

Navigating International Meetings



An initiative of:



United Nations
Association in Canada

A Pocketbook Guide to
Effective Youth Participation

Navigating International Meetings **- A Pocketbook Guide to Effective Youth Participation -**

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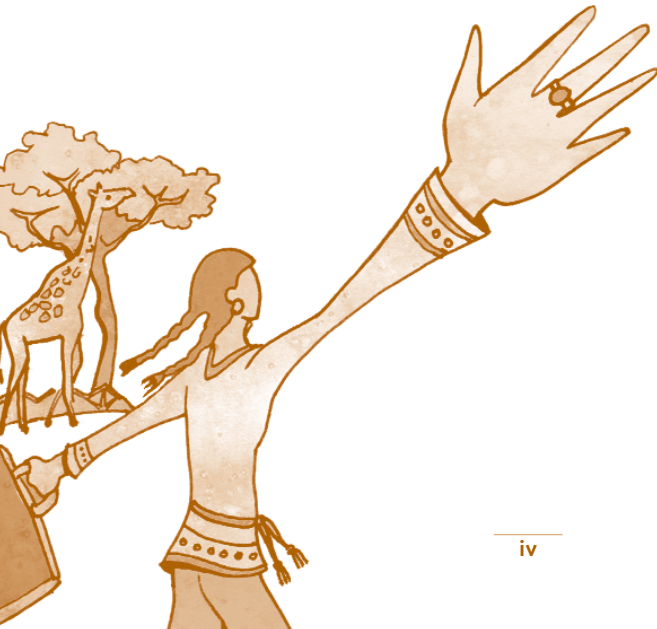
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Foreword

If you're thinking of participating in an international meeting (IM), you might be asking yourself: Why would a young person go to an international meeting? Where do you find out about them and get involved? How do you get there and what needs to be prepared beforehand? How do you "work" the meeting and have the meeting work for you? What about when you get home – does the excitement (and work) stop on the last day of the meeting?

"The corridors of the UN are getting used to the sight of young faces, as they should be..."

(Gemma Hobcraft, United Kingdom)

We heard from members of the international youth community that young people would benefit from a youth-friendly guide on how to be more effective at an international meeting. In response, a team of young Canadians drew on their collective experience from participating in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, and consulted with youth around the world to create *Navigating International Meetings: A Pocketbook Guide to Effective Youth Participation*.

This Pocketbook gives concise information about the structure and process of United Nations (UN) meetings, looks at the different avenues available to youth for participating, and offers practical information for surviving an IM. The Guide also touches on important questions regarding the impact of IMs on the local, national, and international level that every past and potential participant should consider.

Because so many international meetings assemble under the auspices of the UN, much of the information in this book was written with direct reference to the process of a UN meeting. The UN, however, is not the only international decision-making body. If you are planning to attend an international meeting that is not being organized by the UN, you will still find most of the information useful since much of the preparation, on-site activity, follow-up, and travel follows a similar course. Lately we have also seen an increase in the number of meetings planned exclusively for youth that are global in scope. While the organization and substance of such meetings may be quite different, we hope that the more general information found in this guide will be of use.

As broad-based participation in international processes becomes increasingly crucial to balancing the forces of other significant international actors, youth perspectives and energy have the potential to stimulate, direct, and contribute to progressive change. We hope that this book will be a valuable resource for youth around the world participating in international meetings, be they on human rights, sustainable development, racism, gender, trade and finance, or any other global issue.



I. Where Do I Fit At An International Meeting?

The United Nations, the World Bank – what is your place at meetings of large international decision-making bodies like these? If you are contemplating attending an international meeting (IM) that you have found out about, perhaps through your national government or on the United Nations (UN) website, there are many capacities in which you can participate.

First and foremost, you can participate by being part of the meeting’s environment and learning as much as you can about the process and the issues which drew you to the meeting in the first place. There are so many interesting people, unique events, and exciting things going on that there is much to be gained simply from being there. Being present among like-minded people and organizations also gives you a tremendous opportunity to make beneficial contacts.

Working “in the corridors” of an international meeting has to do with building relationships, common language, mutual understanding, and trust.

Another opportunity for participation is in the agreement process itself. Having a youth presence in international political processes is important, but the work is very different from the grassroots, local community-based activities with which young people most often find themselves involved. Working “in the corridors” of an international meeting has to do with building relationships, common language, mutual understanding, and trust. It is highly political in nature and requires some training and experience to be poised and effective in this environment.

Those most interested in affecting action-oriented, results-based change on the ground may find the international political process frustrating, and prefer the networking, relationship-building, and shared learning that also occurs at an IM. Others may find that they feel right at home **lobbying** government officials and sitting through long negotiating sessions. Different people are good at different kinds of work – it is important to learn where your strengths and interests lie.

We’ve all heard the popular expression “think globally, act locally” many times. This expression is not only relevant to those wading into an international meeting for the first time, but also for those who are more seasoned at international negotiations. For those of you wanting to find a balance between international negotiations and local grassroots work, you may find yourself needing to bridge the gap. International **negotiators** often become wrapped up in drafting text and policy, and forget what it means to local government, community organizations, or a member of the general public. On the other

hand, grassroots workers sometimes forget to view their work in the context of international frameworks that are created through many efforts. The various roles that youth can play at international meetings can serve to bridge this international-local gap.

II. The Essentials

What are international meetings?

The last few decades have seen a rise in the number of international meetings (IMs) that work towards building a framework for countries to work together on global issues and dilemmas. The large number of significant meetings that take place naturally raises some difficult questions.

How many of the outcomes of these meetings can one person or organization discover and translate into something useful “on the ground”?

How effective are IMs and their outcomes at achieving their intended results, particularly at national and local levels?

Are IMs the key to making progress towards peace, equity, disarmament, sustainability, human rights, and global economic justice?

While there are no simple answers to these questions, the reality is that our present international arena requires dialogue between players, and IMs provide space for that dialogue. At the same time, the effectiveness of large-scale meetings is increasingly being called into question.

IMs are held with the aim of either 1) reaching agreements on how to solve specific problems or address particular issues of global importance, or 2) reviewing progress from the time another meeting was held. For example, significant meetings usually have 5 and 10-year follow-ups (and are typically named according to the city where the original meeting took place, e.g. Rio+10 or Cairo+5). The agreements struck at IMs are the result of extraordinary efforts made by participating nations and individuals to improve the world we live in. They include international legal instruments (**conventions**, **treaties**, and **protocols**) that require countries to take specific actions, **programmes of action** which set out guidelines, targets and mechanisms to achieve goals defined at the IM, as well as political **declarations** and statements that do not carry obligations but establish **norms** and standards for the international sphere.

Some IMs do not aim to reach any formal agreements, but are organized to facilitate discussions and information-sharing between countries, as well as between different interest groups that form within and across countries. This information-exchange process is also part of those meetings that seek to establish international agreements.

Although many countries may be concerned with the same global issues, they certainly don't always envision the same solutions. Each country has its own interests and concerns for its population, environment, and economy (and also often seeks to support the interests of its allies). Similarly, different groups within each country, such as youth or Indigenous Peoples, have their own specific concerns. As a result, reaching **consensus** on these international legal instruments can be like putting together a puzzle with too many pieces! Issues under negotiation are often extremely complex and negotiation sessions are usually long and exhausting.

Although many countries may be concerned with the same global issues, they certainly don't always envision the same solutions.



Who participates?

States and observers

According to international law, only those states that are recognized by the United Nations as independent and are also **Member States** of the UN can negotiate and vote on international or **multilateral** agreements. Once a treaty comes into effect, those states that have accepted to be a **Party** to the agreement are the only participants allowed to make decisions on its implementation or revision. However, other entities (e.g. national liberation movements, inter-governmental organizations, specialized agencies; see <http://ww.un.org/Overview/missions>) can be officially identified as **observers** and take part in the negotiations and defend their ideas and interests. As observers, however, they cannot vote or object to a consensus at formal or informal sessions (see “Formal & informal Sessions”, page 7).

BOX I. Reasons for participating in international meetings

States do not all participate in IMs for the same reasons. Countries arrive at IMs with differing agendas and motivations. Here are some examples:



Other participants

In addition to Member States and observers, many other bodies participate at IMs and contribute to the negotiation process. Although they cannot vote or object to a consensus, relevant UN bodies, as well as a diverse range of other non-state actors roughly termed **civil society**, are having an increasingly significant impact on the negotiation process.

Major UN organizations

The United Nations is really a family of organizations, often referred to as “the UN system.” The UN is composed of a Secretariat, various UN programmes, funds, councils, commissions, and specialized agencies that contribute to the discussions and follow-ups of these meetings (see “Recommended Background Reading” for more information about the structure of the UN, page 46). Some UN organizations attend IMs as observers (see above), but many UN organizations also work in partnership with governments and **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs). IMs provide opportunities for these partners to meet and network.

Civil society

Civil society actors are increasingly present and active at IMs. For our purposes, civil society refers roughly to those actors and institutions that lie outside of the sphere

of government. Depending on the nature of the meeting and the issue(s) at hand, interested civil society actors may include academics and researchers, corporations and industry, women's groups, representatives of Indigenous Peoples, local governments, youth, and, almost always, NGOs and media. During the 1992 Earth Summit, certain groups in civil society were given the status of a **major group**, formally acknowledging their need to participate in the **conference**.

Generally, civil society actors need to have permission to attend an IM through a process of **accreditation**. The process may be established for each particular meeting (usually through a secretariat) or admission may be restricted to those NGOs holding on-going **consultative status** with the UN Economic and Social Council (**ECOSOC**).

NGOs are important to the process of an IM because they are seen to have broad-based support, and the ability to engage, inform, and mobilize the public.

Local, national and international NGOs are one sector of the broader category of civil society, though they are sometimes perceived as the whole of civil society itself. They are important to the process of an IM because they are seen to have broad-based support, and the ability to engage, inform, and mobilize the public. They also fulfill different roles at the IM.

NGOs may directly and indirectly exert influence on the negotiation processes. Often forming coalitions, NGOs provide direct input to the meetings by submitting written statements and publishing position papers. Larger, international NGOs like Greenpeace or Amnesty International may arrive with their own team of experts and directly lobby government delegates independently. Some also publish neutral reviews for the duration of the negotiations. For example, an NGO called the International Institute for Sustainable Development publishes the *Earth Negotiation Bulletin*, a daily reporting service for environment and development negotiations.

NGOs also often advise, provide support to, and lobby national delegates. They indirectly influence the process by raising public awareness of specific issues, promoting media coverage, and lobbying (sometimes multiple) governments.

Other civil society actors play specific roles in their own realms of activity. Media participants, for instance, play a large part in determining how a meeting will be portrayed to both national and international audiences. Representatives of Indigenous Peoples work to ensure their interests and needs are considered during negotiations.

The role of youth

Youth participate in IMs in a range of capacities. Youth serve as members of government **delegations** (sometimes after intense lobbying for the inclusion of youth) or participate as civil society representatives. In the latter capacity, there is again a range of options. Youth can attend as media representatives (whether or not their role is to report on youth issues). They can represent national or international youth-serving organizations, or participate as individual members of non-youth groups. In all areas, the participation of young people at IMs is rising.

“International meetings can be extremely overwhelming and intimidating for young people. This is especially true for Indigenous youth who find themselves in a foreign environment structured on western-based formality and procedure.”

(Lynn Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs, Canada, Turtle Island)

Youth come to international meetings with a diverse range of interests, goals, backgrounds, and experiences, and often these differences can be more significant than the commonality of being young.

Youth represent a significant (and increasing) portion of the world’s population, and offer different perspectives on many issues. Young people are the ones who will be around to see the long-term consequences of today’s decisions and actions.

Needless to say, there are divisions among youth. Youth come to international meetings with a diverse range of interests, goals, backgrounds, and experiences, and often these differences can be more significant than the commonality of being young.

BOX 2. Who are “youth”?

The UN defines youth as those aged 15 to 24 inclusive. This term was defined by the **General Assembly** during International Youth Year (1985). Outside of the UN, the definition of youth varies between countries and institutions. For example, the European Union considers an individual as “youth” until 30, while Indonesia goes as far as 40.

How many youth are there? Using the UN definition, there are approximately one billion youth spread across the world today. That’s one-sixth of the world’s population! If you include everyone under 25, youth make up almost half (48%) of the world.

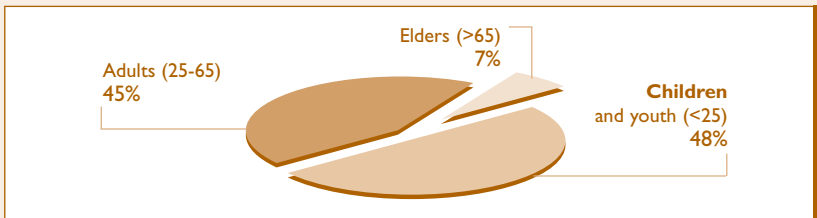
Is youth participation at an IM representative of world youth? Unfortunately, the answer is no. The reality is that different sectors, gender and regions have greater

accessibility to the IM process. A few basic factors that can define and skew the demographics of IM youth participation include:

Global Distribution. About 85% of the world's youth live in countries of the South. However, youth from the North tend to have more opportunities and access to resources to be involved in IM processes. At a typical IM, the majority of youth participation will be from the North.

Gender. The world youth population consists of approximately 525 million young men and 500 million young women, or 1.05 young men for every young woman. However, the nature of gender relations and rights in many countries may make it more difficult for young women to access opportunities to participate in IMs.

Literacy. While in no way a requirement, IMs tacitly assume participants are literate. In countries with low literacy rates, with gender-based literacy programs, or where English (the predominant language used in IM processes) is only offered in specialized high-level education, youth participation in IMs will be significantly under-represented.



World population distribution by age group (Population Reference Bureau 2000)

Formal and informal sessions

IMs have both formal and informal negotiation sessions. Formal sessions are usually governed by the **Rules of Procedure** of the specific negotiation system being used, are transparent (meaning information about what happens at the sessions is available to all participants), and are almost always accessible to all parties and observers. At UN meetings, translation of documents and simultaneous interpretation of sessions into the official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) is offered in most instances.

Formal sessions also include the **plenary**. A plenary typically takes place in a large meeting room where statements are made and final, formal decisions are taken. For example, once the negotiation of a particular text (e.g. the political declaration

**Special Contribution –
Engaging the International Financial Institutions
Pamela Foster, Halifax Initiative, Canada**

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are independent specialized agencies of the UN system, and are commonly referred to as the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). There a number of ways in which civil society organizations can engage with IFIs, including their consultations on projects and policies in countries that borrow money from them. They also conduct policy consultations in “donor” countries – those that lend the money. Increasingly, IFIs are making use of web-based consultations. For example, the World Bank may require consultations on the environmental and social impact of a project, and will carry them out in the country where the project will take place. The environmental impact assessment can also be commented on via the web.

As someone who has been involved with different levels of IFI consultations with other civil society organizations (CSO), I have found the experience, in many cases, frustrating. It seems that participation in these dialogues does not translate into changes within the IFIs’ activities. A growing number of CSOs are even wondering if the IFIs are using consultations to manage rather than address criticism.

So before you consider engaging in dialogue with the IFIs it is important to critically evaluate certain matters:

Who? *Which civil society groups have been invited? Is it only service delivery NGOs who partner with the Bank on projects? Have the IFIs invited NGOs that have a critical voice? Is there strong representation from Southern civil society?*

What? *At what stage in the project/programme/policy development have the IFIs invited consultation? Are key assumptions within the project/programme/policy up for discussion, or just minor details? Is there a commitment to respond to input by revising the draft and responding to comments?*

How? *Does the format/agenda of the consultation allow for dialogue? Are key documents made publicly available and in a timely fashion? Is the allocation of time between IFIs and civil society fair, or imbalanced?*

The IFIs also host civil society dialogues on a range of topics at the time of their Annual Meetings, which usually take place in Washington D.C. Similar to UN meetings, NGOs participating in Annual Meeting dialogues must be accredited in advance. How the IFIs decide which NGOs receive or are denied accreditation is unclear, but most applicants receive accreditation. The meetings provide an opportunity for information gathering and exchange with IFI senior staff, as well as a question/answer period with the Presidents of the organizations. It is important to meet as civil society in advance of these meetings to ensure that time is used effectively with regards to information exchange, which is, rather than influence, often the main outcome of IFI consultations.

or programme of action) has been finalized in separate sessions, it will be brought to the plenary for formal adoption. This is basically “the rubber stamp” of approval. Opening and other statements by governments will be made at the plenary and civil society groups are also permitted to read statements (usually through prior arrangement with the **conference secretariat**).

Informal sessions, contact groups, or working groups are often necessary for dealing with a very long agenda of items, or when formal negotiations become deadlocked and can't move along any further. A smaller group of key negotiators (including experts and high-level bureaucrats from country delegations) will then attempt to reach consensus or agreement on particular issue(s). These sessions are usually held in only one language (most likely English), are often closed to non-negotiators, and take place at the same time as a number of other informal sessions. It is difficult to find out when and where the informal sessions are taking place, who is participating, and no official records are kept. It is difficult for small (often Southern) delegations to effectively participate in informal sessions.

The reality is that informal sessions are where most of the real decisions are made. Such meetings can be in a small negotiating room with a few tables and chairs, in a corridor with only 4 or 5 people, or even in a restaurant over dinner. An example of a process where most discussions occur in informal sessions is the international negotiations of a formal commitment to fight climate change.

The preparatory process

While all the excitement and media attention surrounding an international meeting usually focus on the dates and venue of the main meeting, newcomers may be surprised to find out that a substantial amount of the work is usually done beforehand. Internationally, this work is done in meetings of the Preparatory Committee of a UN conference, known as **PrepComs**. There are several PrepComs that take place over a period of two to three years before the main meeting. It is at these meetings where Member States will develop the agenda, and draft and negotiate most of the content of principal documents that form the majority of the meeting's outcomes. Nationally, a country's development of positions and consultations with citizens and interest groups (if there are any) also begin many months before the meeting. In other words, by the time the actual meeting takes place, many of the discussions and debates have already occurred.

“Real regional balance does not mean balance between North and South but it means that the North should not have more than one-fifth of the influence.”

(Leif Holmburg, Sweden)

Participating in the preparatory process of an international meeting is crucial to effectively influence the outcomes.

It is for this reason that participating in the preparatory process of an international meeting, both nationally and internationally, is crucial to effectively influence the outcomes, and all the suggestions given in this book also apply to preparatory meetings. You can participate by actually attending one or more of the PrepComs as a member of civil society or an official

delegation. It is also possible to carefully follow the process from home through daily negotiation updates if regular access to the Internet is available to you.

While it is typical that there will be more youth present at the main meeting, there is a need for more youth participation in the preparatory process. PrepComs also provide an opportunity for coalition and alliance-building with all actors during the most essential stages of the process.

III. Youth In Action! How To Be Effective At International Meetings

What does it mean to be “effective” at an international meeting? It can mean setting goals in advance and then achieving those goals. It can refer to how you support other participants during the actual meeting. Or it can mean understanding the relevant outcomes of the meeting so that you can translate these outcomes back in your home country. Effectiveness at international meetings means different things to different people, but all participants must accept one reality: there is hard work to be done before, during, and after the meeting. It is also easier to cover more ground if you work in groups – don’t try to do it alone.

While this “how-to” section is organized sequentially from before you go to the meeting, to being on-site, to back at home, many of the tips below apply to all of these periods. When you move from one stage to the next, refresh yourself on the tips that have already been mentioned – they could still be pertinent.

On the other hand, don’t let all of these tips weigh you down either! There is way too much here for any one person to do. Do as much as you can and need to do to reach your objectives, whether your objective is learning as much as you can about the process and issues (perhaps in order to participate more strategically in the next meeting) or as focused as introducing specific text into the document.

“Before I’d come I wish I’d known how little, but important, my role here is.”

(Søren Meinert, Denmark)

The “golden rules” of the game

There are some bits of advice that can significantly enhance your experience at an IM and *apply at all stages of the game*. Since they’re so important, we’ve entitled them the “golden rules.” Give them some special attention!

Take advantage of your youth

Many doors will open to you simply because you are young. Because youth are a major group in certain international processes (for example, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development) young people have certain speaking rights. Often policy-makers and negotiators welcome your input because you offer a different and exciting perspective on the issues. They will most likely find consulting with you refreshing. There is also a certain novelty about youth, meaning you may find you have the freedom to say some things that policy-makers may not be able to say.

Find a mentor

Watch carefully for seasoned veterans of IMs, including experienced youth. They may not be the head of a delegation, but they often stick out by their high level of ease and comfort in the environment. They will speak out at critical times in meetings, often providing unique perspectives and insights into the process and content of the meeting. You can present yourself as a newcomer, or the mentor may just come to you. These people will help you to deal with the steep learning curve of IMs in a more productive and less frantic way. Apart from the benefits of having a mentor, be sure to stay critical and question their views and opinions if you don’t quite agree with what they are saying.

Be patient and learn from different working styles

Working with so many people can be an extremely exciting but challenging experience. International meetings give you an opportunity to work with people of different ages, linguistic groups, regions of the world, cultures – you name it. Different people have different ways of communicating and working. Just like any diverse social environment, such differences can be valuable but frustrating. The first step to becoming more comfortable and effective in such an environment is recognizing that differences exist, and identifying yourself within

Ask yourself where you are coming from: your own culture, limitations, and position of privilege.

the spectrum of diversity, including where you fall in age, language, region, etc. Ask yourself where you are coming from: your own culture, limitations, and position of privilege. Try to work through the frustrations by focusing on, learning from, and appreciating the valuable lessons. Chances are that other people will also find your style different and possibly difficult. Working in an international setting requires lots of stamina and patience.

Be prepared to deal with “the brush off”

While being a young person might be helpful in some instances, other times you might find yourself discriminated against because of your age. “Ageism” most often refers to discrimination against older adults, however in this case the term refers to taking away the legitimacy of a youth perspective or youth presence based solely on young age. Getting the “brush off” (being treated dismissively) can be expected, but there are effective ways of responding to it. In such cases, it is crucial to keep your cool and remain polite, but don’t shy away from sticking up for yourself and your ideas.

Also:

- ✓ Stay as healthy and energetic as you can. Getting as much sleep as possible is helpful!
- ✓ Do not feel powerless if you have language difficulties. There are many ways of communicating in order to ensure everyone has an equal chance of making their point.
- ✓ Keep your self-confidence up. Mistakes happen.
- ✓ Approach other delegates the way you want to be approached – with courtesy and respect.
- ✓ Listen and observe whenever you can. Be open to diverse input.
- ✓ Don’t be afraid to introduce yourself to other delegates, and ask questions if you need some answers. Remember, “veterans” are usually more than willing to explain lingo or procedures to newer people.
- ✓ Finally, make an effort to attend social events – formal ones as well as those that are more casual. Getting to know other participants in a social environment can be fun and relaxing when you need it most.



BOX 3. Challenges faced by youth at international meetings

- ❖ *Difficulty obtaining accreditation.* Young people may have a more difficult time getting accreditation to attend an IM, especially because youth are not always affiliated with an organization.
- ❖ *Different degrees of access to information.* For example, on an official delegation, youth representatives might find that they receive less information than other delegates, or are kept out of the “serious discussions.” For youth that are under-resourced, this includes issues of availability of information in the home country, access to technology such as Internet, and access to information at the IM itself.
- ❖ *Relatively less power within/between delegations.* Depending on the country of origin, the state of power relations within the government might leave youth feeling powerless when trying to influence their delegation (see Box 4, page 20). Southern delegations are also considerably smaller in size and fewer in number, and relatively less influential than delegations from the North.
- ❖ *Language.* Youth from non-English speaking countries face significant disadvantages at English-dominated meetings. In addition to formal documents and negotiations, much of the informal UN lingo is also English, and many youth meetings are held in English without translations. This makes the process more difficult to decipher. If the majority of meeting participants are English-speaking, non-English speaking youth might find themselves feeling marginalized.
- ❖ *Discrimination.* Discrimination may manifest itself (e.g. gender, linguistic, racial, political, religious) from other delegates and participants. Youth might find themselves being held responsible for the past actions and foreign policy of their country (or region), rather than their own beliefs.
- ❖ *Issues of representation.* Who do you actually represent at an IM? This issue remains contentious. Many argue that it is impossible to represent such a diverse category of people as “youth.” Your country of origin, any organization you are involved with, and age group will also come into play.
- ❖ *Less preparation.* Under-resourced youth (and delegations) might find it harder to participate in the preparatory process for a meeting (in person), and might not feel prepared, or integrated into the environment when the main meeting rolls around.

- ◇ *Travel-related problems.* Participants from the South face more difficulties when trying to obtain a visa to enter the country where the meeting is taking place. Many potential participants may not actually gain entrance to the host country in time.
- ◇ *Uncomfortable situations.* Under-resourced youth might find it more difficult to take advantage of networking opportunities that occur over (expensive) meals, or incur any other unplanned costs.

Before you go

Being effective at an international meeting has a lot to do with what and how much you do beforehand. Whether you're attending a **summit**, or even a PrepCom, chances are that a lot has already happened and you may have a fair amount to catch up on. Remember, you're not doing this alone! Seek out other people and organizations that are going to the meeting and work with them.

Before you go is also the time to try to secure a stronger voice for youth at the meeting. Consider contacting the conference organizers (usually the conference secretariat) and lobbying them to integrate youth participation opportunities right into the official structure of the meeting. This could be, for example, scheduling a roundtable between youth and governments, or creating more opportunities for youth to address the plenary. Contact your government and suggest that they have a youth delegate. Many governments don't think of doing this unless the meeting is specifically on youth or children.

Reading

Reading can't be emphasized enough. Get up to speed on what stage the documents are at, where they've been, and who's been lobbying for what. Know what was the original intent of the meeting: was it to discuss a topic for the first time, to share information, or to review and build upon past agreements? Read what you can about the host country. International meetings don't take place in a complete bubble – the host country will affect how the meeting and **side events** are planned and carried out. Find out what preparations they have made and what the country's particular interests are in this issue and/or meeting.

What should you read? Here are our top 5 suggestions:

1. *Draft documents.* Become acquainted with the draft documents which result from PrepComs as they form the basis of subsequent negotiations. Find out

what the contentious issues are. These may not be obvious just by reading government or UN texts. Look for pointers in the media and from other independent observers (e.g. “think-tanks”, NGOs). If your meeting is a follow-up, take a look at the documents which came out of the original meeting (these documents are usually found on the conference website).

2. *Civil society positions.* Consult the positions of various national and international civil society groups to see if (and how) they differ from governments’ and/or your own positions. You should also look at the local positions of organizations and media located in the country hosting the meeting.
3. *Lingo.* Learn the lingo (see Annexes, page 47) and technical vocabulary related to the issues under discussion. Familiarize yourself with the many details of the formal process used during UN negotiations. Attending a Model United Nations (MUN) simulation or consulting MUN resources can strengthen your understanding (see <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/modelun/> or UNA-Canada’s *Model UN Sourcebook* @ <http://www.unac.org/mun>).
4. *The rules.* Know the general rules and codes of conduct used at IMs (see “Recommended Background Reading,” page 46). Specific rules may change from meeting to meeting, depending on the level of potential security threats, but basic codes of conduct remain the same. Larger meetings also attract more organized demonstrations and consequently have increased security. It is wise to be aware of the prospects for demonstrations and deliberate your involvement based on any available information.
5. *Government documents and positions.* Focus on the official positions of your government in the lead-up to the meeting. These include Preparatory Committee meetings, government consultations with stakeholders, and position and discussion papers. These government reports and papers may be public documents, so ask for them. (Try the foreign ministry, your country’s UN Mission, or the Internet, remembering that these papers are sometimes only finalized at the last minute.)



Prioritize your reading needs and goals, or you'll drown in the amount of information! Get a general level of knowledge on the major topics through background reading, past conference reports, newspaper articles, and speaking with local experts. Use the Internet – a lot of the information you need may be found there. Finally, don't be afraid to stop looking for things to read – get on the phone or write letters instead. Many times government documents are hard to find, or haven't been created. In order to get this information you may need to find relevant government officials and talk with them instead. This also offers a great opportunity to meet/speak with the people you will be working with at the IM.

Position building

Depending on what capacity you are attending the IM in, you may find it useful to develop positions on the issues, either on your own or in conjunction with an organization. Your government, as well as civil society organizations, will arrive at the meeting with well-developed positions too. Participating in and influencing the in-country preparatory process well before the meeting can be an effective way of getting your concerns addressed by or incorporated into your government's positions.

Here are 3 key ways to build your own positions and then contribute to those of your government:

- a. *The issues.* Decide which issue(s) you wish to represent youth on and think about the outcomes that you would like to see. Find out what other people (i.e. local and national youth organizations) are saying about the issue(s). Identify youth and other NGOs that are involved in the process and offer to participate in the preparation of joint position papers. Positions from organized groups tend to carry much more weight than positions defended individually.
- b. *Outcome documents.* Use and refer to outcome documents (or paragraphs) from previous international meetings, especially those from youth-specific meetings, to support your position. These texts have already been approved through consensus. They provide you and your position with strength, credibility, and concrete power since language agreed to in past texts sets a precedent or baseline. See the UN Youth Unit's website for a complete listing of these documents: <http://www.un.org/youth>.

- c. *Consultation sessions.* Participate in as many consultation sessions as you can in order to influence your government and, hopefully, get your own points reflected in their official positions. Encourage your government to hold consultations with youth, but if it is not possible, send them copies of your own positions. Remember, national governments are large and complex so get in touch with someone early on to ensure that the appropriate people receive your suggestions.

See http://www.unac.org/youth_sd/ for an online guide to writing position papers.

Networking

Developing a network of allies and contacts before you go will be invaluable to you when you arrive – not only from a lobbying and negotiating perspective, but also to see some friendly faces you already know when you get there! Networking can involve a range of players, for example:

Participating organizations. Make linkages to organizations, youth-centred or not, that are going to be at the meeting so that you can share information and opinions and ultimately achieve greater influence. Well-organized back-up from youth groups and NGOs in your country can increase the pressure on your government for certain outcomes that you all want to see. Creating a network in advance also allows you to organize for group work that will need to be done collectively at the meeting (e.g. writing a youth statement, see “Working with an international youth caucus,” page 28). To find out about international youth participation in the meeting, try contacting the conference secretariat: they might be able to tell you about the existence of a youth **caucus** or listserv, or put you in touch with other youth who have contacted them.

Politicians. Consider setting up meetings with parliamentarians/political representatives before you go in order to generate interest. Provide them with a youth point of view, as well as any data, studies, or position papers you may have on the issue. They just might look to you as an adviser in the future.

Media. Try to meet with your country’s media both at home and during the event. If a reporter is being sent to cover the meeting, try to meet with that individual before going – it might be easier to track them down (and vice versa) at the meeting if you’ve already been in contact. Don’t forget about alternative media sources. They are usually open to different perspectives on the issues.

Youth Testimonial

Indigenous youth at international meetings

By Lynn Katsitsaronkwas Jacobs

Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, Canada, Turtle Island

In our traditional teachings, every day we offer our greetings to all elements of the natural world that provide us with the sustenance and beauty around us. Here I would like to offer my greetings to our youth. We are the life force that is the link to the future health of our planet. It is our contribution today that will shape the world of our future generations.

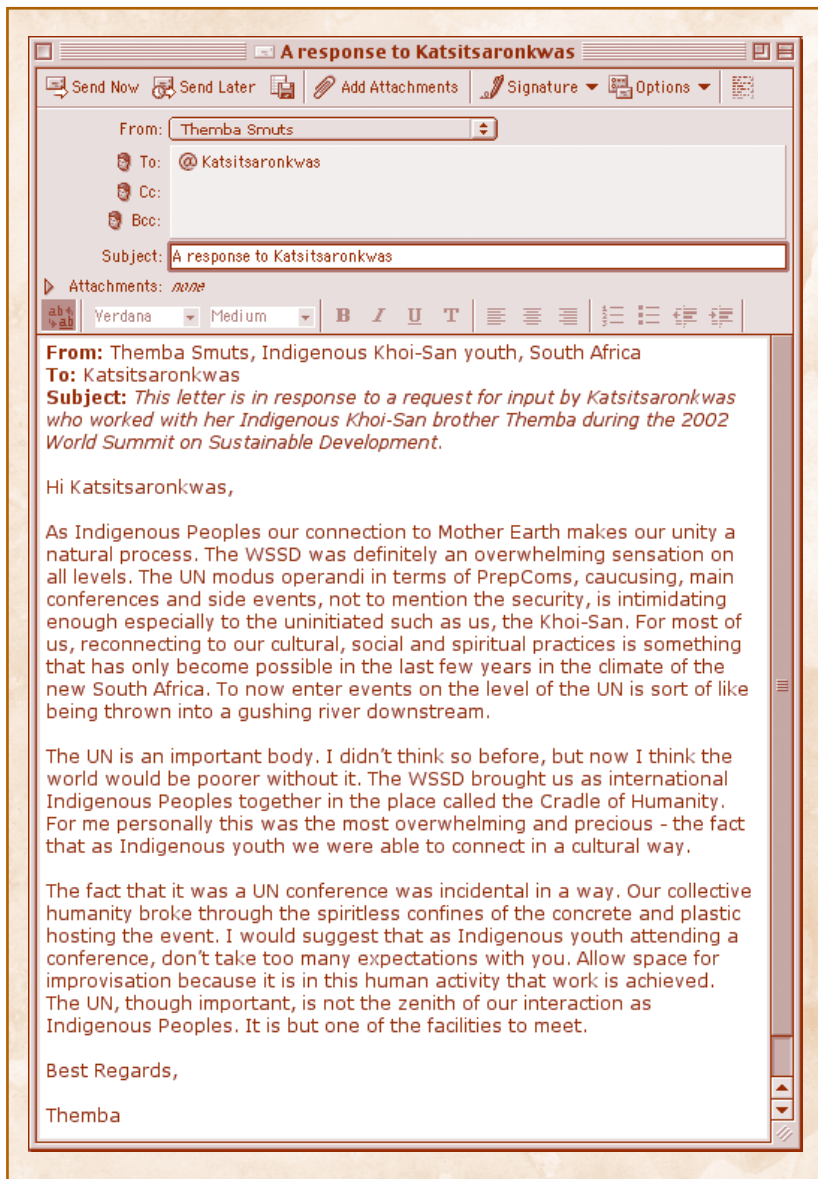
In order to achieve sustainable livelihoods in our communities, action is required at all levels - from the grassroots all the way to the United Nations. Although the results of efforts in the international arena are not seen immediately in our communities, even small victories at this level are investments that produce a slow movement of positive change.

International meetings can be extremely overwhelming and intimidating for young people. This is especially true for Indigenous youth who find themselves in a foreign environment structured on western-based formality and procedure. The spirituality and level of dialogue inherent in our interactions with each other and the natural world is lacking in the United Nations. Although decisions are being made that have significant impacts on our communities, it is very difficult, particularly for our elders, to find relevance in the words and processes of international meetings. It is essential that our youth become involved at the international level so that we can contribute the unique needs and worldviews of our communities, and communicate the information from these meetings back to our people, in a form that is relevant to us.

At international meetings, an Indigenous Caucus brings together Indigenous brothers and sisters from all over the world. Working within the Indigenous Caucus adds a special level of familiarity and sense of family to the experience. It is important to be aware that other Indigenous Peoples from different parts of the world will have different priorities and approaches, and may not have appropriate access to resources to participate in these meetings. As with any international caucus, one of the major challenges is to reach consensus on the language used to lobby other caucuses and governments while taking into account these variations.

As Indigenous youth, we can also lobby the international youth caucus, where an immense diversity of knowledge, views and approaches towards Indigenous issues will be encountered. Our commitment towards respectful education about Indigenous issues and needs is necessary to bridge the gap of understanding, particularly with youth caucus members who will eventually become leaders themselves.

My final advice to you, brothers and sisters, is to be patient and stay strong in the struggle. Don't get lost or discouraged in the big United Nations machine. Your voice and contributions at the international level of decision-making are vital to the health of our communities. And most importantly, continue to widen the circle of awareness about international processes by sharing the information with your communities, and obtaining the fundamental guidance of our elders and traditional teachings. Skennenkowa (I wish you great peace).



BOX 4. The role of youth on official country delegations

If you've been selected to be a youth representative on the official delegation of your country, you're in for some busy times – as if it wasn't going to be hectic already! The role and expectations of a youth on a delegation are quite demanding, and will require some extra pre-departure thinking.

Ensuring youth representation - Not all country delegations have youth representatives for a variety of reasons, including limited financial resources, and a lack of political will to include a youth perspective. If you know of a meeting that is coming up, you or your organization can contact the government department responsible for managing your country's participation in the meeting and lobby for youth representation. You may also want to contact other governments to ask for financial assistance, or work with young people from other countries (especially those that include youth on their delegation). The selection process could be through application or through appointment.

Privilege and responsibility - Being the youth going to an IM in the capacity of a youth delegate is a position of privilege, and it is likely that you were chosen from many other qualified candidates who could be in your place. It is important that you are aware of this privilege and that it should not be taken for granted or wasted. Playing this role implies responsibilities to: youth at home who may be depending on you for information about the meeting or to advocate key positions on their behalf; other youth at the meeting to whom you can act as an access point for information about negotiations; and of course the delegation, which should benefit from your unique perspectives.

Your role as a delegate - Being a youth representative means that you're not only playing a different role at the IM, but also within the actual country delegation. You will probably be expected to know all the issues and national positions. But whereas some delegations may have an environment in which you can lobby different members of your national delegation, others may expect you to uphold the national position on any given issue. Make sure you are aware of these limitations before you formally agree to participate, and ask for full briefings before you depart (on positions, but also on logistical issues of travel and funding).

Benefits - In addition to being fully funded to attend an IM, being an official delegate gives you a green light to attend many events that you wouldn't otherwise necessarily have access to. Not only will you be able to go to delegation meetings and negotiations (though not necessarily all of them), you may be able to secure

access to “insider” information by building relationships with other members of the delegation, or attending meetings that are closed to everyone except government delegates. This is a great – and rare – opportunity to approach ministers and government officials. You may also access on-site resources more easily than other youth, like computers, Internet, telephones, and fax machines.

Challenges - Being younger and less experienced than others on the delegation may leave you feeling marginalized and lacking legitimacy in meetings and gatherings. You may also feel that your “relevant issues” are all the issues, and it may be a challenge to become versed on every topic under the sun. Youth have a stake in most topics and your knowledge and contribution to the discussion will have implications for how much validity the youth role is given. What’s more, the youth delegate will not always be included in corridor discussions, so forming personal contacts with certain negotiators is key to your involvement. Finally, the responsibility of being a member of a delegation is overwhelming, and you may find yourself experiencing occasional feelings of complete ineffectiveness. Identify some concrete goals before you go, so that at these points of exasperation, you can look at what you *have* been able to accomplish, rather than at all that remains undone.

A balancing act - While you may have access to many more meetings, you may find them impinging on more and more of your sleep! The role of a delegate is certainly more demanding, especially if you are participating in the international youth caucus, which some delegations may even require of their youth representative. Youth delegates play a bit of an “insider/outsider” role, and are therefore a valuable source of information and insight to non-delegate youth. They can provide up-to-date information about the state of negotiations, direct the efforts of youth towards central issues, or point out key officials that should be the focus of lobbying efforts. However, this privileged role can sometimes leave you in an awkward position, as you may find yourself the subject of lobbying, holding confidential information that you are not at liberty to reveal to other youth or the media.

Youth Testimonial

Participating in UN conferences: A youth perspective from the South

By Sonu Chhina

Mumbai, India

As you stand in the queue to get your accreditation badge, you can't help but smile like a cat. Just getting someone to fund your airplane ticket was such a battle won. The story of the journey from the day you receive news of a UN conference to the accreditation tent is an important one for a youth from the South and should be told. Unless you have made substantial inroads in local organizations which have healthy funding arteries in the North, pleading with them for accreditation or funding is not going to work. The government delegation might not even know what their team looks like. The government might make a tokenistic youth gesture, but depending on what the delegation is like, these delegates may never be seen or heard during the negotiations.

After invaluable help from other youth activists, a wire transfer and accreditation may be provided from youth-friendly organizations and foundations in the North. When you're at the conference, try and attach yourself to a youth who is one conference old. Take time out and circle the plenaries, events and panels important for you. Focus is vital to being effective. Sit with an experienced hand who has had the opportunity to be at the earlier PrepComs and figure out the politics on the floor. Recognize the "friends" on the floor and try and network between the breaks. Once inside the UN, the division bell between the work of a youth activist from North and the South does not ring. It is more or less the same.

Working with the NGO delegations from your country or region is like walking a tightrope. Walk clear of the politics and don't even try to understand the intense intra-NGO fighting. On one hand, they have the experience and knowledge about the issues and you have a lot to learn from them; on the other, they can be frustratingly un-youthful in their outlook. Some cultural attitudes dictate that they speak and you listen.

At the end of the day, you will realize that working with the other youth and strategizing with them is your inspiration and source of energy while working in the UN. Post-midnight chats sitting on sofas with others as the negotiations go on make you realize that the UN has brought different ends of the earth together. Locally, another youth may be celebrating a legal victory won for gay couples, while you are trying to fight the 1200 Rupees fine imposed by the Mumbai police on couples in a public park who indulge in "socially inappropriate behaviour". The cultural differences are huge but they all collapse under the umbrella of rights, services and participation.

For youth activists, the journey has just begun. There's an exhilarating thrill in seeing your suggested text in a UN document. That is the ultimate measure of your success and the sleepless week that you spent in the UN. It is important to focus on your successes and use them as reasons to work in the next UN meeting.

On-site

You're there. It's overwhelming. Where to start???

Find those allies and networks that you developed so carefully before you left and add to them. **Caucuses** spring up spontaneously at international meetings and can provide important direction and solidarity (see “Working with an international youth caucus,” page 28). Side events, such as NGO or civil society forums, exhibitions, or simultaneous conferences, can provide opportunities for developing supportive relationships with like-minded groups or participants and a place to profile and promote your own work.

Don't delay in immersing yourself in “the process.” There will undoubtedly be far too many meetings to attend, speeches to hear, and delegates to corner for you to do it all each day. No one can do it all, but try to do as much as you can. These few days are what you've been preparing for.

Here's what you can do to dive in:

- ✓ Find like-minded youth groups and NGOs present at the meeting and cooperate with them. Sharing information and keeping each other up-to-date on news and decisions taken is crucial.
- ✓ Keep your eyes open and follow updates carefully. The agenda can move very fast or slow, and unpredictably in some cases. Highlight parts of the texts that are relevant to your position or interests so that you can refer to them quickly when needed. Record changes to the text on your copy as they are negotiated since an updated version of the draft text may not be made available for a while, if at all.
- ✓ Speak to your government's delegation as frequently as you can. If possible, arrange for regular briefings.
- ✓ Look for friendly members of other governments. Many of them will be supportive of your positions and can help you to influence your own government's positions. Remember, if your country works in a **negotiating bloc**, you will need to convince more than your own government to adopt your amendments. Pay close attention to which governments, and more specifically, which negotiators, are advocating positions that are similar to the ones that you are advocating. Speak with them and find out how you can work together to make things happen.

“As a government delegate you have to somewhat filter your activities – you are best leaving media advocacy work to others who can truly speak their mind (rather than the delegate who has to filter their comments)...”

(Lindsay Cole, Canada)

- ✓ If you're involved in the youth caucus, don't let it take up all of your time. Consider participating in other issue-based caucuses. This will allow you to network, as well as to introduce youth issues as relevant to many other agendas.
- ✓ Plan your time appropriately and look into events before you attend them to maximize your effectiveness. Choose the plenary sessions that are most relevant for your country, your position, and/or your interests. Pace yourself and stay focused.

BOX 5. Ideas for participation for youth at home

If you are not participating at an IM in person, but are interested in being involved and having your voice heard, here are some things that you can do:

- ◇ Make notes on your ideas and opinions on the position papers that have been proposed by youth participants, national positions and other international topics, and submit them to the participant. If possible, arrange a meeting before the IM to discuss issues in person.
- ◇ Keep your eyes open for any public youth consultations either with the government, or youth participants; suggest one if the idea does not come up and even help organize it!
- ◇ Seek out any email-based listservs arranged by youth participants (or suggest one), and send questions back to the participants regularly regarding the updates or anything else that you want to know about. Your questions are crucial to staying engaged in the process.
- ◇ If access to email is limited, encourage youth participants to keep daily notes while they are away so that you may read them later.
- ◇ Seek out other channels of information from which to get details about the IM, and different perspectives which you can ask your youth representatives about.
- ◇ Ask youth participants to bring back any youth documentation from the IM. Ask them to consult with you to adopt a community-specific action plan to implement the outcomes of the meeting. Follow-up with national plans for implementation as well.

Remember, if you are participating in an IM, you should keep these ideas in mind in order to keep youth at home involved.

How to be an effective lobbyist

In the context of international meetings, “lobbying” means trying to influence international agreements by promoting your views through contact with delegates on official country delegations (your own and others), other members of civil society (including different caucuses), as well as major negotiating blocs.

Lobbying is a common practice in all realms of political life. However, different strategies are needed in order to be effective at an international meeting. Some reasons for lobbying in such a setting are:

- ◇ To get certain issues, commitments, or language included in the text to acknowledge their significance. (For example, at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, many individuals and groups were lobbying to get descent-based discrimination and recognition of the slave trade as a crime against humanity included in the text.)
- ◇ To make sure certain language does not get negotiated out of the text, weakening progress made at previous meetings. (For example, at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, many were lobbying to prevent language on sexual and reproductive rights – accepted at previous international meetings – from being toned down, qualified, or deleted from the text completely.)
- ◇ To get certain text included that will allow you to lobby for action on that issue at home.

“As we became more familiar with the system, we were able to support the lobbying efforts of youth from other regions as well as our own.”

(Megan Bradley & Shalene Jobin, Canada)

Timing is crucial. Try and get started when the text is still being written since only the text that remains **bracketed** (see Box 6, page 27) is open for negotiation. Remember, much of the text may be written and agreed to at PrepComs rather than at the actual IM. The earlier you can get lobbying, the better.

The ABCs of lobbying

A) Draft the language

- ✓ Before you approach a delegate or participant, you must be familiar with the documents that are being negotiated at that specific meeting. Read the documents in advance, and note the areas of the text that are contentious and still open for negotiation. Be aware of relevant commitments made in previous documents.

- ✓ Any additions or changes to the negotiated document must be drafted in advance, be well researched, and in appropriate language. Is your text diplomatic, strategic, and realistic? Look at past international agreements to get a feeling for the style of language that is used. Provide your lobby point to a delegate on paper, clearly written (preferably typed), dated, and indicating which civil society groups support this lobby point, and also which other (if any) governments are supportive. A delegate will usually be more interested in a suggestion coming from three or four interest groups than from one individual. When providing your suggested text to a delegate, make sure you note the specific location of insertion and have clear, concise arguments to support your position. Delegates will need this in order to put your position forward on the floor during negotiations.

B) Make contact

- ✓ Sometimes it takes a while to make contact with those you want to lobby. Keep trying using different tactics: corridor encounters, writing letters, emails or faxes. Be persistent, but not pestering. Take risks. Approach high-level delegates and negotiators and ask them for a meeting – or coffee.
- ✓ Some contacts may not be able to help you directly, but maintain good relations – they may know colleagues who can help you.
- ✓ Leave a brief written summary of your positions and suggested changes to the text (if you have any) with the delegate that you are trying to lobby.
- ✓ Concentrate on building your credibility for future encounters: a delegation which does not support your position on one issue may support you on another.

C) Build support for your position

- ✓ If a delegate says his/her delegation is decidedly unable to support your position or implies that you do not grasp all the issues, try to get some explanations. This will not only give you insight into alternate points of view but your position could gain respect, which may pay off later. You also may be able to get the delegate thinking twice about the issue.
- ✓ If a delegate or a delegation is undecided, sometimes the best way to influence them is simply to have an honest conversation with them. State your concerns and ask their opinions.
- ✓ Recognize that a delegation or country's position is not always the same as an individual delegate's personal views.

BOX 6. The complex world of text

“On 1 September, delegates agreed to discuss the precautionary approach based on paragraph 93(e)bis alt. Developing countries and several developed countries preferred “bearing in mind” the precautionary approach. Other developed countries stressed application of, and later proposed “reaffirming our commitment to apply” the approach... After discussion, delegates agreed to a slight amendment of a Chair’s proposal. The final text reads “to promote and improve science-based decision-making, and reaffirm the precautionary approach as set out in Principle 15,” and quotes the Principle in its entirety.”

*- from Earth Negotiations Bulletin, Vol. 22, No. 48, 2 September 2002
covering the World Summit on Sustainable Development*

Yikes! Why would countries spend so much time debating over such small changes in wording? If you have spent any time reading UN declarations, programmes of action, protocols, or other such documents, you have probably noticed by now that the language is very diplomatic while being realistic, strategic yet flexible, and to the point but lengthy. This is not surprising considering the large number of countries that are involved in drafting documents that could have significant implications for policies at home. A word or phrase which seems meaningless to one country could mean huge changes in policies for another. For example, a country that is richer in natural resources will be more careful when negotiating issues of trade or the environment.

This is why much of the talk surrounding the preparatory process and the main meeting are focused on “the text” and what latest changes have been negotiated. Because IMs strive towards agreeing upon documents through consensus, it is better for all portions of the text to be agreed upon. Language that is “bracketed” indicates the portions of the draft text that are yet to be agreed upon. Square brackets reveal a lot about what the [hot areas of debate] are. This process can sometimes become extremely tight and heated, leading to situations where terms and phrases can become trading chips. In a hypothetical example, in the negotiations on Tobacco Control, one country may be willing to include language on strict restrictions on second-hand smoke, in exchange for a concession on language concerning advertising bans.

Working with an international youth caucus

Inevitably, an international meeting has implications for specific sectors of society that have vested interests in the outcomes of the meeting. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development, for example, explicitly consults “major groups” in multi-stakeholder dialogues as partners in decision-making. This practice is becoming increasingly popular both internationally and nationally.

More often than not, youth have a stake in the issues being discussed. Although the category “youth” intersects with many other groups (women, Indigenous Peoples, religious communities, labour unions, and ethno-cultural communities, to name a few), it has been recognized that there are benefits that come from being organized as a youth caucus. Caucuses can be either issue-based (individuals gather to discuss a specific topic that is of interest to them), or a major group caucus. A youth caucus would be an example of the latter, but youth who have particular interests in a topic may join together to form an issue-based youth caucus. Because of the diversity of interests that youth represent, some find that issue-based youth caucuses, such as “youth and sexual health education,” are what work best.

Greater strength and impact can be found in numbers. As such, caucusing can be an effective strategy towards seeing goals realized. But working in the form of a caucus can be both rewarding and frustrating at the same time. It is often like a microcosm of the whole IM where a diverse group are challenged to find consensus among themselves. It is important to ask yourself at the beginning why you are interested in working with the youth caucus, how your goals relate to those of the larger group, and what actions are better to take on your own.

If things work out perfectly and everyone agrees and the work gets done – great! If not, spending some time thinking about and agreeing to a process before the meeting may help immeasurably in getting the work of the caucus to be more effective.

“I’m very frustrated with the youth caucus. Too many wannabe politicians and not enough youth who act their age and really represent young people and youth action.”

(Russell Parkinson, United Kingdom)

Points about the process

Getting started. It is best to get started as soon as possible, as there is much to do. If a youth caucus does not yet exist for the meeting you are attending, and you’ve managed to make your way to the first preparatory meeting, you may wish to approach other young people and collaborate to kick-start the process. At home,

you may need to do some research to see which organizations are involved in the meeting process and find youth contacts through them. An email listserv is a useful tool to maintain communication between youth colleagues across the world and the rest of the caucus, between and during meetings.

Organization. There are many initial tasks at hand. First, an organizational body or steering committee must be selected. This body does not have any political influence over the group, but is responsible for logistics. Specific officers may be responsible for different tasks. Additionally, the youth caucus may choose to have a facilitator or coordinator. The method for choosing the facilitator and officers also needs to be determined (i.e. through a vote or through consensus), and the same method may be applied when choosing someone to give a formal statement to the plenary. This may help facilitate any competitive tensions that may arise.

Direction. It is useful to create a list of aims for the group in order to gain direction. This may be done by the steering committee through a consultation process with a larger group of youth.

Decision-making. Issues of group decision-making and rules of procedure also need to be determined early on in the game. While most countries and organizations make decisions by a majority vote (with the term “majority” being defined in each circumstance), consensus of all members is suitable for an international setting.

Pick your battle. The youth caucus cannot cover all the issues, no matter how big it is. Use your decision-making procedures to determine a few key issues that all involved youth agree are important. This is crucial for overall caucus effectiveness. Also, don't be afraid to break into as many issue-based caucuses as needed.

Working groups. As you may have guessed by now, things change very quickly at an IM and **working groups** allow youth participants to strategize their actions in a timely manner. Daily meetings during the actual IM are crucial for all members of the caucus to stay up to date (in addition to choosing one or two key contacts responsible for disseminating information regularly), but the bulk of the work is done in smaller working groups. Key working groups include media, lobbying, drafting of texts, drafting of statements, and issue-based groups.

Concrete action. Leading by example is necessary for demonstrating the commitment and professionalism of youth to the rest of the international community. The youth caucus will typically produce a statement including a list of concrete actions and means of implementation that will be followed after the meeting. This product is key for youth as it offers them a concrete outcome to take back home and implement

with other young people, both individuals and organizations. Link these issues to specific recommendations for language in the official outcome document. Tell governments exactly how you want them to address your issues.

Special tactics. It doesn't all have to be about drafting paragraphs and declarations. Creative actions make a statement too, and the youth caucus could be a source for this. At the fourth PrepCom of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, youth participants walked around the conference centre backwards to indicate that the negotiations were moving backwards. To emphasize the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots," government delegates were invited to a party, just outside of the meeting centre's gate, at which there was no food or drinks (to the invitees' surprise of course).

Logistics of youth caucus meetings

There are some key roles that need to be filled in the context of organizing and working in an international youth caucus. These include (but are not limited to): facilitator of the youth caucus, officers of the steering committee, **chair** of the meeting, note-taker, messenger/contact person(s), logistics person (responsible for booking rooms, advertising meeting time and place), and liaisons between the youth caucus and other processes (such as the plenary, other stakeholders, government delegations, side events, etc.).

Try to have a rotating chair. This ensures increased participation and variation in language and facilitation styles. The next chair may be chosen at the end of each meeting.

And, finally, ensure that clear and complete notes are being taken to document all decisions made, especially decisions about procedures. Record them, and have them on hand at every meeting.

You and the caucus

Representation and regional balance. A young person that is able to attend an international meeting is in a position of privilege. With that privilege comes the considerable responsibility of representing youth from your region and around the world. Some youth are also representing organizations to which they have further commitments. Be aware of where you are from. Although the issue of "true" representation is very contentious, there needs to be some recognition of the fact that an international youth caucus is working within a much larger context than it sometimes seems when you're locked up in a room drafting paragraphs of text under tight

timelines. Representation between North and South does not mean 50/50. While it rarely occurs, accurate representation would mean that youth from the North would make up less than 20% of the participants.

Choosing issues. When working strategically, key issues and messages need to be agreed upon. This may mean that an issue you are passionate about is not one on which the youth caucus chooses to develop a position. Recognize that you are working in a collective, but that you can still individually (or through other groups) pursue your own issues and interests.

Be ready for anything. Things could get chaotic – you are working with youth from all around the world who will have different backgrounds, goals, and ideologies. Maintain your confidence and be ready for lots of confusion, frustration, misunderstandings, and (let's not forget) learning. Leadership in this context is difficult: take it on if you feel up to it or be supportive of efforts underway. Remember to be open with those that you are working with, and try not to get too caught up in high-power politics. If you find yourself overwhelmed, find a few people to work with who you respect and trust.

Latecomers. If you are joining the international youth caucus late in the game, keep in mind that you are entering a process that is already underway. There should be openings for involvement of latecomers, and if there aren't, you may want to speak to the steering committee about creating opportunities.

BOX 7. Making a youth statement

Depending on the kind of international meeting you are attending, youth may be able to request a place on the speaker's list to address the plenary. The effectiveness of statements by non-government actors is difficult to measure. Some believe that a youth statement is a valuable opportunity to address powerful decision-makers, including heads of state and government, that young people may not necessarily have access to in other circumstances. A public statement also gives young people a chance to add some "youth flavour" to an otherwise quite formal process. Youth actually have a reputation for giving the most interesting and invigorating addresses!

Drafting a statement that all youth at the meeting can agree upon can be a challenging process. It is crucial that you keep in mind that the final statement will need to reflect the views of many individuals, organizations, and the issues they represent. Ensure that as many people as possible that will be represented on the podium have a chance to read the statement, to avoid any disagreement and frustration

afterwards. While achieving consensus on the final product is difficult, the process of debating, deliberating, and writing is itself an exercise in international negotiations.

However, others hold the opinion that young people are better to invest their time in other activities, such as lobbying negotiators and developing on-the-ground projects, rather than diverting their limited resources into the drafting of a youth statement. There is value to this view, highlighting the need to prioritize actions and be strategic in the way youth collectively allocate their time.

If you do find yourself in the process of drafting a youth statement, here are some pointers to keep in mind:

- ◇ Make sure your points are brief and to the point without sacrificing substantial content. Steer clear of vague, general statements.
- ◇ The statement should not be a shopping list of demands. Staying relevant to the agenda is important to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of those you are addressing.
- ◇ Ensure that concrete recommendations for action are included, and also stress commitments that youth themselves have made.
- ◇ Make sure your statement is not similar to those of other groups/individuals. Re-stating the words of others makes for a less interesting address.
- ◇ Delivery and timing are crucial for keeping everyone's attention – this responsibility falls mainly on the person giving the address, but deciding the style of delivery can be discussed in advance and in a group.
- ◇ Try to join up with other civil society groups and give a joint statement – these often carry more weight and demonstrate solidarity.
- ◇ Make sure that you have enough printed copies of your statement for delegates, media, etc.

Back at home

Finishing an international meeting can be exhausting. You've had numerous days of intense lobbying, negotiating, and listening, potentially a long trip home, and then probably stacks of things to catch up on in your "other life."

The meeting does not stop here though. What you and others around the world do after the meeting is often the ultimate test of whether the decisions and commitments made will have an impact. Take a breather and then dive in again.

“Post-midnight chats sitting on sofas with others as the negotiations go on make you realize that the UN has brought different ends of the earth together.”

(Sonu Chhina, India)

Get it on paper

Write a post-meeting report including information about the meeting’s process, its outcomes, your successes and challenges and, of course, any personal reflections you may have. Make it available to government (especially members of your country’s government delegation), NGOs, and the larger youth community. A one-page summary could be useful for sparking the media’s interest, and local and national news sources might welcome full articles. All of this will be useful for your own reference in the post-meeting process as you struggle to remember everything that happened!

If you have access to web pages, consider putting all of your documents, speeches, youth declarations, etc., online. It will be an important resource for other youth attending future IMs.

Stay in touch with your international contacts

Maintain communication with the relevant contacts you made at the IM, be they other youth, NGOs, government representatives, etc. Formal and informal youth networks are often established at IMs and listservs are one way of staying in touch. Some meetings spur the formation of new youth organizations that keep like-minded youth connected and active.

Ask youth from other countries what follow-up strategies they are using and share your own with them. Seek support and motivation from your contacts. The post-meeting period can be the most challenging as people struggle to maintain momentum, interest, resources, and focus. Keep each other going! One idea is to decide upon a collaborative follow-up task while at the meeting – this will give people a reason to stay engaged after the IM, and give them something tangible to work on together.

Follow-up with your government

Contact parliamentarians/political representatives, and members of your country’s government delegation, and let them know how you feel about the outcomes of the meeting and your expectations for implementation. Encourage them to monitor your government’s implementation of the commitments it made at the meeting.

Youth Testimonial

The first time at a UN meeting

By Gemma Hobcraft, Brighton, United Kingdom

There is something awe-inspiring as you walk, fully accredited into the UN Basement and become party to as much subterranean bureaucratic hustle and bustle as you allow yourself to be. The first time you have the advantage of unrestrained enthusiasm, and eagerness to learn, and slightly wide eyes. But you have to be on your guard and remember what you are there to do, stick to your principles, and, most of all, share information. There can be a lot of waiting around and a great deal of frustration as you wait for the slowly leaked rumours and snippets on the precious document - your life becomes about "the document."

A UN experience can also be quite humbling and somewhat demeaning. The corridors of the UN are getting used to the sight of young faces, as they should be, but you need to make sure that any platform, however tokenistic it may seem, is used as a stage to make productive noise and interact with "elders" on their level. Age should not be an issue and if people do ask you how old you are, you can shrug and ask them how old they are. The rest of the time you have to try and make your own opportunities to get those adults to interact with you as an equal. Remember that they have probably had much more experience and know how to play the UN game, but they can also be pleasantly surprised by the freshness of our ideas.

Try to stay away from making enemies. You may hear one particular group receiving bashing after verbal bashing. Make up your own mind. Respect different cultures, however much you may disagree. Take things professionally, never personally, and always leave hatred in the basement. Most importantly, if you do manage to secure a place on a government delegation, do not feel inferior to other delegates - you have rights and equal access to most things, and can act as an aide for others confined to the corridors.

One final note, specific to being a Northern delegate: it is difficult to explain but sometimes I feel I shouldn't be there. Something in me feels implicitly wrong coming from a developed country perspective whilst dealing with development issues. But the key is working together with others for something because you believe in it, regardless of your background. If you network you will find that fellow advocates become more than colleagues instantly - they become friends with similar mindsets.

The most important thing is that as you leave, invariably disappointed with the wording, frustrated by the seeming lack of progress, and tired as hell, head home and keep the energy and passion for the cause alive. Act local, think global, continuing doing grassroots work. The UN - you can start working away at it but the politics will continue. Be aware that you can make a difference by persevering and not allowing those basements to disillusion you.

(Remember to follow any oral communication with a letter, email or fax. The correspondence should include a recap of your position and your appreciation for their support for your views or for the opportunity to present your opinion.)

Link-up with other organizations to achieve greater influence in ensuring a proper, accountable government follow-up. This could include both organizations that you partnered with during the meeting as well as those that become interested post-meeting.

Report back to your community

Report back to a diversity of NGOs, youth communities, and local officials about the outcomes of the meeting and encourage community discussion of the relevant issues. Provide individuals and groups with ideas (perhaps in a one-page summary) on how to stay or become involved in the implementation process. Be ready to provide advice on how and where to find further information and educational materials on the issues at hand – maybe a list of references that you found useful.

Remember that you have been exposed to a unique and intense process and those who haven't may not be well-versed in the lingo. A word like "PrepCom" might not make sense to everyone! Speak to be understood and initiate discussions where others will be empowered, not intimidated, to participate.



IV. Beyond Declarations And Statements

Other impacts of international meetings

Is all of this hard work worth it? Do IMs have any impact? Evaluating an international meeting's success goes beyond assessing the strength and content of the legal instruments or declarations and statements that are agreed upon. IMs and the entire treaty process generate a whole range of outcomes that are less obvious and certainly harder to measure.

Being in the same place at the same time creates opportunities for information-sharing and relationship-building between governments, between governments and NGOs, and among NGOs, that would otherwise demand far more time and resources. IMs also tend to generate enormous media coverage, focusing the attention of people around the world on the global issues being considered at the meeting. Through such media publicity, as well as preparatory meetings, national processes, and civil society mobilization, IMs bring issues to the top of the global agenda, increasing pressure on governments to act.

Through the debate and deliberation of issues, new norms and principles – often more progressive than former ones – are established at IMs.

Regardless of whether a formal agreement is struck, IMs change the way the world thinks about issues. Through the debate and deliberation of issues, new norms and principles – often more progressive than former ones – are established at IMs and frame international dialogue about those topics. In this same way, IMs often provide opportunities for recognizing certain issues as important for international debate. This can extend to even

the type of language and words we use to speak about these issues. For example, even though references to caste or descent-based discrimination are not found in the final Declaration and Programme of Action agreed to at the World Conference Against Racism, the meeting led to the recognition that it was indeed a legitimate and pressing concern on the international agenda. A general recommendation addressing the issue was adopted shortly thereafter by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Finally, side events may lay the groundwork for valuable post-meeting action. NGO forums, for example, enable civil society actors to network and exchange, as well as strategize and coordinate their lobbying efforts for the parallel international meeting. They allow for additional learning, and exposure to new ideas, new

projects, and different worldviews, cultures and values. They also create a platform for which excluded and oppressed actors can speak, and bring issues to the table that may still be “off-limits” for government delegates.

What *can't* an international meeting do?

Through the UN and the process of treaty negotiation, our international community has painstakingly built, shared standards of conduct to resolve global problems. But this multilateral process is fragile as it is enforced only by the will of nations that recognize the need to balance national priorities against the needs of the international community. So while IMs are essential for meeting other actors in the international community, they only provide the groundwork for concrete action through national policies and local initiatives.

“Working in isolation is not effective; youth need to learn from the most successful social movements from our time (women, human rights, etc.) and be clear about the need to systematically increase our participation.”

(José Galindo, Ecuador)

It is important to realize this fact as you step into the corridors of IMs. Dissatisfaction with numerous IMs and their outcomes leads many people to the streets in protest of what goes on inside the meeting-place. This dissatisfaction is pronounced with certain institutions, including the international financial institutions (see “Engaging the International Financial Institutions,” page 8) and the World Trade Organization. Many become frustrated with the general public’s lack of access to the official meetings, and find fault with a system that allows decisions to be made by elites without proper consultation. For many, demonstrations are the only outlet available for

their voice to be heard. Peaceful demonstrations can provide creative opportunities for delivering messages en masse to negotiators and participants at IMs. When deciding whether or not to participate in a demonstration, there is no exact measure for gauging how effective it will be. It is sensible to take some safety precautions in case it becomes aggressive (see <http://www.solidaritynetwork.ca/links.php> for tools, resources and safety tips for demonstrations).

V. The Practical Stuff

Money issues

Getting together enough money to go to an international meeting is probably one of the biggest challenges that youth share. While IMs can be experienced in executive or economy style, even the cheapest ways of going are still pricey. Unless you're lucky enough to live where the IM is being held, your expenses will include (at a minimum): a ticket to get there, entry visa (if needed), local accommodations, local travel to and from the meeting site, and food. You might also find yourself spending a lot of money at Internet cafés if you plan to stay in touch throughout the meeting.

“If it doesn't work for the 1000th time, try it for the 1001st time and it will work.”
(Mirella Daurer, Netherlands)

Some youth at IMs have their expenses covered by a government or NGO. Others get there by using their own financial resources or through fundraising and sponsorship.

Here are 5 tips, drawn from the experience of youth who have participated in IMs, on how to push through the money barrier:

1. **Speak with your government:** check out possibilities for serving on the official delegation, receiving a scholarship or grant to attend, or “working” (i.e. organizing or moderating) one of their side events.
2. **Contact the conference secretariat** to see if there are any scholarships or grants available for prospective participants.
3. **Approach as many governmental and non-governmental organizations as possible for sponsorship.** In exchange for sponsorship, offer to report back on your experience once you return (in the form of a written report or presentation) and/or to promote and represent the organization while at the meeting.
4. **If you work for an NGO,** try including the costs of participation in a project budget.
5. **Use your own networks and the media to make appeals for support.** Get in touch with your community – community organizations often like to help young people attend events like this and have money for that purpose. Approaching media is also useful. One young participant at the World Summit on Sustainable Development was able to raise US\$10,000 in five days through appeals in her country's media!

Accreditation

The formal process of registering to participate in a UN international meeting is called accreditation. It will probably be less of a challenge than finding your funding, but is still something that needs to be arranged well in advance. Accreditation can take weeks, even months, and there is often a registration deadline date. While specific sub-categories differ between IMs, often reflecting different rights of access, there are only 3 main classes of accreditation: government delegations, NGOs or civil society groups, and media. Individuals must be endorsed and register as one of these 3 classes.

There are a number of ways to get accredited:

- ❖ If you've been invited by a government or are serving on a government delegation, they will probably organize accreditation for you.
- ❖ Check if the NGO you're representing has ongoing "consultative status" with ECOSOC. (See the listing at <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo>.) If so, someone will still have to write to the conference secretariat on letterhead to indicate that the NGO wishes to participate at the upcoming IM and to provide the name(s) of who will be its representative(s).
- ❖ If your NGO does not have consultative status, the conference secretariat may still grant accreditation to your NGO for a particular meeting through an application process.
- ❖ If you're not associated with an NGO, or your NGO does not receive accreditation through the meeting-specific accreditation process, or your NGO has already filled its quota of allowable representatives, find one that is accredited and is willing to let you use its "name" to get access to the conference site.
- ❖ Media representatives also need to be accredited and should write to the conference secretariat. (Being accredited as a media representative can have certain advantages: media-only centres are sometimes equipped with free-use computers and high-speed Internet. However, media are sometimes locked out of certain sessions too.)

Even once you've received confirmation of accreditation, you will still need to register at the meeting site – usually to receive an official pass. This can be a long and arduous process. Try to arrive early to register and come with extra rations of patience. Bring all relevant documentation (for example, your original request for accreditation and any subsequent correspondence received from and sent to the

conference secretariat), government-issued photo identification, and, if required, your passport and a number of passport-size photos.

Sometimes things happen at the last minute, no matter how much you try to get everything organized beforehand. If you are unsure as to whether you will receive funding, don't wait to get your accreditation or entry visa. Funding can come in at the last minute and the worst thing that could happen is to get the money to go but not have your accreditation or entry visa in order.

What should you bring?

Like many others, you may find yourself wondering – usually at midnight on the day before you're supposed to go – what on earth to pack for your first international meeting. Not everyone will have the same needs, of course, but here are some general suggestions:

- ✓ Bring comfortable clothes and especially comfortable shoes. Suits and more formal work wear would not be out of place but are not necessarily needed either. To be safe, bring both comfortable and formal.
- ✓ Bring official documents and correspondence regarding accreditation, your association with a civil society organization or government (on letterhead), entry visa and/or letter of invitation, proof of good health or necessary medical tests (if required), and passport. Extra passport-size photos might be needed.
- ✓ Bring copies of your own position papers and any other information on your organization, agency, activities, etc. Business or contact cards – printed or handwritten – will definitely come in handy.
- ✓ Print out a copy of the latest draft of the negotiating document before leaving. There may be copies available at the meeting site, but if they run out it can be very hard to follow the negotiations without something to refer to on paper.
- ✓ Bring a sturdy bag or briefcase to collect documentation at the meeting. Make sure not to pack too many things since there is usually a huge amount of paper to bring home.
- ✓ Pens, highlighters, and sticky reference tabs can be incredibly useful for marking and finding relevant parts of the negotiating document and recording changes to the text as they are agreed. Multi-coloured pens are useful for keeping track of what different delegations/negotiation blocs are saying.

- ✓ Try to find a day planner that allows you to organize your time down to hours and minutes. As soon as you can, start filling in what meetings you must attend, events you want to be present at, etc.
- ✓ A battery-operated alarm clock. There's nothing worse than getting all the way to an international meeting and then sleeping through the meetings!
- ✓ It is important to bring adapter plugs and transformers for any electrical appliances (hair dryers, laptops, travel irons, etc.) that you are bringing. Not only are there many different types of outlets, but levels of electricity differ from country to country.

All this being said, try not to bring too many things as you may find yourself lugging around your baggage!

Travel tips

There are plenty of resources on how to travel safely, responsibly, and on a budget and what to do to prepare for an international trip. Reading about the host country in advance will also provide more specific pointers. For example, the currency exchange rate of the country you are visiting could significantly impact your budget. Here are some general tips to bear in mind:

“Being alert and rested is very important to be able to prioritize and digest all of the information and opinions that will be fired at you.”

(Miguel Heilbron, Netherlands)

- ✓ Research basic laws and lifestyles of the host country. “Unusual” laws are often covered in travel books.
- ✓ Bring your official documents with you in your carry-on bag. You may need to present some, if not all, to the immigration officials upon arrival. It's a good idea to keep a day's worth of clothes in your carry-on in case your luggage goes on its own trip somewhere else. Money (travellers' cheques, cash, credit cards, other valuables) should also be kept with you at all times.
- ✓ Keep a copy of all official documents (including your passport, and copies of credit card and travellers' cheques' numbers) in another bag and leave a copy with someone at home too.
- ✓ Research what health precautions (e.g. immunizations) you need to take before leaving and whether you'll need health insurance.

Youth Testimonial

Thoughts on youth and the World Summit on Sustainable Development

By Sergio Belfor

Paramaribo, Suriname

When I went to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), it was the first time I'd been at a conference with world leaders, but it was not my first international conference. In July of 2002, I was asked by the UNESCO Committee of Suriname to attend the Youth Action Summit 2002 in the Netherlands, in preparation for WSSD. After this meeting I was officially placed as the youth delegate in the national delegation of Suriname by our Minister of Environment.

On my first day at the WSSD I realized that many delegations didn't have youth delegates and those that did didn't let them participate in the different meetings and in the plenary with the Heads of State. Only some countries actively engaged the youth delegate and let them participate to their full capability. It was also evident that poor Caribbean and South American countries had fewer representatives at the meeting than the developed countries, who could sit in on all meetings to have a say. A small delegation from the South could not.

I believe that when you want concrete results and action plans, world conferences like these are not as effective as smaller international meetings. On the last day of the plenary, when agreement was needed for the political declaration, I could see that though poor countries like mine had the same vote as the rich, the interests of the rich countries were given higher priority. But poor countries are still ratifying environment protocols and are trying to implement them.

Still, this world forum is the right place to meet people and organizations to network with. It is a forum where you can gain a lot of knowledge on certain topics because a lot of experts are present. Conferences like these are the place where you can get to know the interests of the different political and trade blocs, such as G-77, AOSIS, and CARICOM (see Annex 2, page 53).

However, in my opinion, the voice of the youth wasn't loud and strong enough, and, in general, we didn't get a chance to fully participate in the whole process of the WSSD. I agree with my President and other Caribbean leaders for not attending the summit themselves because of the high costs involved. I sometimes wonder now how much this summit cost and if it would not have been better to give the money directly to countries to implement sustainable development programmes.

In any case, the WSSD was a great experience for the further development of my life.

- ✓ Find out if your country has a consular office in the country you will be visiting and bring the contact information along.
- ✓ Be aware of meal arrangements if you have any allergies or dietary restrictions. If you do not speak the official language of the host country, you may want to create a card that lists what you cannot eat which you can then present to the server. A language school or embassy can help you write the card.
- ✓ Try to figure out what some of your options are for getting from the airport to your accommodation before arriving.
- ✓ Arrive a day or two early if possible in order to get oriented and to complete your registration before the meeting begins. Plan to stay at least a day after the meeting is officially scheduled to finish since many IMs often run late in order to reach last minute agreements. If the meeting is taking place in a community/ country that you have never been to, you may also want to keep a few days for exploring after the meeting is over.
- ✓ Note that in anticipation of the influx of visitors, the cost of accommodation and transportation in the host city can increase substantially around the time of an IM, particularly a summit.

Finding and choosing a place to stay can be another hard decision to take from afar. Accommodation options usually range from 5-star luxury hotels to home-stays and hostels to crashing on the floor of another delegate's room. If you're looking for the cheapest place to stay and it happens to be rather far from the meeting site, don't forget to factor in money and time spent getting to and from the meeting. Will you be able to get there if the meeting (or a post-meeting dinner) finishes late at night? Would you prefer to stay in an area or venue where other youth or delegates from your country are staying? Would it be safer for you to stay around your other colleagues? Staying near other participants can provide company, safety in numbers, and more opportunities for networking and lobbying, but you might also find yourself seeking to get away from the conference "scene" once the day is over. Whatever you decide, have the name, address, and telephone number of your accommodation with you when you're passing through immigration. Landing cards, which you may need to fill out before collecting your luggage, often require you to declare where you'll be staying.

If the host country's official language is not your own, learn a few basic phrases to help you when you arrive. Customs agents, taxi drivers, conference workers and organizers, service agents, etc., will be flooded with international participants. A simple thank you and smile can open doors.

Youth Testimonial

Participating in UN conferences: A youth perspective from the North

By Megan Bradley and Shalene Jobin

Grimsby and Edmonton, Canada

Our introduction to international meetings was the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and its preparatory process. We participated as both youth representatives on the Canadian delegation, and once as NGO representatives. Although participating in these meetings involved a steep learning curve, our experiences made it clear to us that it is a privilege and an incredible opportunity to be involved with the United Nations. For us, our involvement also came with responsibilities: because so few youth have the chance to participate directly in international meetings, it is essential that those who do attend make the most of the opportunity, and keep youth at home “in the loop” by sharing information and ideas for action.

As Canadian participants in the WSSD youth caucus, we saw many of the same challenges that face the UN overall. Since (as usual) Northern youth were over-represented in comparison to youth from the South, the caucus had to be continually conscientious of maintaining an open, equal process. Although working with youth from around the world was extremely enlightening, at times it was a struggle for everyone to communicate effectively across cultural and language barriers. Even within the North, youth are an extremely diverse group, representing different interests and coming from a wide range of cultural, political, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. We met other youth from the North with markedly different views to our own on issues from women’s rights to big business. One of the most significant hurdles we confronted was finding ways in which we could work together as youth, without sacrificing our own values and convictions.

Northern youth participants face particular challenges regarding the political structures they have to work with. We saw that youth participants from the European Union need to be familiar with and lobby on both national policies and the broader EU platform. Meanwhile, young people from the “other” Northern states (including those in the Southern hemisphere!) will focus on the JUSSCANZ bloc (see Annex 2, page 53), an eclectic group of economically wealthy countries that is often not receptive to direct civil society input. As we became more familiar with the system, we were able to support the lobbying efforts of youth from other regions as well as our own.

Youth have the energy and innovation often sorely lacking at the United Nations. However, as we engage with the system we need to be careful not to “play the game” by imitating the political in-fighting and self-interested behaviour that unfortunately characterizes many other blocs and caucuses. Instead of simply buying into the process as it stands, we can be the breath of fresh air that is so crucially needed in the smoky corridors of the United Nations.

VI. Reflections

There are so many components to participating in an international meeting, sometimes you may end up feeling like you're caught in the eye of a tornado! Within all the pandemonium, it may be crucial to your sanity to write down a few questions beforehand to reflect upon during the meeting in order to bring you back to the essentials.

Why am I here? It is likely that certain concerns and events in your life got you interested in the IM in the first place. Most likely you had particular goals and outcomes that you wanted to see materialize. Keep your mind on these fundamental reasons for your being at the IM.

Who are all these people around me?! They are your neighbours from back home, fellow global citizens, and some very bright and skilled people. Granted, there will always be some shady characters in the international playground, but try to remember that most of the people around you are probably there because they care about many of the same issues as you.

Who am I doing this for? There are many answers to this question, and they differ from person to person. As young people, we have a stake in the long-term effects of many international meetings. We also have a unique transitional role. We can play the role of transferring knowledge and skills to youth who are just entering the picture. And, as we "grow-out" of the youth category, we can serve as allies and carry forward a concern for youth participation and perspectives.

What is my measuring-stick of success? Let's face it – detangling the process and understanding how international decision-making works is a success in itself! But you probably have other things that you've set out to do, so set yourself some realistic and achievable goals. These can include anything from gaining knowledge and experience, making some good contacts, and exposing your own efforts and activities. If your efforts lead to a change in the official text, this is a huge victory! If not, don't worry – it's all a part of the intense, unique learning experience that attending a meeting can be.

It is quite an opportunity to be participating in a piece of international decision-making history! There is a lot to do and a lot to learn, so keep yourself grounded, get a taste of some of the excitement, and play your part.

VII. Recommended Background Reading

Websites

Upcoming UN meetings and events: <http://www.un.org/events>

Questions and answers about the UN: <http://un.org/geninfo/ir/>

Organizational structure of the UN: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/chart.html>

UN rules of procedure: <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/scrules.htm>.

(For another commonly used set of procedural rules known as *Robert's Rules of Order*, see http://www.constitution.org/rror/rror_00.htm.)

Youth at the UN: <http://www.un.org/youth>

The role of youth at the UNGA:

<http://www.takingitglobal.org/voice/unyd.html>

United Nations Bookshop: <http://www.un.org/Pubs/bookshop/index.html>

How to write a position paper: http://www.unac.org/youth_sd/

Publications

On Behalf of my Delegation... A Survival Guide for Developing Country Climate Negotiators. By Joyeeta Gupta (2000). Center for Sustainable Development of the Americas (CSDA) and International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Available online at: http://www.cckn.net/pdf/my_delegation_en.pdf.

Putting Gender on the Agenda: A Guide to Participating at UN World Conferences. United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (1995). To obtain a copy, contact unifem@undp.org.

The Stakeholder Toolkit: A Resource for Women and NGOs (2001). Edited by Minu Hemmati and Kerstin Seliger. UNED Forum. Available online at:

<http://www.earthsummit2002.org/toolkits/women/index.htm>.

Whose World is it Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations, and the multilateral future (1999). Edited by John W. Foster with Anita Anand. United Nations Association in Canada. To obtain a copy, contact info@unac.org.

For suggestions on reading materials specific to your IM, please refer to “Reading” on page 14.

Annex 1

Translating the language of international meetings: a glossary of terms

It may seem at first like international meetings use a completely unknown language. The official terms, acronyms, and jargon used at international conferences can be daunting, and may even seem controversial. The following definitions come from a variety of sources and are intended to facilitate understanding of and participation at IMs. Many of them focus on the language used at meetings convened by the United Nations, but are not necessarily the “official version”.

Abstain: To abstain is to refrain from casting a “yes” or “no” vote. While an abstention does not affect the overall results of a vote, Member States may abstain for a variety of reasons: voting in favour or against could be detrimental to them (e.g. would damage a relationship with an ally who is voting in the opposite direction); a state may believe that the issue is not relevant to them; or, the issue may be too controversial for the state to take a side. Member States also have the right to explain their abstention, which may introduce a new direction for the discussion.

Accreditation: The formal registration process that enables a person – be they government, non-government, or media – to participate in UN conferences, summits, or special sessions and their PrepComs (preparatory committee meetings). For more information see “Accreditation,” page 39.

Bracketing: Square brackets in a negotiation text indicate that the section of text is still being discussed and no consensus has been reached on the particular issue.

Bureau: The Bureau of a UN conference is composed of the Chair and representatives of the five regional groupings of Member States.

Caucus: A caucus is an informal grouping of like-minded individuals, groups, or states. Caucuses can be either issues-based (e.g. education caucus), regional (e.g. Asian caucus) or a major group caucus (e.g. youth caucus).



Chair: The Chair is responsible for facilitating the meeting and ensuring the rules of procedure are upheld. Different Chairs may be elected for informal sessions.

Civil Society: Refers roughly to those actors and institutions that lie outside of the sphere of government. Civil society actors can include academics and researchers, corporations and industry, representatives of Indigenous Peoples, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media. NGOs are usually perceived to be the whole of civil society, but this matter is still up for debate.

Conference or Summit: An international meeting of high-level government officials, UN officials, and civil society representatives (including NGOs and experts). The culmination of a long negotiating preparatory process.

Conference of the Parties (COP): The COP is the body which governs a convention and is composed of all State Parties that have signed on. The gatherings of these states parties are referred to as COP 1, COP 2, COP 3, and so on.

Conference Secretariat: Conference secretariats are usually established to service and administer UN conferences. The secretariat is responsible for a range of tasks including accreditation of NGOs and distribution (and sometimes preparation) of key documents and preparatory information.

Consensus: Consensus enables resolutions, decisions, or final conference documents to be adopted without a vote. Consensus is achieved through negotiating and compromise and implies agreement among all government delegations.

Consultative Status: Non-governmental, non-profit public or voluntary organizations that are given consultative status with the Economic and Social Council maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the UN. Those that have attained consultative status through a process of application and review by the Committee on NGOs of the ECOSOC are able to contribute to the work programmes and goals of the UN by acting as experts, advisers and consultants to governments and the Secretariat.

Convention, Treaty, or Protocol: “Convention” and “treaty” are used interchangeably and refer to legally binding agreements between Member States. Conventions and treaties define the duties of those states that have ratified them. Protocols are developed subsequent to a particular convention or treaty, establishing additional rights and obligations. They must be signed and ratified like conventions and treaties and are also legally binding agreements. See also <http://untreaty.un.org/English/guide.asp>.

Declaration: A document expressing non-binding agreement between Member States.

Delegation: A delegation consists of representatives of a government at a UN conference or meeting. A delegation can include high-level representatives of relevant ministries, technical experts, and representatives from civil society, including youth. The size and representation of a delegation is entirely up to the country.

ECOSOC: The Economic and Social Council is one of the 6 principal organs of the UN, mandated to coordinate the economic, social, and related work of the UN (including 22 programmes, 14 UN specialized agencies, 10 functional commissions, and 5 regional commissions). NGOs seeking accreditation need to do so via ECOSOC.

Expert Group: Expert group meetings may be convened by the conference secretariat and/or mandated by Member States as part of the preparatory process for a UN meeting. Experts include academics, representatives of governments and NGOs.

General Assembly: The General Assembly is the highest principle organ of the UN and consists of all Member States. It governs the work of the UN and formally adopts the documents resulting from IMs organized by the UN.

High-Level Segment: The ministerial-level component of an IM during which the most significant issues are discussed and agreements made.

Intersessional: The official meetings of large UN commissions that occur between sessions of the General Assembly.

Lobbying: Formal or informal interaction between governments and interest groups to promote particular agendas on different interest areas.

Major Group: The concept of a “major group” was developed during the process of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and refers to specific groups who have a stake in what is being discussed at a particular meeting. Agenda 21, one of the resulting documents of UNCED, names Youth, Women, and Indigenous Peoples, among others, as major groups in the issues of sustainable development.

Majority Voting:

- ◇ simple majority: 50% plus one vote
- ◇ qualified majority: according to an adopted formula such as three-fourths or seven-eighths.
- ◇ weighted majority: additional weight is given to some countries for specific reasons (e.g. financial contributions)
- ◇ double majority: requires a majority on the basis of both “one country-one vote” and financial contributions (to a particular fund)

Member State: A country that is recognized by the United Nations as independent and that has subsequently become a member of the UN.

Multilateral, Bilateral, and Unilateral: In the context of international affairs, multilateral refers to initiatives, meetings, or organizations that include more than two countries. Examples of multilateral organizations include the UN, the African Development Bank, or the World Trade Organization. Most international meetings can be called multilateral. Bilateral refers to initiatives and meetings between two countries (for example “bilateral aid” refers to aid money flowing directly from one country to another with no intermediary actors), and unilateral is used to describe initiatives taken on by one country on its own.

Negotiator: At an international meeting, a negotiator refers to high-level delegates that are responsible for discussing, bargaining, and agreeing to issues in major documents, declarations, statements, etc. Countries usually have chief negotiators which represent their government.

Negotiating Group or Bloc: A negotiating group or a “bloc” is an informal coalition of states based on regional, ideological, historical or economic commonalities. States join blocs in order to strengthen their negotiating positions. Being informal groupings, blocs change depending on the meeting topic and may even shift throughout a meeting. Some of the most important blocs include the G-77, the EU, and the G8. Other blocs include JUSSCANZ, the Rio Group, the Like-Minded Group, and AOSIS, as well as regional groupings such as CARICOM, ASEAN, and the AU.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO): An NGO is any local, national or international, not-for-profit organization that is driven by people with a common interest. This term is most commonly used to refer to organizations that have economic, social, and/or humanitarian goals.

Norms: In the context of international decision-making, norms are standards or principles that assert what is right or wrong, and are the backbone of international frameworks for action.

Non-Papers: Prepared for informal consultations among Member States, non-papers serve as a tool to advance the process of reaching consensus. Non-papers are not included in the official record of the conference or meeting.

North-South: Less a geographical reference than a political one, the North-South dichotomy is one way of referring to the divide between countries that are richer, have relatively better standards of living on average, and more power in the international sphere, and those that are poorer, have relatively worse standards of living on average, and less power in the international sphere. Other ways of describing this dichotomy include: **developed vs. developing** or **less-developed** countries; **industrialized vs. non-industrialized** countries; **wealthy** or **rich vs. poor** countries.

Observer: A nation, bloc, or organization participating in debate, but without formal rights such as voting.

Operative Clause: Operative clauses are those paragraphs which list the recommendations being made for action on the issue or topic, and are therefore usually found in the Programme of Action section of a conference document. Operative clauses usually begin with more directive words such as “urges”, “requests”, “calls upon”, etc.

Party: States parties to an international agreement are the countries that have ratified it and are thereby legally bound to comply with its provisions.

Plenary: A meeting of the whole of a commission or conference where formal decisions are taken.

Preamble: The preamble is the introductory section of a convention, resolution, or conference document. It identifies key issues under consideration, states recognition for the underlying factors of a problem, and identifies key general objectives.

PrepCom: The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for a conference is made up of Member States, and from these a Chair is selected (who, consequently, tends to have considerable influence on the preparatory process). PrepCom meetings are held to develop an agenda and programme of work for a major meeting and to undertake preliminary negotiations in advance of the major meeting itself. Civil society representatives, with accreditation, also participate in PrepComs.

Programme of Action: An agreed-upon set of strategies and measures to achieve the goals of the conference, often accompanied by a Declaration. Member States begin drafting the Programme of Action at PrepCom meetings (if applicable). Also sometimes called a **Plan of Action** or **Platform for Action**.

Protocol: See *Convention, Treaty, or Protocol*

Rapporteur: The officer of a meeting or conference specifically charged with keeping the minutes and writing the report of each session of the conference.

Ratify: The official approval or acceptance of a convention or protocol by a national government, which makes them legally bound to the agreement. Once the required number of ratifications has been achieved (the number is set within the terms of the convention itself), the convention or protocol “comes into effect” and must be abided by all contracting Party States. It is important to note that while Heads of State may sign a convention or protocol, approval from their respective governments is necessary to ratify it. Domestic implementation measures must then be introduced.

Regional Group: The five regional groups meet privately to discuss issues and nominate Bureau members and other officials. The regional groups are Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC), and the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG).

Reservation: States can declare a reservation to a conference document (i.e. Declaration and Programme of Action) or a treaty. By declaring a reservation, a state can still adopt or accede to the treaty or conference document, but indicates to other Member States that it will exclude itself from applying certain paragraphs of the agreement with which it does not agree. Sometimes reservations are not allowed, or are only permissible with respect to specific paragraphs.

Resolution: A document sponsored by a government or group of governments that contains a set of recommended actions. Resolutions include a preamble outlining the purpose of the resolution, a listing of previous decisions adopted on the subject, and operative clauses which specify the recommended actions to be taken.

Rules of Procedure: As international meetings and conferences have lengthy agendas that require participation from all the actors involved, basic rules of procedure are necessary to determine who speaks, about what, and when (see “Recommended Background Reading,” page 46).

Side Event: An event (e.g. panel presentation, roundtable, simultaneous conference, fair, NGO or civil society forum) held parallel to an IM, usually related to the issues being negotiated.

South: See *North/South*.

Special Session: A United Nations General Assembly Special Session (sometimes denoted UNGASS) is a special sitting of the General Assembly focussed on either one specific topic or following-up on a past summit or conference. Special sessions are similar to UN conferences or summits in that a variety of stakeholders are involved and a declaration and programme of action are often produced, but there are usually less expectations for Heads of State to attend.

Treaty: See *Convention, Treaty, or Protocol*

Working Group: A sub-group of a UN commission tasked with drafting language for the final documents.



Annex 2 Translating the language of international meetings: acronyms

AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States	G-77	Group of 77 (negotiating group representing 133 countries of the South)
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation	GA	(UN) General Assembly
ASEAN	Associations of South-East Asian Nations	GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
AU	African Union (formerly the Organization of African Unity)	GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
CACM	Central American Common Market	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market	GNP	Gross National Product
CBO	Community-Based Organization	GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization
CHR	(UN) Commission on Human Rights	HDI	(UN) Human Development Index
CONGO	(UN) Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations	HIPC	Highly Indebted Poorer Countries
COP	Conference of the Parties	IBRD	(UN) International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (part of the World Bank Group, often referred to as “the Bank”)
COW	Committee of the Whole	ICC	(UN) International Criminal Court
CPD	(UN) Commission on Population and Development	ICJ	(UN) International Court of Justice
CRC	(UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child	ICT	Information and Communications Technology
CSD	(UN) Commission on Sustainable Development	IFI	International Financial Institution
CSO	Civil Society Organization	IGO	Inter-Governmental Organization
CSW	(UN) Commission on the Status of Women	ILO	(UN) International Labour Organization
DESA	(UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs	IMF	(UN) International Monetary Fund
DPI	(UN) Department of Public Information	IPCC	(UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ECOSOC	(UN) Economic and Social Council	IUCN	World Conservation Union
ENGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organization	JUSSCANZ	Japan, United States, Canada, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand (a negotiating group made up of wealthy countries)
EU	European Union		
FAO	(UN) Food and Agriculture Organization		
G8	Group of 8 (negotiating group made up of 8 wealthy countries: USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Russia)		

LMG	Like-Minded Group (a coalition of 13 countries of the South)		Human Settlements)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals	UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (Common Market of the Southern Cone)	UNDCP	UN Drug Control Programme
MNC	Multi-National Corporation	UNDP	UN Development Programme
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement	UNEP	UN Environment Programme
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization	UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development	UNFPA	UN Population Fund
NGLS	(UN) Non-Governmental Liaison Service	UNGASS	UN General Assembly Special Session
NGDO	Non-Governmental Development Organization	UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	UNHCHR	UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
NPO	Non-Profit Organization	UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
OAS	Organization of American States	UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women
ODA	Official Development Assistance	UNYU	UN Youth Unit
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	WFP	(UN) World Food Programme
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries	WFUNA	World Federation of United Nations Associations
QUANGO	Quasi Non-Governmental Organization	WHO	(UN) World Health Organization
R&D	Research and Development	WTO	World Trade Organization (successor of the GATT)
RG	Rio Group (negotiating group representing interests of Latin America and the Caribbean)		
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program		
SC	(UN) Security Council		
SIDS	Small Island Developing States		
TNC	Transnational Corporation		
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of International Property Rights		
UDHR	(UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights		
UN	United Nations		
UNCHS	UN Human Settlements Programme (also UN-HABITAT, formerly UN Centre for		





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