, and if there's any topic that you'd like us to cover in a future episode, please let us know. And with that, on with the show.

Jessica:

We are so happy that all of you are able to attend today. We have a really great program for you. This is the last of our five part DRG Tipping Point series and we hope that many of you have been able to join us. We'd also love to have your feedback on this session and this series, so please take advantage of the exit polls at the end of the session.

Jessica:

First, many of you know Mike, our agency Senior Advisor [inaudible 00:03:22]. So just to summarize his bio, Mike has worked in international development for 30 years with organizations such as Peace Corps,

where he was Chief of Programming and Training for the LAC and Pacific region, Chief of Party for Creative Associates for a Youth and Violence prevention project in Central America, as well as UNICEF and the Inter-American Foundation. As most of you know, Mike works across all the bureaus. So, Mike, let's get started with our first question.

Jessica:

Can you describe why youth are a strategic imperative for getting better DRG outcome?

Mike:

Welcome everyone. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. And thanks so much, Jessica, and to the GROW team for organizing this really important Tipping Point dialogue. I want to start by recognizing that it's been a challenging few months for all of us and those we work with globally. That became even more challenging in many of our communities in the US and around this world this past weekend.

Mike:

The title Youthquake is a term used globally to describe the transformative nature of this new generation of 1.8 billion young people. It represents hope as well as the urgency, and the discussion today takes on more relevance than ever in that sense. So, Jessica, to your question about why there's a strategic imperative of youth, we are at a moment that we call PQ to many countries, where the population of youth is approaching its highest percentage historically. And former administrator Green and other leaders have spoken about the urgent need for USAID staff to better understand and engage the youth as partners, particularly leveraging their energy and optimism for long term change, but also to prevent a sense of marginalization.

Mike:

As you can see in this first slide on the demographic transition, what we sometimes call youth bulge in a lot of countries shows the percentage of youth per country, and the darker slide areas are countries that have over 65% of their population under the age of 30. So six out of 10, seven out of 10, persons in those counties are under the age of 30. And you can see in the countries it aligns very closely with a map of global fragility. It's not to say that any country that has a high percentage of youth is fragile, but we do find that often government systems are overtaxed in terms of responding to the health needs, the education needs, the employment needs, of young people with that young population. And that's why we work so hard to help countries move towards what we call a demographic dividend by making the right choices in governance of services, in education and health and in employment.

Mike:

Out of those places where there's tremendous untapped potential, human capital also offers us tremendous opportunities. Second, we know more about nuance programming and how it gets better results in the youth field. So, just to clarify what we mean by youth; if you look on this next slide you can see that, for USAID, we take an ages and stages approach to defining youth as 10-29, divided by four stages of early and late adolescence and emerging adulthood. And the reason we do that is we obviously treat young people based on the developmental thoughts that they're going through at that time, cognitively and emotionally and socially and morally, and we look at ways that we can really learn from what's transitioning in their own development so that our own programming can better support them and better engage them.

Mike:

Our research has found that by understanding these thought sets and the drivers of young people in a nuanced way, we leverage much better cross-sectoral outcomes. Third, the intractable development problems of our day and the journey to self-reliance depend on how we address the disproportionate impact that these issues have on young people. As you can see in the slide, these are just a few of the dramatic issues that are affecting young people. For example, the fact that we need five million new jobs every month for the next 10 years just to keep youth unemployment at the same rate that it is right now, which is about double the general population. And right now, during COVID, we know that 91% of young people are out of school and out of learning according to UNICEF. And they also predict that a large number of young people may not return to school; having to help their families who are income insecure at this time, so that poses tremendous challenges along with some of these other ones that we highlight here.

Mike:

That unemployment rate. The fact that young people are vastly disproportionately impacted by violence, and how do we deal with building a culture of peace and engage young people in peace building, which many of our projects have been focused on in the ENE region and in Africa, and in Latin America and Central America. But the democracy barometer surveys are also showing that, in a number of regions, they're showing a loss of trust by youth in government and democratic institutions. And we'll talk a little bit more about how our partners are working on that in new ways to connect with youth where they are in a more technology connected digital world, and how we could better support that to get them reconnected and build that sense of trust with their communities.

Mike:

Combined, that means that we have a lot more out of school, out of work and discouraged young people in some communities, yet their optimism, according to surveys, for wanting to be in community change continues to be high across the board globally in most countries. With amazing examples, especially during this time of COVID, how young people are finding ways to step up and saying that they're interested in not being leaders of tomorrow, but supporting actions in their community today.

Mike:

So, how is USAID approaching youth programming in a different way to get that outcome? As most of you know, in 2012 we did a big pivot, a big shift with our youth and development policy and the way that we have focused on youth from being an at-risk beneficiary group, to being potential untapped population that leverage better democracy and government outcomes and cross-sectoral outcomes by being partners. And that can't be rhetoric. When we talk rhetoric young people smell it a mile away, so we look at concrete ways of providing them opportunities.

Mike:

To use an analogy of a Rubik's cube, and you can see it here; we've moved from a one size fits all focus, directly addressing at risk youth and their issues, to today where we take a much more three-dimensional view intentionally that's nuanced on looking at the three different dimensions here, which are first, what is age appropriate? Looking at early adolescence, late adolescence, and emerging adulthood, and what sort of illustrious activities do we design in any of our programs in democracy governance, education, employment?

Mike:

Second, we look at a socio-ecological level coming down on there, and so for each of those age brackets we also look at how we target young people, but also their families, the community and the system level. And that's extremely important as we've found, for example, in our Central America programming, where we've had much better outcomes on peace security and community and violence prevention by working with the families as well as the youth, and then working with some of the legitimate community leaders to bring those three forces together.

Mike:

The third dimension is we recognize that youth have multiple and integrated needs so we design more multisectorally, and that's what we've done through our YouthPower program over the past five years and now with our new YouthPower two programming.

Jessica:

Okay. Thank you, Mike. Can you also tell us what is different about our new approach in terms of designing programs that focus on integrating youth, and what are some of the lessons learned that can dramatically improve our DRG program outcome?

Mike:

Yeah. I have to say I feel really lucky and blessed to have come to USA at the time that I did because the agency made some really important changes and investments over the past five years, both with the youth policy and then investments like the YouthPower program, where we're able to invest a lot more in our research and learning globally. And so when I think about the transformational Tipping Point practices that have helped us get better outcomes, there's four that I really want to highlight. One is using better evidence based approaches, and in that sense it's called Positive Youth Development. A bit of a squishy term but it's based on a lot of good evidence I'll talk about in a minute. Two, we had to design with the opportunity in mind first and then focus on how do we develop the capacity behind that. Third, we don't just want to focus on things that we've done traditionally in DRG. Youth don't want their parents' DRG activities, so we have to do a better job of engaging young people in our assessments. And then four; leveraging the democratic dividend by reaching them early.

Mike:

So let me touch each of those really briefly. So on the next slide you'll see, this is our framework. USAID's model, known as PYD or Positive Youth Development, is actually based on 30 years of research on youth development in low, middle and high income countries. It's not rocket science; it's brain science. It focuses on four domains in seven features that, when integrated into any project; democracy and governance or peace and security or education, these features combined really get us better cross-sectoral outcomes. So those domains and features really boil down into things that, for a lot of us, we would recognize were key parts of what helped us thrive and survive as young people ourselves. So it's how do we bring in to any activity we design in those lustre of activities skills and assets development, the role of caring adults and mentors, which has been tremendously proven over lots of research to be a transformational impact on programming. Youth contribution, helping them be change makers, providing them with safe spaces in non-school hours. So connecting them to youth centers and different places.

Mike:

Building a sense of belonging. And that sense of connection to others is really important; that's where sports programs and faith based programs come in. Pro-social norms of how they see the norms in their community, in their family and in their country; how they connect to those better. And then, finally, age appropriate or youth friendly services, really allowing young people to feel they can access services in their community in a way that they're not judged and that they can take advantage of that to really implement better outcomes for themselves and their families. So, as I said, it sounds familiar. These are things that helped us thrive as teens and these are exactly the type things that we're trying to mainstream into our programming.

Mike:

Second, on the next slide, I wanted to relate to you a lesson that's tied to Positive Youth Development but really gets us to one of the most important points of it. So when we think of those four domains of assets and skills and building a sense of agency, building a sense of contribution, and then finally that enabling environment. I want to tell this story quickly with examples from the Somalia Youth Leadership initiative, where we were working to try and resolve the challenge that only about 10 to 12% of youth were attending secondary education in two regions of Somalia. There are high levels of acceptance of political violence in these regions. So in these regions we worked in 29 communities to improve teach skills and infrastructure, resulting in improved educational outcomes, so young people's skills went up, their confidence and agency went up, but which way did acceptance of political violence go?

Mike:

We would assume that acceptance of political violence went down, but it actually went up. As youth got more skills and greater sense of agency, their expectations rose, and when they weren't met they were frustrated. And too often we skill up without thinking about the importance of creating the opportunity. In the other 29 communities in the program, USAID's partner added one component that made a major difference; they added a component of civic engagement through community service learning projects. And in those communities violence and acceptance of violence dropped 16 to 20%. So merely by thinking about where the opportunity was, it became more real for them what the issues were and we were able to give them a sense of voice and participation in that process. So the key is that the opportunity for civic engagement has to be designed at the front end, and then we think back to where's the best way to deliver on some of the skills that young people need in a democracy rights and governance program?

Mike:

Too often we run out of steam when we're designing. We spend so much time thinking about what skills we need to give them before we think about how we're giving the opportunity to employ those skills. A third lesson that we've learned that helps really release greater results is that young people don't want their parents' DRG activities. The SUPS research on pro youth social policies that we did about two years ago found that youth are growing weary of youth party wings and youth policies, or parties that don't really reflect them. They're much more focused on being [inaudible 00:17:15] and action oriented, rather than being obedient party members waiting their turn. In other words, youth really hate that giant pause button that tells them that they're the hope and the leaders of the future. If you want to lose an audience of young people, just tell them that they're the hope of the future, because it frustrates them like nothing else.

Mike:

They have the technology, the passion, the energy and they time, to be engaged now, but they're looking for ways that we can connect to work together on some of these issues, be it COVID, be it elections, be it democracy or rights or humanitarian response. To better respond to this we really need to authentically integrate youth considerations into our political economy analysis, and as we've been doing for the past year and a half, doing a lot more cross-sectoral youth analysis at our missions with focus groups and surveys and key informant interviews. USAID has never done as many youth assessments as we've done in the past two years, and that's a testament to us trying to find a way to better listen to these voices that gets us better outcomes. And doing these assessments with young people really effectively increases our success with social norms and behavioral change. We see it in Colombia with some of the recent violence prevention surveys. We see it in the Kosovo mission that use local assessments, including the public health survey.

Mike:

We see it in some of the new political and economic analyses that are going on that integrate youth and gender, and persons with disability and the LGBTI analysis together in an inclusive way.

Mike:

The last lesson that I really want to share is what we call leveraging the democratic dividend. A lot of you have-

Mike:

(silence)

Mike:

[00:31:03] Excellent. So what did you hear in your group? What jumped out at you?

Jessica:

I actually feel like a few people were saying the same thing in terms of engaging youth from the very beginning. That would be including whatever the challenges that they're facing and make sure that that's incorporated within all of the full program cycle.

Mike:

Yeah. A couple of things that jumped out as ideas from folks that were in our break out group. They talked a lot about the role of mentors. And mentors do not always have to be older; they sometimes can be peer mentors, like Abella mentors other young change makers across Tanzania and across Africa. So exposing youth to those other young leaders who've had success as change makers, as well as who've had failures, because we learn a lot from our failures as well. There's also a lot of... So that also links the mentoring to the network in part. We're really trying to look at where USAID is supporting networks that exist out there through our YouthPower learning initiative, as well as through our youth lead platforms. Anything else jump out, Jessica, from some of the ideas of how we can improve our DRG program youth integration?

Jessica:

Yeah. I really liked this comment from Blair because I hadn't heard it framed this way before, and it seems simplistic but realistic; that youth needs to be asked what they want to achieve. And then those

programs are designed to help them achieve their goals, rather than us as a donor imposing what we think they want to achieve, and really incorporating their voices then from the very beginning. Sort of what I had said earlier.

Mike:

Yeah. That's excellent. And we, too, in our group talked about some of the opportunities of where we could actually start to work to get youth working together with governments. For example, in the post COVID space there are a number of places where young adults are being trained to be tracers and monitor services. We have a lot of young people, and some of our Dreams ambassadors across Africa, who are working on HIV AIDS services and support. And there's some really powerful networks of young people who are working, whether it's on the democracy and election space, or working in the health space or even in the real innovation and entrepreneurship space. So that can be partnered, and often we actually see that much more at the local level than at the national level.

Mike:

So understanding how to work with young people so that they can work more effectively with local municipal authorities is a really important component to weave in. I had the opportunity to see that when I was recently in Armenia. And we've got youth councils working together with municipalities across Armenia as a follow on to Development Revolution from 2018.

Jessica:

Right. And I would just share this last comment that I think really said that, and I'm a passionate story teller, but I think that it's important that when we do have success, that we're sharing those success stories with key stakeholders and that we're inspiring youth that they actually are making an impact. And maybe they can hear those stories, that it inspires them to dream bigger than what they were originally, and it also feeds back that we're hearing them and that we're implementing that in our program.

Mike:

Yeah, absolutely. So let's take a few questions from those who are on. For Abella as well if Abella is still on with us? Abella is just always... every time I hear her, talk with her, she inspires me so much in terms of the way that she is reaching out and working together with the voice of young people across Tanzania in the democracy space. But she also runs a digital training program for young women. She runs multiple media platforms for Youth Voice across the country. So, let's see; Neeta, were you just typing a question? Please feel free to put in your questions for Bella or Jessica or I.

Mike:

Okay, so we have a question. How can we better engage leaders like Abella and a number of our young partners across our programs to serve as trainers and facilitators and mentors? Abella, would you mind taking that?

Abella:

Yeah, most definitely. Thank you, Neeta, for the question. And I actually really want to answer by giving an example that answering that. I arrived at this already. It has been invited that again and again to train and connect and meet the youth across the globe. I remember after being invited to South Africa to do



training from there, so I'm sharing examples from Tanzania and South Africa. Ned has also connected us in a manner that we're exchanging all these same countries I've mentioned, they are exchanging from one another. And then, also, when I travel in these countries my fellow leaders, they expose me to the young ones so we start mentoring together. So I think if we can support the consortium, the network, that's already available, but also if there are international gathering and conferences, we can bring these young people to come and share. In that way young people connect with fellow young people and actually we can connect with one another.

Abella:

Currently I'm also not only mentoring youth in Tanzania, I'm mentoring youth from across Africa, just because we meet either in a training session or in a networking session or something close to that. So I think the more exposure and I wouldn't emphasize enough what Jessica said, when we share and they're already listening to all the announcers who announce young people everywhere they go, we think a lot because sometimes they start community and enter, we can not enter as yet, but you know our stories. So I feel like you don't even have to give us money or big support; sometimes all you have to do is announce it and understand our story and what we do, and then you'll be opening doors for us. And one thing I just want to encourage you; once you open a door for such a leader like me, or some [inaudible 00:37:25] from Nigeria or from Liberia, some friends of mine, you also open a door to 50, 100, 1,000 [inaudible 00:37:33] youth behind that. So if you find the mentors and leaders well, you're not only touching one person; you are touching a community of young people behind them.

Mike:

That's awesome. Abella, can we also take this next question there and ask your take on this? I know you talk with young leaders around the world and across Africa. The question is how do young people feel about the situation of democratic backsliding and authoritarian influence right now in many countries, which recent reports has shown is increasing in so many regions of the world? How should we be addressing it together with young people?

Abella:

Do you want me to answer that?

Mike:

Yes.

Abella:

All right. Allow me to quote one of these French West Indian psychiatrist and political philosopher. His name was Frantz Fanon. He said something. He said, "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, find its mission, fulfill it, or betray it." So one this is, do young people have a mission, and then second, are they fulfilling it or betraying it? So the authoritarian raising or regime, it's happening in both young countries, in growing democracy and older democracies, but it's more so... I've been seeing it so much in Africa right now, even, I'm afraid to say, at the face of it, we could be seeing in my own country. But one thing I would like to say. Just like what is happening in America right now, authoritarianism it's not rising right now; it's just being recorded right now. Let me say and recognize that for us. So the thing is how do young people fight back? Actually, I think young people can be better driven, they like to deliver as one. And then we should teach young people leadership like USA did. Tanzania has a program called Advance Youth, where part of their are partner in such program.



Abella:

And one of the things we do is train young people in leadership, livelihood and life skills, but in leadership, really, the manner is amazing, it's remarkable. In the manner that once young people understand leadership gives them power to engage correctly but also to set themselves up correctly. But also I think we should support young people and work with social influencers. So social influencers, they're not just famous people; they're actually influential. So if we could train the social influencers to actually be able to sit within the government and influence, they can influence young people who are following them. I've seen it happening again and again. I'm a beneficiary of YALI program for teenagers helped me tremendously, but I've also done other leadership programs apart from that. I think, if we could start such programs where we can teach young people on the importance of good leadership and clean politics and ethical leadership, it would actually be able to raise another caliber leadership.

Abella:

And finally can we please tell the stories of good people who are promoting democracy to help reduce authoritarianism? Because sometimes you see so much negativity in media where there's also so much good happening at the same time, and there are young people also doing good at the same time and they're also good young leaders who are doing good at the same time. So maybe we should supporting media too to continuously see in good stories or hopeful and encouraging people to see what is the opposite of authoritarianism and how can we combine it with a relevant example. Because once you see role models and mentors who are doing it, then they are able to copy them to do it with them.

Mike:

Okay. Thank you, Abella.

Jessica:

All right. We're going to have to wrap up, unfortunately, because we are almost at time. But we will follow up with the questions afterwards for all of the session. We are also going to have some resources that we'll share with you in that same email that we didn't get to today. Everyone, please take some time before you log off and we really would appreciate your comments and feedback on today's session. You will see all the different pods that are now on your page, and please take some time to fill that out? And I just want to say thank you everyone who has been a part of this session, and if you've been a part of the other Tipping Points as well, it's been a great series. Thank you so much.