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Global Youth: 2016 The New York Times Writing Competition: "Word (World) of Yours"

New York Times

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2016
The New York Times
“Word (World) of Yours”
Writing Competition

Global Youth



The New York Times

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Secondary Schools



Champion
Chinese International School
Christopher Cheng



Runner-Up
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Kids These Days

Chinese International School
Christopher Cheng

Nearly four years before the United Nations (UN) named Dr. Shikoh Gitau a recipient of the Africa Knowledge Exchange Award, she was merely one of the many computer science students at the University of Cape Town. Yet, in the span of just one year, she launched her own mobile application and began working for Google - all while still attending university. But her meteoric rise to prominence would have been impossible if not for Ummeli, the mobile application she created that has pulled millions of African youths out of unemployment and underemployment and funneled them into the mainstream economy.

However, Dr. Gitau wasn't alone in her efforts to employ youths. Three months prior to Ummeli's launch, in January 2009, African leaders convened in Addis Ababa to address youth unemployment and underemployment, labeled by the African Union as “two of the greatest challenges Africa faces in the 21st century”. As a result, they declared the coming ten years to be the “African Youth Decade”, spearheading numerous policies and investments to stimulate job creation. Yet even with the collective efforts of Africa's governments and Dr. Shikoh Gitau, widespread youth unemployment and underemployment have marched on, undeterred.

Gabriel Benjamin, an unemployed Nigerian university graduate, commented on the menial job prospects of his fellow graduates: “They clean floors in hotels, sell [mobile telephone calling] cards —

some even work in factories as laborers.” Such underemployment is regarded by the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C.-based American think tank, to have minimized unemployment statistics. Yet, even so, the World Bank estimates that three in five unemployed sub-Saharan Africans fall within the youth bracket, and reports that 72% of Africa's youth population lives on less than US\$2 a day.

“Youth unemployment is a ticking time bomb,” stresses Zambia's finance minister Alexander Chikwanda. Unemployment and underemployment foster a sense of being unwanted and aimless, making for “easy recruitment” into radical militant groups such as Boko Haram, as reported by Nigerian journalist Ahmad Salkida. However, the African Development Bank (AfDB) contends that in some places, the youth unemployment bomb has already exploded, with significant consequences: “As [the Arab Spring has] shown, lack of employment opportunities ... can undermine social cohesion and political stability.”

Some believe that the initiatives of African governments have been unsuccessful due to their failure to address the root causes of youth unemployment and underemployment. According to Tighisti Amare, the manager of the Africa Programme at London-based think tank Chatham House, “lack of investment in ... sectors with potential for creating jobs” is one of the primary factors sustaining Africa's inability to proportionally grow its workforce along with its population.

Indeed, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa has found that the majority of foreign direct investments in Africa target industries that generate fewer numbers of jobs for the 500 million Africans of working age.

Further buoying African employment woes is each government’s prioritization of universal primary education, a UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG), instead of widespread post-primary education that actually confers job opportunities. The International Labour Organization reports that African youths today are twice as likely to be unemployed as their elders, mostly due to the incompatibility between the skills modern youths possess and the skills sought by employers.

Clearly, there is plenty of work to be done. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has repeatedly urged the governments of natural resource-based economies, such as those of Nigeria, Algeria, South Africa, and Zambia, to diversify their economies into more varied and employment-rich industries or “be susceptible if the bubble bursts.” On the other hand, the United Nations must re-orient its focus, in the wake of the expiration of its MDGs, to promoting differentiated education which imparts skills to African youth that are attractive to employers.

Conversely, Dr. Gitau firmly believes in technology’s ability to reconcile Africa’s employers with its many youth workers: “It levels the playing ground. It [allows] a kid like me, who grew up

in a slum in Kenya, [to] be able to sit on the same table as kids who went to Stanford, to be able to work for Google.” Indeed, technology facilitated Dr. Gitau’s ability to entrepreneurially tackle one of African society’s most profound socioeconomic problems, and simultaneously found employment for millions of disadvantaged African youth. Undoubtedly, entrepreneurial innovation from Africa’s youth will be critical for future progress and development.

Today, Dr. Gitau works for the African Development Bank, where she is leading technology innovations for inclusive job growth initiatives. Such a symbolic unification of Dr. Gitau’s entrepreneurial spirit and African governmental institutions hints at the approach that must be taken to solve Africa’s youth unemployment and underemployment: one in which African governments, as well as “kids these days,” work together to make the next ten years a true African Youth Decade.



The Case For Youth

Dunman High School
Esther Ng Ke Han

Post-Millennials, Generation Z, iGeneration — That’s what they call us.

Entitled, Self-Absorbed, Materialistic — That’s how they see us.

Resourceful, Engaged, Nascent — That’s who we really are.

Talk to anyone from the older generation, and they will probably have a lot to say about youth today. In their minds, we would be the stereotypical childish adolescents; sharing our entire life story on social media, narcissistically taking selfie after selfie, eyes never leaving the screens of our latest electronic gadgets. These same individuals will have you convinced that youth nowadays are doomed to failure, with attention spans shorter than a goldfish’s, unable to articulate opinions that require more than 140 characters, and constantly using TLDRs to shy away from reading anything remotely important. The disparaging comments of “kids nowadays...” and the reminiscing of “back in my day...” will most likely leave you with a deeply pessimistic outlook on the generation that will eventually become the leaders of our world. Maybe it will even make you wonder whether Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw was right when he said, “Youth is wasted on the young.”

But is this true? Are we, as a generation, so exceptionally wayward and wilful that we stand out even against the history of mankind? It is interesting to note that such sentiments, now colloquially coined as “juvenoia”, go back at the very least to Ancient Greece when Socrates

said, “The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise.”

So no, I am not taken in by such a portrayal of this generation’s youth. Instead, I shall make a case for the immense potential that I believe this generation will have towards the betterment of our world.

There are more young people in the world than any other time in human history. In fact, the United Nations Youth Envoy estimates that there are about 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in our world today. This is the largest youth population ever. Youth who are eager for change. Youth who have considerably much more resources than their predecessors had. Youth that are better able to utilise the many tools at their disposal.

The internet is one key tool that youth today use. Global internet penetration rate is constantly on the rise, with many normal citizens in developing countries now gaining access to the infinite knowledge available on the World Wide Web. And it is the youth today that are leading the way in widening the reach of the internet.

It is precisely because youth today are so comfortable with technology, that geographical, language, and cultural barriers can be so easily transcended. The internet and social media are tools that increasingly bridge the distance between people, making us truly global youth. It is with this reach that we can

harness the potential of all the 1.8 billion young people around the globe. It is only hence that we can empower those who are weak, and give a voice to those who have been forced silent.

More specifically, it is the engagement through social media that has played a key role in youth's involvement in political, social, and economic issues. Social media has helped to spread awareness, spark intellectual discourse, and even to overthrow corrupt governments. A growing number of global crises, one of which being the Chibok school girls kidnapping, gained international attention through social media campaigns of #BringBackOurGirls. Young people all over the world are not trapped in their own bubble of blissful ignorance, but are exposed to the serious needs of other communities. Whether it is injustice felt on an individual or societal level, social media is now the best tool to raise awareness and lead the call for action. And most often, it is the global youth population that contributes the most to social media networks that seek to mobilise and empower the masses.

The proliferation of resources, combined with the zeal and energy often associated with youthfulness, will bring us far. I am not so naive to think that this generation of youth is perfect. Many, especially in the developing countries, still do not get to enjoy the benefits of this connectedness, nor do they have the necessary resources to get involved. Too many see their potential hindered by

extreme poverty, discrimination or lack of information. It is also undeniable that this new generation will bring with it a whole new set of problems. But it is my strong belief that youth today have, both the will, and the capabilities to do great things on the global stage. If we continue to invest in the youth all around the globe, we will truly see what 1.8 billion young people can do to change the world for the better.

It is hence that I have to conclude that no, youth is not wasted on the young.

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Universities



Champion
National University of Singapore
Lin Ziyi



Runner-Up
Singapore Management University
Chow Zi En





The ‘Inevitable’ Cynicism of Youth

National University of Singapore

Lin Ziyi

Despite growing up in a happy home and hardly ever wanting for anything, cynicism has always come easily to me.

Part of this attitude stems from my father, who is a cynic. I remember being too young to sit in the front seat of his car, arguing against the back of his head with the kind of naivety that comes from being a coddled ten year old. He tore down my poorly constructed case for the fairness of the world as he distractedly waited for a light to turn. “There are children who starve to death because they parents cannot afford to buy them food. Do you think they ever did anything to deserve that? Don’t be stupid. The world is unfair, even if it has been good to you.”

As I grew older, our conversations involved the hypocrisy of authority figures, the selfish intentions of men and how little difference most individual people make. The architecture of the world and its institutions incentivizes egoism, he taught me, and nothing is freely given, at least, not without an agenda. If a stranger tries to give you candy, he wants something from you.

The other part of my cynicism was fed by the news. Globalization means we get information from all over the world instantaneously, a veritable flood of depressing headlines assaulting us daily. Every article or piece of information makes problems seem more unsolvable and selfishness seem more intractable from human nature. Assertions without context, declarations that a problem could be easily solved if one simply did this or that; these seem foolish to the well-informed.

Huddled safely within my home, any atrocity that happens in the world is quickly made known to me by the beep of my phone. With the way information is transmitted today, and the type of information that grabs attention, it is no wonder that youths have become increasingly disillusioned with the world. It is easy to feel powerless, even if we have not experienced these things personally.

The impact of global information sharing affects more than one generation. But historically, youth has always been linked with idealism. From anti-war protests during the Vietnam war to anti-violence protests from students of the University of Paris in the 1200s; the idealism of youth has always driven such activism, which makes cynicism in youth so troubling.

In a moment of overdramatic (and somewhat pretentious) venting, I once claimed that ‘to know the world is to despair at it’.

But that is not true. The world is better than it was fifty years ago. Poverty has declined, there are fewer deaths from preventable causes and more people enjoy basic human rights. I don’t believe that we will ever have a utopia, but I do believe that we can make the world a significantly better place fifty years from now.

It is entirely justified to doubt that such progress can be easily made. If it were, someone else would have already done it. And that is exactly it. It is because we collectively hope for a better world that positive change does not come about easily. The world may have selfish, Machiavellian people, but it also has selfless, deeply

empathetic go-getters.

Cynicism manifests in many ways. It is perhaps best encapsulated by the varying reactions to climate change. Those that believe our environment is doomed regardless, so there is no point changing our consumption. Those that treat every law that attempts to help the environment with mockery and believe that its failure is inevitable. Those who feel that anything they can do is merely a drop in the ocean and simply stop trying. It is these reactions by my peers that cemented in me how awful cynicism can be. It is not truth or a lack of faith; it is apathy. The only thing blaring in my head then was a phrase by Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

In the story of Don Quixote, the hero returns home defeated; his idealism and chivalry became the cause of his suffering, his disappointment and the cruelty he had to endure. It is a healthy dose of skepticism can keep us from having expectations that end in disappointment. The solution to cynicism is to stay globally connected. In spite of its terrors, there is goodness in the world that can be known as long as we stay informed. During the Boston Marathon bombings, some participants finished and ran the rest of the way to a hospital to donate blood to victims. Some in Germany welcomed refugees with banners while others shunned them. An eighteen year old is organizing the world’s largest ocean cleanup. As long as we continue to seek out knowledge and understand complexities that we realize that people are capable of

good things and positive change, while not easy, is within reach.

“Don’t be stupid,” was my father’s advice.

It is stupid to sit in the spectrum of cynicism and idealism and choose either end. Reality rarely falls into extremes and we need to continually seek the world, both its ugliness and beauty, in order to understand it. Cynicism is giving up on understanding, giving up on taking control of what happens to you. Young people have a special place in the world because they tend to be the drivers of change. It is important that they, and I, work to understand reality, to stay connected to the world, rather than perpetually sit in the backseat and let someone else drive the car.



What Is the Global Youth?

Singapore Management University
Chow Zi En

No one really stops to think about who's missing when taking a group selfie. At least, Paul Ryan didn't. His apparent obliviousness to the racial homogeneity of the interns in his selfie drew much flak from the public. However, why were people so angry about this? If this were a group selfie of college students, barely anyone would bat an eyelid. Perhaps, the difference is that people expect Capitol Hill, the seat of the government, to be representative of America. When non-whites constitute nearly a fifth of the population, they might have a point there.

The fact that Paul Ryan hadn't consciously noticed the lack of non-white interns reveals how we can sometimes have rather warped perceptions of the communities we live in. Yes, he isn't the only one – each of us can make the exact same error, because these mistakes do not exist only in the political sphere, but more insidiously and pervasively, they also exist in our daily lives.

In particular, I want to talk about the use of “global youth”. This is a term bandied about in countless international youth camps and conferences, but its actual meaning and reference are barely discussed. When I was 17, I participated in an international youth conference, meeting many peers from different countries and cultures. For the first time, I stepped beyond the boundaries of my national community, and was introduced to the vast diversity of ideas and backgrounds that the global community could offer. As my maiden exposure to an international group of youths, this molded my personal

conception of what the global youth looked like and felt like. No one really stopped to talk about who was missing from this community – those who could not obtain visas, those who could not afford the flights, those who could not even go to school. At least, I didn't.

Our mistake lay in not questioning the concept of global youth, and allowing ourselves to grow up with a narrow perspective of what this entails. To some, this may seem insignificant. Wouldn't we form a more accurate picture of the world as we gain more opportunities for exposure? Ideally, yes. However, for most of us, our understanding of the global youth comes from social media, our social circles, or these very international youth conferences. In these seemingly different avenues of exposure, there is one predominant group present – upwardly mobile youths. This constant reaffirmation of a certain characteristic of the global youth entrenches our intuition of who really belongs to this community.

Some attempt to broaden their perspectives through embarking on overseas community service projects and interacting with youths from disadvantaged communities. Yet, these youths are present only as objects of our discussions: how do we, as the empowered global youth lift them out of poverty? Ironically, their presence only underscores their very absence as equal participants of that discourse.

I am sure that some have already recognized this problem. However, not everyone has. Our intuitive conception

which we have allowed to persist over time – that the global youth looks and feels a certain way – reinforces itself perniciously as an immutable truth. Yes, we can sometimes have rather warped perceptions of the communities we live in.

What should we do then? Dropping the term entirely would require us to forgo building a global community of youths, and deprive us of a useful rallying call for youths across countries. We shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, we should refrain from forming easy conceptions about what the global youth is and accept that we do not know how it looks like.

We may never achieve a settled notion of what the global youth is, but we have never rejected ideas on such a basis. We choose not to encapsulate justice, liberty, or morality into single conceptions because their value comes from our constant reevaluation of what they stand for. Similarly, abandoning a single definition of global youth does not render it meaningless. In fact, we have been straitjacketing it by chaining it to a fixed manifestation. It is only when we break free can we see the complexity of what the global youth can be. It becomes more than a simple descriptor of who we are, and now becomes a statement of what we aspire towards.

This requires us, as organisers or participants of international youth conferences, to be as inclusive as we can possibly be – lowering administrative and financial barriers is one way. We should also listen, without bias or prejudice, to the voices of those who are unable to join

in for these discussions, and represent their voices earnestly and sincerely. Most crucially, we must seek to establish the dominant narrative that the global youth is not a closed concept, but an open conversation that aims to include every single youth in the world regardless of nationality or background.

Like Paul Ryan, we have the capacity to make such mistakes. It is only through our recognition of this fallibility that will enable us to build a future where the global youth is a truly empowering ideal for each and every youth in the world.

THE BEST WAY TO LIVE THE BEST WAY IS
TO ENJOY THE MOMENTS OF YOUR LIFE
BECAUSE THAT'S ALL YOU HAVE
BUT OF MOMENTS
LIFE IS A JOURNEY
ENJOY IT

A hand holding a silver pen is positioned over a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is open, showing lined pages. To the left, a portion of a laptop keyboard is visible. In the background, a smartphone lies on a white surface. The overall scene suggests a workspace or a place for study and writing.

**Shortlist of entrants
Secondary Schools**

It's Not Because It's Public, It's Because It's Poor

American International School of Guangzhou

Grace Tang, Caroline Mao, Iris Xu

As an international student living in China, my first impression of American public schools was from *Mean Girls*. *Mean Girls* was my life: the stuck-up teenagers, the rich-girl fashion, the snobbish characters that were both whiter and prettier than me. Everyone treated each other like garbage, but this movie was so different from my mundane academic life that it seemed like an exciting joyride.

It took me until Grade 7 to realize what a mistake that was. I moved to a public school in North Carolina with a student count of thirteen hundred crammed into three grades. The first day of school, I ate lunch in the bathroom. Everyone else had cliques to meet up with as soon as the bell rang, but I had no one—I was the shy new Asian girl in the most intimidating environment I could imagine. At this school, the only thing that was still mine were my grades, and I capitalized on it. I outworked more talented classmates for a fighting chance. My life became a torrent of study guides, report cards, and everything that came in between. My parents grew up poor and broke out of their poverty by taking advantage of the opportunities that followed Deng's economic reforms, and from a young age, they taught me that the only path to success was hard work. While my peers made a point of their disinterest in their grades, I was studying over three hours a day.

The greatest impediment to the progress I made, however, were my apathetic teachers. This didn't apply to every teacher, but exceptions were few. Most of them shuffled through semesters with the same tedious PowerPoints and worksheets. I didn't bother asking for extra help because I knew they wouldn't want to spend any more time in the classroom than what was required. A teaching job at a public school was a dead, washed-up career, and students were a means to a monthly paycheck. They were the picture of indifference: what did it matter to them whether you got an A or an F?

It couldn't help but make me miss my old private school teachers. Mr. Hollingsworth's class taught me more about power napping than quadratic equations, but every time I'd showed up at lunch to with questions about parabolas, he'd responded with patience and diligence. He'd cared. Nothing ever fell through the cracks. If the principal came in to say we were going to begin a new program, or a group of kids were starting another club, it would happen. At public school, my classmates and teachers always complained about wanting this or that — expanding their sports teams, more exciting field trips rather than the brief ventures at the Outer Banks, projectors in every classroom — but when I asked why we didn't do that, someone would shrug and say, “Money.”

Of course, my private school had had plenty of funds. Many students had families so rich, I'd wondered why they even needed to go to school. The students here weren't rich at all. Whenever I participated in a conversation about public school,

I was overwhelmed by my classmates' stories about grueling part-time jobs and irritating customers that ate up all their study time. According to the Southern Education Foundation, low-income students were estimated to compose 51 percent of America's public schools in 2013. My state, North Carolina, was at 53 percent, while southern neighbors like Texas and New Mexico had even higher numbers. In China, I hadn't exactly been going home to a mansion and three ays, but I was one of the most privileged students here.

After a few months at my new school, the principal announced we'd be building an auditorium, then cancelled the plan almost immediately. Curious to see if I could land a spot in the next play and gain some semblance of a social status, I'd actually been thrilled for the auditorium's opening. When I demanded to know why the project hadn't been completed, I received the same answer: “Money.” Why did money matter so much? I started to realize at that point that the problem wasn't that our school's performance was poor. It was that we were poor. No one had the time or funds to apply for a tutor or college credits on top of their part-time job. An AP exam offers an extra college credit—and it costs 91 USD to take. SAT scores are proven to have a correlation with family income. A student attending one of America's most selective universities is fourteen times more likely to be from a high-income family than a low-income one. And most of those low-income families are sending their children to public schools.

This wasn't my international school in China. In public school, rags-to-riches stories are fairy tales, not family anecdotes. My classmates scoff about how they won't bother applying to college because they'd never be able to afford it anyway, and any arguments I make to the contrary are hopeless against the cynicism that they've been spoonfed since birth. I can't blame them, either. Statistics tell them they're right.

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The Chinese Children Buried in Oblivion

American International School of Guangzhou

Jenny Choi, Leah Lee, Michelle Zhuang

“Young boys for sale–100,000 RMB each,” reads an online website selling abducted children.

100,000 RMB. That is about 16,000 in US dollars. In China, an illegal market has developed in which numerous children are openly being sold online. Child kidnapping and trafficking have been a problem in China since at least the 1900s. As many as 20,000 children are abducted annually and 400 weekly according to the US State Department, though Chinese state media estimate up to 200,000 per year, with the Chinese government providing no figures of child abduction.

Many experts say child abduction and trafficking are unintended consequences of the one-child policy, as parents were willing to sell their undue children to avoid paying fines. However, the one-child policy has recently been abrogated and the real reason is deeply rooted with the traditional attitude of the Chinese people.

There is a traditional preference for sons in Chinese culture, as they carry on the family name and provide financial support for their parents. Accordingly, most Chinese couples prefer sons over daughters which can possibly lead them to be implicated in child trafficking. They would purchase boys in the black market to avoid the risk of giving birth to a daughter. In addition, the tradition in China of raising distant relatives’ children also gives them the pretext to raise the abducted children. For example, if you have four children and a distant relative does not have any, it is not a misdemeanor for you to hand over one of your children to that relative to raise. Yet, such traditional perceptions decrease the people’s awareness and aggravate the problem of child abduction and trafficking.

It would be alleviating if the children are only sold for adoption. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Although adoption is a part of the trafficking industry, a majority of the youths are forced into child labor; boys to factory labor and girls to prostitution. Chinese newspapers have reported that thousands of young children in the south-west were sold “like cabbages” to work in factories. In the worst cases, abducted children end up begging for change under the control of adult criminals.

What is the government’s response to this deplorable matter? At a hearing in September 2013, the Chinese delegation declined to respond when the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked whether China will ban all forms of child trafficking.

Nevertheless, China has been taking steps toward tackling the problem. China was able to create an anti-abduction task force that has rescued more than 54,000 children and cracked down on 11,000 traffickers since 2009, according to Xinhua news agency.

From the families’ point of view, however, such measures are not sufficient. Many say that local police offer cursory

help when children disappear. The most essential setback for finding the children is that the police are often too late to do so. Many Chinese police stations do not even consider accepting a missing person’s case until the child has been missing for a full 24 hours, according to Shi Richeng, Lei Yong and several parents of kidnapped children. Sadly, there is no point in looking after 24 hours, as the child would already be transported hundreds of miles away.

Child abduction and trafficking in China is a serious yet opaque problem. In fact, it is considered as a taboo to the Chinese government, who realizes the existence of the problem, but does not provide specific statistics of about the number of children kidnapped and adopted. The actual number of children abducted is vaguely stated and no one is certain of the exact statistics. It is the main reason why people, especially the Chinese, are ignorant and unaware of the problem. However, the problem is severer than what people think and thousands of parents are suffering from the pain and agony of losing their precious children.

Critics are calling for China to penalize buyers of stolen children. The UN committee is urging the government to enlist more help in rooting out trafficking. Thus, both traffickers and buyers must realize there is a heavy penalty for their actions. It is also crucial that the police should not repeat the halfhearted and apathetic investigations. They must act immediately after any suspects of abduction before it is too late.

Lives of innocent youths are vigorous and precious – yet heart-wrenchingly fragile. They belong to the most vulnerable subset of the society, thus are the biggest targets of harm and abuse. Life is beyond price and the global world needs to work its way towards becoming a more civilized community. Life is a mixture of happiness blended by family, companions and memories, and youth is exactly when a person learns to embrace all of these. Taking away children’s happy memories via child abduction and turning them into horror, fear, and uncertainty, would be the last thing we want to see.

The Divorce of Youth and Politics

Anderson Junior College
Tarasvin

Consider this. Barack Obama winning landslide victories in 2008 and 2012, with the help of the youth vote. And yet, in mid-term elections, the Republicans managed to gain control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Take Brexit. Young people were estimated to be 82% in favor of Brexit, and yet only 36% of those registered voted. With the referendum too close to call, the outcome may well have been markedly different.

Youth are, in general, among the most politically disconnected generations in years. Nowhere else has this been more profound than in elections, where young people seem to bemoan the outcome, and yet did not vote for their preferred candidate or issue. A common, and rather flawed, line of reasoning is that young people are simply lazy slobs who cannot be bothered to make their vote count.

This is simply not the case. Young people volunteer more, are better educated, and are vastly less likely to engage in petty crime as compared to their forebears; which doesn't seem to translate to political indifference.

However, youth also face poverty, barriers to education, multiple forms of discrimination and limited employment prospects and opportunities that all contribute towards this trend. Added to this, is the fact that young people often do not feel as if they have a stake in the political process, whether their votes actually matter, and lack understanding of the political system.

Research has found that young people who come from a higher socioeconomic background tend to talk about politics more regularly than the rest of their peers. One line of argument could be that youth from poorer socioeconomic status have less influence simply because of them lacking the necessary money or resources to make a statement, or make their views heard. With working-age youth making up 40% of the world's unemployed, this is particularly exacerbated among youth, who don't have a stable income to support themselves or their families, forget participating in elections to ostensibly influence the government.

Another hurdle that political parties must overcome in order to get young people to vote for them, is the fundamental distrust young people have in the political apparatus. They viewed politics as the most deceitful profession in Britain, according to IPSOS. Without faith in the political system and its leaders, young people are not inclined to vote, as their belief that voting will not make things better goes unchallenged.

An associated reason for the decline in youth participation is rather lacklustre in attitude of politicians towards youth engagement. Issues that most concern young voters like education are often shunted to the back of the queue, as politicians seek to sway older voters. Democracy is intended to ensure the representation of interests and rights. Look

at the youngest average age of a formal politician. In over a third of global countries, eligibility for the national parliament starts at 25, with politicians often considered young if they are younger than 40. Without youth-centric issues being debated or discussed on, young people are not inclined to vote, as they see no need to endorse those who do not serve to advance their interests.

However, this does not mean that young people are apathetic about the world. Instead, they just want less and less to do with political point.

“Young people today want to see change. They want a better world.” -Sir Richard Branson.

In order to tackle this problem, with far-reaching consequences, politicians must do their best to give the youth a stake in the election. This cannot be accomplished via using token Youth MPs, who do not fully understand the complexities of issues, nor the youth wing of a party, which does not participate in policy discussions, or votes to influence policy.

In order to encourage and support youth to vote in the first place, civic and political education can be taught in schools. Ensuring continuous youth participation and civics education will go a long way towards convincing youth that their vote matters, and that they can influence policy to their benefit. A successful example would be that of Barefoot College Night Schools in India, where students have rights to participate in school affairs. This likely contributed towards them being more likely to vote in the future.

To conclude, there is indeed a widening gulf between the youth and politics. However, the gap can be bridged, by giving youth more stake in the elections, and by educating them.

“Youth: The Missing Part of the Equation”

Bina Bangsa School Kebon Jeruk
Serano Tannason Ng

Dora and Albertina could not be any more different.

Dora Lawrencia is a young city girl whose family's financial situation has not only granted her access to excellent education, but also the opportunity to join Leo Club, a global youth organisation which aims to serve communities through collaboration amongst young people in over 140 countries. She has passionately taken the role of International Relationship and Youth Exchange Committee, a strategic position to tackle the issues of global youth and interact with like-minded youths from other nations. A recipient of the prestigious Leos of the Year Award 2014-2015, Dora has been empowered by the various opportunities that she received and uses the chance to in turn empower those around her.

Albertina Beanal, on the other hand, is a young girl who has failed to advance to the next grade for four years. Growing up in the squalid conditions of a Papuan village void of proper education, the odds were stacked against her. She was enmeshed in a never-ending cycle of poverty almost impossible to break out of. She, however, did break out; not merely from the inside, but with the help of a Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan's name is Yohanes Surya. Having a noble goal of giving underprivileged youths a chance, Surya gathers students like Albertina from Papua and trains them.

Albertina would go on to garner medals in national robotics competitions, thereby proving that Surya is right – every youth can thrive, if only given the opportunity.

When Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) ushered in the new leaders for the term 2015-2019 last year, one of the early decisions the leaders made was highly unusual: to eliminate corruption in the country, they reasoned, they have to stop the act of cheating in school. Their action attracted a lot of controversies and the public lambasted the commission of being too incapable to handle major cases and instead, focuses on young people. Similarly, many politicians do not take into account the interests of the youth voters when designing their electoral campaigns. What these two situations tell us is that we may be taking youths slightly too lightly, even though the global youth population is over 1.8 billion.

Yes, many of us youths may be indifferent about politics and extremely lazy in exercising our voting rights. Yes, many of us are pampered by the sophisticated technology whose advent happened before we were even born and is still rapidly advancing. Yes, many of us may have taken too many selfies and may be too self-obsessed. However, there exists a crucial fact about youths: we are the key to world issues. This is not difficult to believe if you consider how much effort is put in to curb teenage drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and other problems that undermine youth's potential for success. The idea behind these initiatives is, of course, that the root of all issues in our society lies in these youth problems. We can solve various

world issues – endless cycle of poverty, rocketing crime rate, etc. – just by nipping these problems in the bud and allowing our youths to flourish.

History tells us that even though most of us do not expect others to make a huge contribution at a young age, many youths have used their versatility and dynamism to innovate and create. The world's largest social media was founded by college students. Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution two years ago was led by youths. The Nobel Peace Prize 2014 was awarded to a 17-year-old girl, whom people worldwide consider to be a beacon of hope. Few can disagree that the Ice Bucket Challenge, which recently funded an ALS breakthrough, was propagated by youths and social media.

The rising popularity of youth organisations like Leo Club and AIESEC are clear indicators of increasing number of youths voluntarily expending their energy and time to make a difference in their communities. “It is an amazing feeling...to be a part of someone else's life and dare to make a difference”, Dora described her experience making her community better, her words echoing the sincere intentions of other youths.

We can reasonably conclude that youths are decreasingly “learning to live in and preparing for the real world” because they are increasingly “becoming a part of the real world itself”. The ones lucky enough to have been empowered are now empowering people, which creates a cycle of its own. This is impossible without opportunities and meaningless without equality, which we are striving increasingly hard to provide youths with.

Our vision of a utopian world, then, should not exclude youths. How do we achieve such a goal? Babatunde Osotimehin, the executive director of United Nations Population Fund, answered it aptly: “We need to ask ourselves: how can we – UN agencies, governments, the private sector, NGOs, academia – empower youth to drive social progress in the developing world through new and innovative projects?”

A Generation of Global Youth

Chinese International School (HK)

Gloria Schiavo, Catherine Cheng

Under the façade of multi-ethnic coexistence, Myanmar is divided. This division centers around conflicts between the country’s Bamar majority and the Muslim Rohingya minority, whose members the United Nations call “the most persecuted people on earth”.

Although they have been residents of Myanmar since the eighth century, the Rohingya have been consistently denied the right to Burmese citizenship under the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law. Demands from their Buddhist neighbours to stop practising Islam or otherwise face stone-throwing assaults are commonplace. In June 2012, the Rakhine State Riots saw groups of Buddhist nationalists burning Rohingya homes. The violent clashes resulted in 280 Rohingyas murdered, and 90,000 displaced. Today, at the entrance to a village in Irrawaddy, “No Muslims” signs are erected to proclaim local rejection of the minority.

Fighting against the imagined barriers that separate citizens from the stateless is Han Seth Lu, a youth activist who proudly proclaims: “I’m Buddhist and my friend is Rohingya. We are different but we accept each other, because friendship has no boundaries.”

Han Seth Lu, along with fellow youth activists, has embarked on a campaign to reunite the nation. The ‘My Friend’ campaign, which takes place on social media platforms, encourages people of different ethnicities and religions to take selfies with one another. With over 3,000 likes on its Facebook page, the campaign has already begun to make impact. Their attempt to pioneer a move towards acceptance of those previously ‘otherized’ by distinctions of religion, heritage, and ethnicity is just one of the many examples of youth striving to construct a world unified by the acceptance of diversity.

Another example is Priscilla Chan’s effort to bring about social inclusion in Hong Kong.

The treatment of Southeast Asian migrants in this ‘international’ city has been condemned by many as tantamount to ‘modern-day slavery’. Many of the 320,000 migrants employed as domestic workers arrived in Hong Kong with limited language skills and foreign cultural traditions. Susie Utomo, an Indonesian activist and writer who was a domestic worker for 14 years explains: “Muslims are a minority in Hong Kong, and sometimes we face discrimination. People talk so negatively about Islam. Sometimes [domestic workers] are not allowed to pray five times per day, because the boss has no understanding.”

In hopes of engineering a move towards greater social inclusion, Priscilla Chan, who is currently an intern at local NGO Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), has developed a project called Coming Together. This project involves various Sunday activities to increase mutual understanding and communication between locals and migrant workers of

Filipino, Indonesian and Thai origin.

Priscilla’s efforts are a tribute to the increasing number of young people campaigning against the traditional tendency to reject and otherize those who are culturally different.

With 244 million people living in a country other than the one in which they were born, a 68% increase from the 145 million people in the mid-1990s, the world has polarized into two movements: those who perceive the national solidarity produced by cultural homogeneity as society’s much needed glue, and those who believe that the unprecedented scale of immigration must be met with a move away from identification based on religion, heritage, ethnicity, and towards global unity.

The latter group is formed by a species of ‘global’ youth who, having been born into an era of globalisation, see the propagation of nationalist identity as corrosive towards social integration. It remains to be seen whether the efforts of this global youth can truly engineer widespread, lasting change.

Exile for Dreamers?

Dunman High School

Lim Jia Yi

When I was 6, I wanted to be a writer.

But because 6 year olds can be indecisive sometimes, I entertained brief thoughts of being both an astronaut and a magician, and at some point, a knight (we can't all be princesses and princes, can we?)

Fast forward 12 years, and the time has finally come for me to make this decision. I should be spoilt for choice, perhaps more so with the creation of new sectors and careers. Strangely enough, I can't.

My fellow youth face the same challenge: expected to make one of life's most important decisions at an age where our lives have just barely begun, we face a tough choice between practicality and our dreams when they may not always intersect. Consequently, we youths are starting to develop a more risk-averse mentality, with more choosing the safer option – whatever that may be.

Raised in the aftermath of the Great Recession in the late 2000s, it is of little surprise that youth today are largely unwilling to venture out of the typical rat race, dreams replaced by two feet firmly planted on the ground. “Children raised during recessions ultimately take fewer risks with their investments and their jobs. Even when the recession passes, they don't strive as hard to find new jobs, and they hang on to lousy jobs longer”, writes Todd Buchholz and Victoria Buchholz, in an article called “The Go-Nowhere Generation”. They coin our generation the “Generation Y Bother”, in view of our “stuck-at-home mentality”, with majority of us staying put in our hometowns despite the fact that unemployment rates elsewhere might be lower, with a higher chance of securing a job there.

The risks we have to undertake are only amplified by the rapidly changing and volatile nature of our world economies. We live in transformative times, suggests the 2015 annual EY Global Job Creation Survey, with record numbers of job destruction and creation as economies change to suit global demand.

Our parents' generation may call us reckless and impulsive, but research by a Scientific American study has shown that we take calculated risks. We tend to choose the levelled brick road when we know the other option is an uneven rocky trek. And true enough, beyond our home borders, there is a forest leading to an unknown we are not prepared to enter.

In part, our desire for security may result from our upbringing, under the watchful gazes of our

helicopter parents. We are insulated from risk in our lives, because our parents take it upon themselves to clear the thorns in our path. Some of us are afraid of failing because we've not tasted failure. And we begin to fear risk.

Furthermore, our parents' perceptions of “good” career prospects can influence the societal trend of many young

people choosing financially stable careers like accounting or law, the very definition of the levelled brick road, instead of wherever else their passions may lie.

We may want stability, but in doing so, we start to limit our own potential to what we perceive to be safe. The world keeps evolving, and our needs follow suit, becoming increasingly complex – like genetically modified health foods for one. Now more than ever, we need entrepreneurs and inventors to veer off their brick roads and try for their dreams. Hart Main was only 14 years of age when he started selling candles with ‘manly’ scents in his school's fundraiser. Today, ManCans candles are found in over 60 stores across the United States, selling over 9000 units.

Youth is a powerful asset to change, and we can catalyse positive social change when we rally and fight for what we believe in. 18 percent of the world's population fall in our category, according to the United Nations World Youth Report, and our might is only growing stronger as we communicate and form global groups in the age of the internet and social media. From youth activists protesting for democracy in Hong Kong, indignados in Spain against economic inequality, to the youth-led “To Write Love On Her Arms” support system for others struggling with depression, self-injury and suicide in the United States, our presence is being felt across the globe on a wide array of social and political issues.

We will be the leaders of tomorrow, and the stability we desire can be achieved for all when we realise the virtue of collective dreams. We are plagued by a myriad of issues today, but nothing can be more devastating than a community of youth who do nothing for their future.

Malala Yousafzai was but one youth when she started her fight for human rights in Pakistan. Now, she is the figurehead of a band of like-minded youth from all corners of the world who share her same vision. Indeed, we are not individuals in this global picture, but a community with a voice loud enough to be heard - but this will only come if we stop exiling the dreamers in all of us to the back of our minds. It's natural to fear risk, but what other time do we have to explore and make mistakes if we don't do it while we're young?

When I was 6, I wanted to be a writer.

At 18, I don't think I've ever stopped dreaming.

Global Youth: A Leap of Faith

Dunman High School

Liu Yunke

I first met Sambath in a sleepy village camouflaged by vast paddy fields in central Cambodia. A fresh college graduate hailing from the capital city Phnom Penh, Sambath surprised many by choosing to teach full-time in an obscure village school 7-hour bus ride away from home. “When I first visited the school, I saw children eating pineapple skins on the ground and their lack of education really struck me,” he told me gently but firmly. “Every child is entitled to a quality education and I am staying here to make that happen.”

Cambodia, like many other poverty-stricken countries, is on the receiving end of donations worldwide. Thanks to youth like Sambath, needy children are fortunately not only showered with Disney pencil cases and Taiwanese uniforms, but also empowered with knowledge and values that will broaden their horizons and shape their world views in the long run.

Such is what global youth truly stand for. As youth, we all hope for a better future, but global youth distinguish themselves from their peers by framing their hopes in a broader context and seeing their own future as part of the collective future of their communities. Instead of rushing headlong into transitory merrymaking and egocentric pursuits, they are improving their communities through concrete actions and transforming the world into a better place.

While I was definitely awed by Sambath’s sheer dedication, my interaction with him was more often sobering. It dawned on me that there seemed to be a deficit of global youth around me, an ordinary student living in the well-ordered, metropolitan Singapore.

Granted, our generation seems to be in a better position to make real changes, as we are generally more informed about global affairs in this increasingly wired world. Thanks to the omnipresence of the Internet, ‘Brexit’ and ‘AI’ are no longer arcane jargon; refugees weeping in Syria and heart-rending terrorist attacks in Europe are no longer unfamiliar sights. Knowledge brings responsibility. However, increased knowledge of an event happening thousands of miles away from home does not always provide us with the impetus to action and when there are millions of likes and shares on social media, the responsibility on each of us is somehow diffused and we become mere keyboard warriors, thinking that someone out there will solve those hot-button issues on our behalf.

Moreover, the strong prevailing culture of pragmatism seems to get the better of us. For many, the first 20 years of our lives consist of a linear trajectory where the finish point is marked by an offer from a good college. Study hard. Play the piano. Join the student union. We have a singular sense of purpose, and are often not compelled to think about the larger questions such as: What are the needs of my community? How do I contribute to humanity?

However, is becoming part of the global youth such an

inconceivable notion? Granted, not everyone is able to embark on a worldwide ocean cleanup like Boyan Slat, nor can everyone become another Malala Yousafzai to receive the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17. However, we can always start somewhere and actively experiment in the smaller world of our own, for the notion of global youth is all about the heart and never the glamour. As long as we put our genuine care into whatever we pursue, seemingly futile efforts will eventually culminate into meaningful changes.

At the end of the day, the biggest hurdle that prevents us from stepping out of our comfort zone comes from within. When youth is at its peak, we think that time is on our side and we are not yet ready to venture out. On the contrary, youth who ever succeed realize the importance of seizing the day. When 9th grader Sara Volz from the U.S. first learned the gravity of climate change, she did not hesitate to make herself a miniature lab under her loft bed, starting everything from scratch. Through tireless trial and error, she successfully developed renewable algae biofuel that amazed the scientific realm. Seeing many friends miss out on life-changing opportunities due to imperfect information, Osama Bin Noor from Bangladesh soon initiated an online platform, Youth Opportunities, to disseminate information regarding scholarships, internships and enriching programs worldwide. Over the years, Youth Opportunities has grown to be the biggest opportunities discovery platform for youth across the globe. Indeed, there is almost no such thing as ready. There is only now. If we wait until we are ‘ready’, we will be waiting for the rest of our lives, only to regret later that youth is wasted on the young.

This April, I hosted Sambath on his first trip to Singapore. At the last stop of the trip, we ended up inside the futuristic Marina Bay Sands. Surrounded by the mellifluous violin renditions and the perfumed air, he whispered: ‘This is where all the rich people stay...’

Was he dismayed by the stark contrast between the glitz of Singapore and the poverty back home? Was he regretting not pursuing a more lucrative career? To my surprise, he was not dispirited at all! In fact, he asked with a palpable sense of excitement if he could use my camera to capture this grandiose panorama for his students. ‘They will be motivated to work harder if they see how amazing the world outside is,’ he said with a fatherly look that belied his young age.

I stood by, quietly watching him walk back and forth to find that perfect spot, rotating the focus ring with extreme caution before finally making up his mind to press the shutter button. At that very moment, I felt so small, yet more eager than ever to take on the world. Indeed, if not now, then when? If not me, then who? That balmy night, it seemed anything could happen, anything at all.

The People’s Medium

Gyeonggi Suwon International School

Tobey Lee

Something is most definitely wrong, I think, as I walk down the busiest streets of Seoul, South Korea. Everyone around me: students, toddlers, couples, and parents, they all brush past me with a zombified expression.

“What’s going on?” I wonder. And then it hits me! Literally... I’m now lying on my back from being knocked over by a man who ran straight into me, not caring to even look up as he walked. “Oh, Sorry, kid! I Wasn’t looking where I was going. Are you ok?” he asks absently as he helps me up. As soon as I’m back on my feet, he’s already plugged in his earphones with phone in hand and walks away disappearing into the endless crowd of other people with their faces inches from their device screens.

As access to media becomes more easy and user friendly, so does its popularity among the current generation. The media craze is becoming insatiable. Thousands of years ago, a man thought to make a written language, the first form of media. Studies show that teens are spending an unbelievable time of nine hours a day on the media. When they were asked how it feels to be cut off from the media, teens responded that being away from it felt horrible and that it was as if they were being deprived of something very important to them. They also expressed their feelings of frustration, sadness, and even the anxiety of not being in the know.

I, myself, am 13 years old, and over the course of the summer, I am reading eBooks, watching TV and movies, playing video games, and checking social networks. However, I certainly have a very low media consumption compared to all of my friends at school and peers of my age.

Countless times, friends and guests of our home have asked, “Why is the wifi so slow? By the way, Korea has the fastest wifi in the world! “Get a new router,” they’ll say. Some people will question my parents, “Your children don’t have smart phones? Oh my gosh, really?” And lastly, “I can’t see a darn thing through this small TV. You need to get a bigger screen.” At this point, I’ve given up asking for a phone. I’ll settle for a dog instead.

At the rate that technology and media have been booming, I can only expect these comments to get worse. Yet, the question remains: What are the effects of media usage on our future leaders and innovators? Is it really worth begging my parents to buy me a cellphone? And where does the balance of the distinction between reality and the world of media lie?

For some people, the mass media is the most influential thing in their lives. Never before have humans been so well informed and globally connected. We can now contact each other on the other side of the globe in an instant, and know everything happening in any given country 24/7. With media, a person who cannot afford travel can now explore the Amazon by watching a travel show. The media is also becoming a way

of education - a more effective way to communicate knowledge. The media has become the ideal tool to advocate ideas and opinions; politicians and celebrities do it all the time. On TV, there are numerous educational programming. Internet offers online study programs and tutoring. People actually learn how to drive a motorcycle by watching tutorial videos, my father included.

With such conveniences, media also comes with some negative and damaging effects. Because sometimes, the media can be a little too good at what it does. Social media is a place where cyberbullying occurs. Many are looking for acceptance and affirmation by their so-called “friends” on social network sites. In a young person’s world, peer pressure now can affect anyone, anywhere, in any fashion. Television is the most popular way that people access the media. Especially among the youth, the media can cause aggressive and risky behaviors. Advertisements can create unhealthy views of self-body image. This can cause behavioral issues with youth trying to imitate their role models. Not just mental effects like attention deficit disorder and depression, but physical effects include addiction where people are prone to obesity and eye disorders. In extreme cases, youth that feel overweight from the pressure of the media can develop eating disorders. Truth is that the media is addictive and does affect quality of life.

We can either be consumed by it, or we can have a healthy interaction with the media and live in the real world in real time. Maybe to most, I may be a modern day enigma without a cellphone, but I’d like to think that as a potential future leader of the world, I do have a good control and well balanced intake of media. Thanks, mom. Thanks, dad. No matter who we are, and where we live, one fact remains - we are connected by media. Whether the youth is trudging the concrete jungles of South Korea or trekking the jungles of South Africa, one commonality exists - the media. The global youth of today is the same here or there...we have the world at our texting fingertips. Good or bad, media is our medium.

Youth and the Political Process

King George V School
Leuven Wang

War, refugees, climate change, terrorism and growing social inequality. These all seem like the setting for a good apocalyptic book but instead, they are some of the daunting realities that face us today. On the subject of climate change alone, scientific estimates state that we must reduce our carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 to avoid drastic disturbances in our ecosystem. The UN also aims for 2030 as the year of completion for their newly approved Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which hopes to not only fix problems in various social, cultural, environmental and economic segments of society, but also to develop and bring growth to them.

In the time taken between now and the completion of these goals, today's youth, namely those currently between the age of 15 and 24, would become the majority of the working population and thus, the people who really control whether we meet these deadlines or not. They will face the unprecedented challenge of implementing sustainable growth in various areas of society. Besides having to phase out our current “business as usual” political and economic systems, they would also be required to replace them with policies that can maintain an equilibrium between the needs and wants of society and the amount of resources available.

To bring around any change on a worldwide scale, governmental agencies from various countries would need to enact effective policies which reflect upon the needs of the people and society. Bearing this in mind, it's essential that youth from all over the world take part in the political process and engage more frequently whether it is by activism, voting or other methods. Already, we have seen the impact that young people could bring onto the political arena. The 2014 Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong was mainly led by youth from student organizations such as the Hong Kong Federation of Youth who opted to fight in the name of democracy and universal suffrage against the CPC. More recently, the 2016 presidential campaign of Vermont senator Bernie Sanders received 2.4 million votes from those under the age of 30, beating Barack Obama's 2008 record. During the US Presidential Primary this year, more than 80% of the youth vote in 3 states opted the self-described democratic socialist whose policies are considered radical by mainstream politicians. This shows that when young people are engaged in politics, they demand large scale change to the status quo.

Despite these grand milestones and achievements, overall youth participation in political activities is still quite low. The US congressional election voting turnout rate for youth has suffered a decline of 10% in the last half century. Only around 20% of registered youth voters chose to cast their ballot in the 2010 election for instance. During the Brexit vote in June this year, young people had been overwhelmingly in support of remaining in the EU but only 36% of the population between

the ages of 18 and 24 actually went to the polls and voted. The Brexit vote could have been easily changed and the economic consequences avoided with ease had the 2 million youths who chose not to leave their homes decided to exercise their voting rights instead. Already, we can see the tremendous aggregate power that the youth bracket wields; it's just that they choose not to use it.

So why do youth not vote? Mainstream media likes to paint them as lazy individuals who don't care about global issues. However, the above mentioned political campaigns clearly show that they do care and very passionately at that. At a Tedx talk at UC Davis, political sociologist Mindy Romero stated: “It's because our civil and electoral structure are discouraging young people from voting, leaving them with a smaller voice in the political process.” Her thoughts were mirrored by those of journalist and TV presenter Rick Edwards. “They've just lost faith, or never had faith in the top-down political process. They don't believe that the main political leaders understand the issues that affect them most. They feel like they're the last group that politicians want to talk to” he explained at a separate talk. And he's right. When we think about our lawmakers and politicians, we conjure up the image of another generic middle-aged white guy in a suit. The youth bracket is underrepresented in national legislatures. In fact, the US Senate disallows anyone under the age of 30 to join and the House of Representatives has its bar at 25. In 2015, only 2% of all British MPs were below the age of 30.

While the system surely has its flaws, the voting process does have an impact and so young people need to know that when they go to the ballots, they are making a difference. Politicians aren't going to listen to those who don't vote. They listen to those who do, namely the older generations so can they be blamed for inadequacy when the youth themselves don't go out to make their voices heard in elections? This cycle of political stagnation can only be broken if we recognize the power of ballot casting. So if today's youth truly want to bring large scale changes to the world, then get out there and vote your mind.

Global Youth: The Powerhouse of the Future?

King George V School

Samanwita Sen, Sean Tsung, Kellie Ling

In the bustling streets of Kolkata, India, I watch as two gaunt children- one slightly taller than the other- follow the hunched figure of their mother. Their bruised bodies are adorned by no more than mere trousers, their ribs jut through their skin, and their faces are shadowed by dishevelled hair. Their mother's rusty eyes bear an expression of fatigue, and her writhing hands clutch a silver bowl as she scavenges for the day's income. In the background, the cries of devout worshippers pierce through the late morning as a crowd makes its way to the magnificent shrines, bowing as they pray for a bright and successful future. The dichotomy of despair and hope is stark, yet clear.

This is the reality for many youths across the globe, with nearly 50% of people aged between 15 to 24 being employed in the informal economy, and another 25% being economically inactive. As a looming global issue which demands immediate action, youth unemployment poses many problems for countries spanning the economic spectrum, not excluding High Income Countries (HICs). Take, for instance, the case of Cornwall. Isolated in the rural fringes of South-West England, Cornwall thrives on the tourism industry, a sector where stable, all-year jobs can be scarce. With few opportunities for young people to pursue higher education, the future of Cornwall's youth was bleak. The region suffered from a paucity of well-educated students, rendering it a neglected shell, hollowed out by a 'brain drain,' as characterized by an exodus of skilled youths in search of a future beyond the dwindling job opportunities and dire prospects plaguing Cornwall.

However, it's not all doom and gloom for Cornwall's youth. The authorities in Cornwall acknowledged that engaging directly with the youth population on a regular basis would not only combat unemployment, but would further cultivate their potential. The solution: Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC), a partnership between five universities and colleges, which now provides over 7,700 students with higher education, with 38% of graduates finding employment in Cornwall and 22% in South-West England. The results have largely been positive with CUC contributing £70 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) to Cornwall's economy in 2011, reflecting higher rates of spending and increased paid employment. Hence, it is clear that developing the latent potential of young people is imperative for economic development and conducive to a thriving society.

Nonetheless, the problem still stands that youth unemployment is especially serious in fast-growing middle-income countries such as Egypt, Albania, and China. In these countries, with a sharp shift from agriculture to industry, young people struggle to find their footing in the rapidly changing economic terrain, leaving some 21% unemployed. On the other hand, in very low-income countries (such as Malawi), young people do have job opportunities, but are more likely

to be employed in low-pay, poor-quality jobs. The reason? An incarcerating trap of poverty. Escaping poverty is difficult and cumbersome, a harsh reality known best by those trapped within it. Essentially, low incomes lead to low savings, severely limiting the money available for investment in capital. This means impoverished workers cannot increase productivity, further restricting income. Thus, those in poverty become the victims of what is known as a “negative multiplier effect”, an inimical cycle from which there is no easy respite.

While there appears to be various problems when it comes to youth unemployment in developing countries, resolving them should not be deemed impossible. It is important to note that non-cognitive traits and skills, such as collaboration and creativity, are malleable up until the age of thirty. Since such skills are likely to inform future career paths, especially the decision to start a business, skill development programs for should aim to encourage desired career traits. This is precisely what the Republic of Benin has achieved. Despite its faltering economy that relies solely on subsistence agriculture, the authorities are adamant on steering their youth towards a more hopeful future. As such, the National Employment Agency has initiated a programme called ‘Job Saturday’ to equip young people with career guidance. Additionally, youths in developing countries should be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with internet technologies, which are essential to administering web-based training programs such as IBM's SME Toolkit, which supports aspiring entrepreneurs in third world countries.

In the bustling streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh, I watch as the frail figure of an emaciated boy jostles past the crowd, selling balloons to whoever passes by. His ragged clothes drape across his frame, and his soft, rheumy eyes intensify the pleading expression burdening his face. For him, his future is uncertain, but it is by no means a future cloaked in despair. He bears within him the power to change his path, and it's about time he's given the chance to do so.

Youth and Globalization: Conflict or Cooperation?

Lahore Grammar School Johar Town

Naseer Ahmad

Qasim lamented about how the tin roof of his house would drip whenever it rained, which is almost always in the humid Srilankan summer, as he chatted with me on a video call. Qasim, 21 and a Pakistani, is an asylum seeker who awaits his interview by the UNHRC to be finally provided a US work visa. Many young people like him frequently bid goodbye to their home countries to live in the shabby neighborhoods of Negombo to try their luck at being sent off to a developed country. Their hometowns and backgrounds may be diverse but they all share a common goal: a better future.

This hope of a future better than the present has always been an engine of inspiration for young people but unfortunately this hope is not universal for today's youth. With income inequality being at its zenith along with rapid development and globalization, many young people face the dilemma of a capricious identity. In a world which changes with every passing day, young people struggle between the outlandish demands of the future and their time-tested but obsolete status quo. Globalization, especially through an increase in access to digital communication, has made foreign ideas all the more digestible in local communities but along with it comes an awareness of resistance and even repulsion to these influences. As western cultures spread throughout the world, there remains a very thin line between globalization and cultural invasion from the perspective of a person in an under developed country.

As the west remains the major producer of mainstream media products and the home of this whole idea of a 'global village' it seems probable that this flow of cultures may be carrying a tint of western ideas or even worse, may be downright one-sided. As long as there remains a 'superior' culture to adhere to, the whole brouhaha about globalization is very likely to boil down to conflict. Another preposition usually put forward is that of dialogue between different youth group. Although a discourse can be helpful, it is only as powerful to avoid conflict as people think it to be. Where globalization has made a discussion on key problems faced by the youth easier, it has also fueled the divide that already exists between different groups. As groups become accustomed to each other and see each other's lives more closely, they also become aware of their own depravities, which they may think they owe to the other group.

As the world faces perhaps the most volatile era in recent times, we see nations pitched against each other due to political differences that are aggravated by grass root hatreds burgeoned by individual preferences. The coming time will be a witness to what grows of the bush of this global youth culture. It should be a time marked by the experienced of us helping the young and not of learned predators hunting on their unwary prey.

The Discrepancy Between Our Global Youth

Methodist Girls' School
Samantha Kok

In the hallway of a school, second class on the left, a bored teenager carves his name on his desk with a Swiss Army pocket knife. The small blade is convenient, weighing a mere 150 grams. It is his most prized possession; a gift from his parents for his 13th birthday.

Deep in the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a small child cradles a submachine gun. A blunt, heavy object weighing about 5 kilograms, but the boy handles it with ease. His most prized weapon; a gift to him for his 13th birthday after he had hacked an officer to death with a machete.

The latter child hails from eastern Congo, where a war has been raging for almost two decades with no sign of abating. Its cause is complicated by various factors which makes a peace agreement extremely difficult to attain. Rebel groups such as Mai-Mai Sheka and M23 pursue agendas like exploiting Congo's abundance of prized minerals and obtaining political power. In the process, many have resorted to unscrupulously violating of human rights, committing torture or even murder. To date, 5.4 million people have perished amidst the conflict.

Arguably, the most unforgivable of war crimes against civilians would be those committed against children and youths, defenceless minors who form the most vulnerable group in society. Rebel groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army program boys to become ruthless killing machines and subject girls to sexual violence. Child recruitment is rampant in Congo, with 30,000 children and counting having fallen prey to such atrocities. Soldiers as young as 15 years old are forced to kill, cut up, and eat families, rendering them emotionally scarred for life. Debilitating sexual abuse robs girls of their will, dignity, and health. Youths are naively misled by the examples set by older siblings to join such groups, or snatched from their families and any last semblance of a normal life by abusive kidnappers.

Needless to say, any trace of education has all but disappeared from these children's lives. The remnant of youth not killed or recruited have to work for a meagre income to support their families. In 2011, an estimated seven million children were out of school, roughly a quarter of primary-aged children and 60% of adolescents. Schools have stopped functioning, either destroyed by fighting or converted into military bases and bomb shelters. The majority of teachers have left their job posts.

This generation of youth is Congo's lost generation; taken away and unable to be recovered. They are lost to their country, neglected, violated. They are lost to us; isolated by thousands of kilometres and barricaded by miles of thick forest, wiped clean from our minds. They have lost their families, childhood, education, but of graver concern, their hope for a future.

Efforts must be made to alleviate and prevent the dire repercussions of the lost generation for Congo and the global community as a whole. When today's uneducated youths

become the adults of tomorrow, Congo will have to battle skyrocketing unemployment rates. The state will be plagued by a plethora of social problems, the manifestation of extremist views perpetuated among former child soldiers. In the near future, Congo might find itself relying on an illiterate and mentally fractured generation, broken by years of war. The mere economic cost of this is estimated at £9 billion, a figure which will only increase as the state battles other social implications. Although Congo's crippling circumstance may now seem isolated, the aftermath of war will definitely be echoed on a global scale. Globalisation has drawn our world closer into a tightly knit and interdependent community, one that can be termed a 'global village'. Distance is no longer a factor which will mitigate the side effects of Congo's war, nor serve as any excuse for our lack of aid. The term 'global youth' has never been more apt as this generation proves intricately interwoven. We must provide mutual help and support each other in order for these youths to progress as a whole.

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, 'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron'. The war in Congo, the war in Syria - wars all over the world - have robbed our fellow youths of their sustenance, peace, and hope for a better future. As schoolboys count the time they have till recess, our brothers count the days they have left to live. As schoolboys carve their names into their desks, rebel groups scar our brothers with cruelty. The weight the boy in the Congo has lost is not just flesh off his dehydrated bones, but his soul, the substance of life. The weight the boy in the Congo bears is not just the 5 kilograms of dead metal, but the intangible burden of loss, of pain. As brothers and sisters in this global village, it is up to us to help alleviate this suffering for their benefit and ours for if not, we will inevitably face the backlash of our indifference.

International Competitions, and How They Mould the Youth of Tomorrow

NUS High School of Mathematics & Science

Ahnt Htoo Myat

For five days in sunny May, the Singapore International Mathematics Challenge (SIMC) and International Student Science Fair (ISSF) took place on the grounds of NUS High School, where students from around the globe would either square off over a series of Mathematics problems, or compete to share their latest scientific discoveries and breakthroughs with others.

The young participants were as diverse as it could get. From Aruba to Vietnam, the participants were a unique blend of culture and character, which I worked hard to chronicle for the high school newsletter. Limited column spaces do no justice to their rich, quirky and sincere thoughts: some were very open, eagerly sharing their thoughts and views. Some found their thoughts racing faster than what their grasp of English could handle. But their animated enthusiasm was universal, and conveyed far more than the language barrier would let through.

International competitions for the youth never fail to draw in big, enthusiastic crowds. Take the family of International Olympiads – of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and the like, where up to 600 secondary school students from around the globe gather for each intense battle of wits. It is undeniable that such a culture of competition enjoys great support from the global community of youths.

Even at the humbler scale of things in the SIMC & ISSF, one could sense the same bubbling wonder. The talent of each participant was undeniable; how could they not be, when they were working on the frontiers of mathematics and science? Now gather over four hundred of them into an intellectually-stimulating space, and the magic that follows is breath-taking. Over the course of the 5 days of competition, as the contestants rushed out reports after reports, and dished out suave presentations of their latest breakthroughs, one thing was clear: the breadth and depth of generated knowledge and insights was simply immense.

This is a highly deserved merit of international competitions: the rigorous atmosphere promotes and furthers the talent of youth. Participants are exposed to a diverse array of cutting-edge fields, fielded by leading academic authorities. This has the result of strengthening the academic talents of youth worldwide, which can only serve to further the strides of society in the long run.

There is also an added benefit to these international competitions: the fostering of global ties, and networking of young talents. By nature, international events allow individuals of all backgrounds and cultures to converge onto a single place. By providing an avenue for like-minded youth to congregate, opportunities for collaboration become ever so numerous and fruitful.

Progress in realms of science and technology no longer can arise from an isolated vacuum; rather, only when infrastructure

for a robust exchange of ideas globally is in place can the fruits of academics' labour be fully reaped. Furthermore, the adolescent mind craves social interaction; couple the networking opportunities of international competitions with the pursuit of knowledge that drives them to excel and innovate, and the subsequent is remarkable.

However, most importantly, contests like these have an impact reaching far beyond the few days spent overseas by the participants. As important it is to establish strong networks and push oneself to strive for higher echelons of academics, the youth of today have an added responsibility to bear: that of putting to use all they have learnt from the events back at home, to make an impact on their societies.

A prominent example, coincidentally, was one who oversaw the proceedings of the SIMC and ISSF: Professor Imre Leader of the United Kingdom. He had been a former contestant at the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO), nearly 3 decades ago. As he shared about his past IMO days as a teenager in interviews, it became apparent just how much the IMO had shaped him. He had been a devoted trainer of the UK IMO team since 1999, and plays an even more active role in revamping mathematics education. Needless to say, the short days his teenage self spent in the IMO of 1981 set him on a path, fuelling his drive to make a change in his own country. This is precisely what the youth can accomplish, given the right prompt from international competitions.

Sir Isaac Newton, a man of great scientific and philosophical fame, once mused that society progresses when we stand on the shoulders of giants. But those shoulders we need today might just belong to the youth of tomorrow. What better way to buff them up to take on this responsibility, by letting international competitions mould them into the very pioneers and achievers they need to be?

Colours That Blind

Orchid Park Secondary School, Singapore
Sandali Siyara

“If I could change one thing about myself, I would change the colour of my skin. I would change it to a colour that brings no discrimination nor makes me feel inferior to my friends.” Since I was a child, I have found it unfair how I was not blessed with the colour of their skin. As a child, I used to wonder what it is that I did so wrong that I was marked this way since birth. I used to be called name and laughed at when I tried to fit in with the fairer kids in school. I used to cry when such insults came bowling at me. As I grew up, I learnt to take a stand for myself. When I came to learn of the injustice done to black people in the U.S. I started to ponder on whether a world without racism could ever exist.

Quoting Alveda King, “Racism springs from the lie that certain human beings are less than fully human. It’s a self-centred falsehood that corrupts our minds into believing we are right to treat others as we would not want to be treated.” No one is born a racist and ignorance and cowardice turns a person into one. When people get frustrated or annoyed with someone of a different race, it becomes easy for them to pick on his or her skin colour instead of dealing with the real problem. Take into account the number of unjustified black deaths caused by white cops in the U.S. At least 102 unarmed black people were killed in 2105, nearly two each week. 37% of the people killed in the U.S. were unarmed blacks, despite black people being only 13% of the U.S. population. Most of the time, these black deaths were caused by people who believed that they were only protecting themselves from the ‘danger’ of a black man. Recently, a black man, Keith Childress, was shot dead in Las Vegas by a white cop just because he was known to be holding an ‘unknown object’. No officers were charged for killing this man. Bettie Jones, a black woman was “accidentally” shot in the neck by the Chicago police while trying to help a neighbour deal with the domestic disturbance. No officers were charged with a crime for Bettie’s death. It brings me great sadness to view the world in the state it is in now. It is highly unjust how the white race is seen as superior to the blacks and it is disturbing to know that the once colour-blind world that I once lived in exists now only in my childhood memories.

Some people succumb to racism because of social norms. For example, a child can be taught to never interact with children of a certain race just because a person of his race was known to be “bad influence” or is “inappropriate”. Such stereotypical minds have blinded children who go to school to learn to distinguish the right from wrong. Many people in the world today have accepted the theory that having a darker skin colour is something to be ashamed of. I am completely against this ludicrous theory. Every life should matter as much as our own. Every race and religion should stand side by side. Every man and woman, black or white should be given the right to lead a life without the fear of discrimination in an unbiased society.

The roots of racism can be traced back centuries ago but even until today, racism still exists among us. Despite the many laws that have been implemented to protect each one of us from racial discrimination, racism still prevails. The minds of many people have become so corroded with anger and hatred towards one another that they fail to see that they are all human in the end. People are too busy noticing the difference in their skin colours that they do not realise that the black men and women are human, just like them. The black men and women deserve equality and respect, just like everyone else. It is not fair nor just to kill a man just because he is black or accuse a black man of committing a crime simply based on partial judgements.

It is time to stop the hatred and distrust. It is time to break down the walls that make one race superior to another. Instead of building walls, build bridges to integrate and reconnect to form one human race. It is time to stop for a moment and think before pulling the trigger to cause the irreversible, unreasonable and unjust deaths of the black people. Racism is an act of ignorance and cowardice. Racism is nothing but a mere social construct by insecure people who wants and needs to feel superior. It is blatant ignorance as the truth is that there is and can only be one race in this world, the human race. Let us work together, hand in hand, pull past and leave behind the colours that blind.

The Drug of Life

Singapore Chinese Girls' School (Secondary)

Elizabeth Teo Min, Nicola Tan Ye Ping, Samantha See Yong Ying

It starts small, with the effects subtle - fascinated toddlers blowing bubbles into its wonder. The addiction then builds as the youth blossoms and falls, prey to the lines separating cyberspace and reality, blurring into the mess no longer decipherable from the truth. In the development of this alternate reality, also known as the Internet, adrenaline making up for where ecstasy lacks, and the impressionable youth allows this novelty to consume them. There is nowhere the lights will not take them, nothing the sounds cannot tell them that they want to hear. In a world where youths are constantly cornered by white walls and societal customs, the average teenager hits the new drug for relief. 74% of U.S. teens are regular abusers. And it spreads.

The drug?

Street Name: Internet.

Where virtual solidarity comes into play like the perfect recipe for disaster, the connotations and implications of a wealth of something that has no choice but to imbalance the delicate scale of pride and gullibility in a classic teenager will more often than not be less than savoury. To all global youth, the Internet is no stranger. No one will deny that the Internet is beneficial to all; it was after all crafted for that very purpose. No one can deny the ill effects either, however - in fact, the controversiality of this very topic has been harped on for nearly as long as the existence of the Internet itself.

When a youth, the product of society, open-minded and eager to find the meaning of life, is exposed to the rich profusion of information, opinions, ideas, that the world, whisked together like sugared cyanide by the Internet, the mind is naturally confused at first, but must, of course, eventually acclimatise to it. Without the experience or grounding required to receive this new information properly, a distortion of perspective and interpretation is immediately introduced. Young, tender, and developing, the teenager's mind is immediately susceptible to new ideas, and desensitized to old. With the new trend of romanticizing radicalism, extremism, and even violence, the youth receiving this on a global scale begin to pave their lives with this very influence. This results in - cue dramatic music, please - terrible repercussions.

With the rapid development of the internet, coupled with social media, the fusion of diverse cultures and practices in places teens never knew existed before have now been revealed as endless information barrelling forward, trying to make an impact on them. When the youth take in all these different dogmas and philosophies pertaining to the violence-strewn world, the lure of these new beliefs leads to the genesis of a new age of a different ideology. A wave of social media and

technology ceaselessly sweeps the world and its people, off their feet and into a whirlwind of chaos and conflict, where youths are unspared and in fact standing in the eye of this hurricane of information and doctrines. Hungry eyes take in words that are shared by different people in different parts of the world, diluting their culture and weakening their heritage.

The tantalizing pull of knowledge subtly drains youths of their own identity, creating in its place, a conflicted blend of culture and mindset that was formed by others around them. And youths, often being young and inexperienced to the world, are easy targets for those seeking to radicalise other individuals. They are vulnerable and susceptible to the empty promises and seemingly judicious words that seep out from the electronic platform of the internet and into their mind. These have easily aided in the rise of extremism and radical groups like ISIS. Phases like these could be said to be the prime of their lives and the brink of their decay. As youths fall victim to these radical influences, they are able to do the greatest things, the most impactful things to our society, be it good or bad. But because of their choices, there is no other pathway but downhill from the peak for these youths who have opened up their minds too much to the influences around them. On a less extreme scale, escalating crimes relating to racial and religious violence would also lead to the new issue of teen/youth violence. With the increasing levels of violence all around the world today, youths are exposed to unorthodox sentiments that are publically shared via the use of the Internet, a common friend to all youths nowadays.

Doused in this technological narcotic, the new generation of global youth cannot help but be drawn into the wealth of information and knowledge that could not have previously been in any way available until just a few decades ago. The light of knowledge has no doubt brought upon a wave of enlightenment, and yet such overexposure without careful and deliberate treatment is fatal in the long run - with the tender, naive minds of youths easily accepting new values and doctrines that cease to do anything but harm them. The dilution of culture and radicalism is bonded tightly to their minds as they try to find their place in this world, like a cancer stemming from knowledge without understanding, a sickness blooming in the light of controversial advertisement. Because even if the drug doesn't kill you, the cold turkey will.

Antisocial Networks, Their Effects on Humanity

Southville International School and Colleges

Akisha Julianne Cu

Nowadays, people are looking at the world through screens: beautiful sceneries edited with filters, breathtaking moments captured through a camera, and memories turned into bios or statuses. The line between what is real and what is conjured by imagination is blurred because the internet is changing the way we act and live. Society is entering the period of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and everyone is connected to the internet. As of 2016, 46.1% of the population is connected to the internet and by 2020, it is expected that the first implantable phone will be sold. There are numerous aspects of the internet that encompass negativity towards certain entities in society, but one of the most problematic platforms is social media.

In October 2015, CNN released a study entitled, “#Being13: Inside the Secret World of Teens,” that elucidated how the lives of teenagers are in this day and age. Over 200 eighth graders participated in this study, allowing CNN and child development experts to analyze their Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts from September 2014 to April 2015. Accumulated over a six-month period, CNN received approximately 150,000 posts to examine. Gia, a participant, had stated, “I would rather not eat for a week than get my phone taken away. It’s really bad. I literally feel like I’m going to die.” Zack, another participant, had said, “I want to see what they’re talking about and if they’re talking about me. Because if they’re talking about me, I’m going to talk about them.” Marion Underwood –a child clinical psychologist and the study’s co-writer– talked about the addiction to peer connection and affirmation that they are able to obtain through social media.

Undoubtedly, the media is known for its effective communication and its crucial role in expanding social connections. Social media broadens horizons of the dissemination of world news, therefore enabling the youth to be in touch with the world. Furthermore, it has unlocked all barriers of communication throughout the entire world. Ergo, it is deemed to be an effortless act of making friends when such is achieved through the use of social media. Instructors are able to talk to their students through the use of social media and students have accessibility to online sources for educational purposes. Granted that the sui generis flow of ideas is expressed through the media, teens use social media as a foundation of an open society; nevertheless, the dangers present in social media should not be disregarded. With regards to acquiring the latest news and information, people depend heavily on the media. However, the youth foregoes honest-to-goodness confabulation with others. As technology advances to a quantum leap, increasing the number of people who now rely on their smartphones, more people tend to visit social media sites. Just over half (55%) of 1,700 people with children aged 11 to 17 strongly agreed that social media hinders or undermines moral development (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

at Birmingham University). Although the media helps in fabricating a positive platform of understanding between the current generation, there are negative impacts with regards to personal and social skills. With the media covering all that there is to know about ‘interaction’, teenagers spend less time conversing with their peers and family members and more time looking through a screen. Consequently, it creates a lack of authentic emotional and physical connection. Contrary to popular belief, not everything on the media is true. The media has the ability to make or break relationships with a single tweet, like, or status update as conversing online has become so uncomplicated as it only takes seconds to post or share a picture or update that depicts detrimental information of a person. The number of likes and followers an individual possesses has become the ne plus ultra of society’s expectations on popularity that social media affects the mentality of not only teens but also children. People spend a substantial amount of time on social media websites that there is interference in their daily lives. It serves as a distraction, thwarting students from focusing on their academics. Consequently, causing an addiction among teens wherein perpetually checking their phones becomes a quotidian routine. Concealed behind a screen, teenagers are given the authorization to be hurtful towards others online. The assurance of anonymity online ensures the probability of never getting caught. Thus, rampant cyberbullying is prevalent among teens all over the world. The matter of cyberbullying has left parents questioning the safety and privacy of social media and the negative impacts it could have on their children. Moreover, it eventuated in innumerable suicides among the youth of today. Unequivocally, another setback created in this so-called advanced technological world of the global youth.

Excessive dependence on social networking may stunt the development of social skills and interpersonal relationships. Whether or not computers are used to augment a child’s social development heavily depends on what they use it for. Though the usefulness of social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter have made these concerns largely irrelevant, children must be accorded the guidance to make sure they utilize technology in a positive direction. Creating cognizance about the impacts of social media and implicating discipline among the youth of today aids in the assurance of a better and brighter future. The fact that negativity will always exist through social media is inevitable, but it is the manner of reacting to negativity that creates a difference between a brilliant open society and a misanthropic community.

United Against Climate Change

St Luke's Grammer School Sydney

Claudia Hayman

Time and time again, as I reach to put a plastic container into the bin, my dad utters the words, “Put it in recycling! It’s the world you are going to live in that you are ruining!” As I put the container in the correct bin, it dawns on me that all of these terrifying facts and figures you hear about global warming and its consequences are going to happen in my generation’s lifetime. We are the ones who are going to live to see the consequences. We are the ones who have to take the responsibility. And I’m talking on a global scale. This problem is going to affect all of us, one might say that the issue unifies us. Therefore, we must use that to face the issue together as a global youth.

The issues associated with climate change that we are going to have to face are going to be harsh and diverse. The UNHCR has predicted that it could cause the displacement of 250 million people by 2050. If we continue at the rate we are using our resources, by 2030 we will be using 2 times the amount of resources the earth is producing annually. Global flooding could triple by 2030. If we continue the way we are heading, the world will warm by 6 degrees in this century. This will lead to crippling heat waves and multi-decade droughts, sea-level rise resulting in coastal flooding, widespread food shortages, species extinction, torrential downpours, pest outbreaks, economic damage and exacerbated civil conflicts and poverty, all in our lifetime. If that spiel doesn’t make you want to put the right container in the right bin, I don’t know what will.

So, what are we, as the international community of youth about to face this terrifying century of turmoil on our precious earth, doing about it? Well, you would be glad to know a few people who have taken the initiative. Over 10,000 youth have already taken part in the Climate Change Challenge badge developed by FAO, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the Youth and United Nations Global Alliance. Since 2004, there are annual United Nations Environment Program Tunza international conferences intended to unite youth globally to discuss a large variety of climate change issues including green economy and jobs. YOUNGO is a group of youth activists that are contributing to shaping intergovernmental climate change policies. These are real people having a real influence on environmental and climate change issues. This shows the power we have, as an environmentally focused united global youth. We can turn this situation around. The battle is not lost yet.

What are us who are not yet (although hopefully eager to be) involved in saving our planet to do?

What are us who are not yet (although hopefully eager to be) involved in saving our planet to do? Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations gave some helpful pointers when he stated ‘They (youth) are adaptable and can quickly make low-carbon life styles and career choices a part of their daily lives. Youth should therefore be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national and global levels. They can actively support initiatives that will lead to the passage of far reaching legislation. We should take Mr. Ban’s words seriously and keep our future on this earth in mind in our everyday decisions. We need to use our talents and circumstances, whatever they may be, to contribute to protecting our environment. Joining one of the aforementioned groups might sound appealing or perhaps looking into a career as a climate scientist. Or maybe just being involved in everyday decisions, turning off the lights when we go out, or not)wasting leftovers. What may seem like a small, insignificant decision really makes a difference. For instance, the carbon footprint of food produced and not consumed is 3.3 Gigatons of CO₂ equivalent. How we, as this new generation live our lives is vital to reducing the impact of climate change.

We live in a critical stage of history. What happens now to our earth is irreversible and will have dire consequences for many generations to come. It is our place, as part of the global community, to unite as youth and take swift action to prevent going down the dark path we are headed. It is our responsibility to protect this generation and the youth of the future. Together, united, we shall take down climate change.



**Shortlist of entrants
Universities**

Through The Eyes of Our Youths

Nanyang Technological University

Daryl Goh

The term “strawberry generation” originated in Taiwan. It is a term used to contrast the pampered and fragile generation to their hardy predecessors. In some countries, this may be true; in many others, being young is not equivalent to having a life free of woes. The world is full with atrocities that, unless you have lived it, you probably would not know about it. Taking a look in the lives of youths around the world, you will find that there are still many issues that continue to plague the new generation of youths.

In Ghana, a sluggish 22-year-old man breathes in the thick smog at a dump site filled with dead computers and other electronics. At Agbogbloshie, Accra, this is where he and many young men his age consider their workplace. His day consists of digging through tons of scrap, burning wires for copper, and scavenging for any other sellable materials. The women and children are also there to prepare food and water for the day, but none of them would touch the nearby river that has been laced with heavy metals and chemicals. Your first thoughts might be to blame developed nations for shipping their junk electronics, but most of the waste comes from Africa within. Tons of imitation phones, from Nigeria and other neighboring countries, get dumped at what used to be a wetland. While proper recycling methods for these wastes are available, in a country where it is hard to even afford daily necessities, raising the required capital is next to impossible. Even with foreign efforts to fight the E-waste crisis, it will take years to restore decades of pollution caused by burning plastic and toxic chemicals that has seeped into the land. There may come a day that these men no longer have to subject themselves to such working conditions. However, the damage to the health of these young men will likely linger on for the rest of their lives.

In Singapore, a demure 16-year-old lesbian finds herself hiding her deepest desire, one she has been keeping for five years. She goes on with her day pretending to be someone she is not, but she knows very few will truly understand how she really feels. Be it to fit in with friends, to avoid disgracing her family, or to avoid being treated as a mentally ill patient, being LGBT is something she lives with in secrecy. In a country that refuses to acknowledge the existence of the LGBT community, it is not easy finding love or to even speak up about the discrimination that very much persists. Despite being one of the most developed nations, public display of homosexual behaviors in Singapore carries imprisonment of up to two years. In some Islamic countries, those convicted for homosexual activities face being stoned to death by their own neighbors. Murder seems to be the fate of LGBT in many other countries, even America. Given all the faults in Singapore's society, it is still a safer place for LGBT than many countries. All she hopes for is to be respected for who she is born as, even if it is against society's beliefs. A life of fighting for the right to

love and be loved is a struggle, but she hopes that the stigma her people face will one day go away.

In Cambodia, an innocent Cambodian girl prepares herself for her very first client. At the tender age of 18, burdened with siblings to support, becoming a sex worker is the best way for a her to feed her family. Girls tricked by the promises made by immoral human traffickers contribute to the population, but like her, many of these girls choose to enter the sex trade. Despite the risk of physical abuse, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases, being able to sell your body is considered lucky. For many unfortunate other girls with no skills or formal education, their only option is toiling in sweatshops, where the working conditions and pay are shockingly worse. She might be highly prized for her virginity now, but she will soon find her value drastically dropping through the years she remains in the trade. With no proper training offered to her and her peers, many remain because they have nowhere else to go. Growing up in such a society, her future daughters will likely end up in the industry. The vicious cycle is what feeds the sex trade of many countries, including India and Philippines.

As youths, we are often oblivious to the lives of others out there. Basic human rights are still being violated; poverty, abuse, and murder exist and are very much widespread. Everyone leads different lives; everyone has their own struggles. Perhaps what we all have in common is the fact that we do not fully know the struggles of others. The grass may be greener on the other side, but a lot of today's youths still lack the resources necessary to cross over. We must open our eyes to the sufferings of others to be globally literate. Only through understanding the wrongs in the world, can we take action, regardless of how small, to better our world. Youths need to learn that growing up is more than learning to be responsible; it is contributing to the community, speaking up for those who need a voice.

Let Us Brave Through the Storm

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Ong Mabel

“It’s just rain,” my Brazilian roommate exclaimed after awakening and learning that classes were cancelled for the day.

“You just take an umbrella and go outside,” she said in mild bewilderment, palms in the air.

I looked outside; grey clouds loomed gloomily over buildings across the street and raindrops were drumming noisily on our window panes intermittently. The streets were flooded and it was the record rainfall for the region. In tropical Brazil, she explained, it rains so heavily and frequently that it was no reason to even be late for class. On the other hand, many of my classmates thought the weather was too inclement to be outside. I was simply too glad to be able to stay indoors to consider the prospect of braving the storm. Clearly, there were discrepancies on how we react to the same weather.

I am a business student from Singapore, currently enrolled in a summer school in Nankai University in Tianjin, China, where undergraduates from different countries are gathered for a liberal arts curriculum. As we gradually learn to understand each other and our differences, I discovered some fundamental issues young Singaporeans face that prevent us from becoming engaged global citizens – something that, given our resources and opportunities, we can be. It seems to me that our sense of isolation from the world and the confusion we have with ourselves, coupled with the inability to express ourselves well, present themselves as a huge stumbling rock that we must break down before we can make our way there.

Singapore is a small island in Southeast Asia. Our survivability depends on maintaining good relations with powerful countries, while remaining neutral in our diplomacy. Growing up in a multicultural environment allows us to develop tolerance and appreciation towards differences such as skin color, religion and race. Our bilingual education provides us with the foundation to understand the nuances of different cultures. Following this checklist, we should be able to contribute to international discussions and participate in solving global problems. Unfortunately, growing up in a diverse environment and being well-educated does not equip us with the necessary qualities.

Funnily enough, the issues preventing us from becoming global citizens stem from the fact that we grow up in a stable, well-ordered society – detached from the struggles plaguing many countries. Many of us lack the emotional capacity to connect with the struggles of others, for we have been rather comfortable living in our own island. We are lucky to be able to walk on the streets at night, work in state-of-the-art infrastructures and live harmoniously. This comfortable but isolated environment has made us living things devoid of a fuller range of emotions, which includes the ability to empathize meaningfully, particularly with those who have witnessed or experienced suffering on a level so pervasive

that we can only struggle to imagine. So long as this wave of indifference and apathy persists, we will always be seen as passing acquaintances, not understanding friends; skillful employees, not sympathetic colleagues.

Young Singaporeans are a confused bunch. We live in a conservative society, but one that is highly influenced by western liberal ideas. We are exposed to a plethora of ideologies, but aren’t pressed to choose and commit to one. This culminates in an ambiguity of our values system. Put us in a global setting, where people vehemently voice their opinions on freedom of speech and environmentalism, and watch us stumble for words. Many of us find it hard to make unshakeable commitments when our values go undeveloped and unexplored.

Living in a diverse society meant that we are well-adept at switching between languages, but sometimes, this also mean that we are not particularly adept at any one of them. When articulation matters as much as the value of ideas, many of us will increasingly find our voices drowned out in the international arena. Hence, while the issue lies in being detached and confused, our inability to express ourselves makes it more difficult to relate to others and commit to a cause. Far from being contributive and active global citizens, we are actually much further away from that ideal than we thought.

The silver lining is that these problems are internal in nature, which means that we hold the capacity to overcome them ourselves. To do that, young Singaporeans need to engage in a type of hard work that is uncomfortable; we need to actively inundate ourselves in foreign cultures, we need to think deeper to find a voice that can strike a chord with others, and we need to work on our languages even when it’s an arduous task. Above all, we need to persist with a spirit our ancestors had harbored when they sailed the seas to find a living for themselves, a fighting spirit that has been lost amidst our rapid modernization.

Three weeks into this international summer school, I have a better understanding of where we, young Singaporeans, stand in this world. Comfort shouldn’t be a shameful achievement, but it shouldn’t rob us from the ability to empathize to the realities happening elsewhere and the will to work hard to improve ourselves. This rock in front of us may seem intimidating, but it is also a vulnerable object waiting for us to break it down. When it is finally shattered, give us some time to find our place, let us brave through the storm outside the island, then watch us blossom.

Working at Dunkin’ Donuts With a University Degree - This Is How the New Generation Will Come of Age

Nanyang Technological University

Rachel Chia

There are many epithets coined to describe today’s youth. Generation Y. Generation Me. In Asia, disgruntled adults have invented a new moniker to express their disapproval in the face of soaring youth unemployment: the Strawberry Generation, a term first coined by Taiwanese but quickly snapped up across Asia to describe her delicate, mollicoddled teenagers, who demand instant gratification but have failed to weather the hardships of working life.

According to data from the World Bank, youth unemployment has steadily risen over the past decade, hovering at 14% in 2014. That’s 30 million extra jobless young people than there were a decade ago. Even heavyweight economies in Asia - the world’s fastest growing region - are not exempt: China, Singapore, Vietnam and both Koreas are all hit with rising figures. Another report by the National Bureau of Economic Research in America revealed that the unemployment rate among 16 to 24 year olds was triple the rate faced by those 35 and above.

Complaints of softening youth resound worldwide. Critics claim that today’s teenagers are spoiled and jobless despite the career opportunities afforded them by rapid globalisation. Mainly, they were passed over in favour of older workers for their lack of experience, but unrealistic duty and salary expectations were also factors that turned employers away - and could it be their tendency to job hop or refuse menial tasks that led to high frictional unemployment?

Not so. The entire economy was suffering too - in 2012, the Pew Research Center found that global youth unemployment hit a 30-year record high, and last year, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reported that almost half of Africa’s youth had no jobs, as did Greece’s, Spain’s and Italy’s. That same summer, the U.S Bureau of Labour said that within two months, the number of employed American youth had increased by 2.1 million. Especially affected were young people from minorities or disadvantaged backgrounds, who faced soaring levels of long-term unemployment. For youth in war torn or conflict-ridden countries, the outlook was, of course, the worst.

This year, the International Monetary Fund anticipated a continued fall in jobs due to including political discord, terrorism, refugee flows and social unrest, especially in emerging markets. The International Labour Organisation predicted that next year, global unemployment levels are set reach 200 million for the first time in history. Globally, youth are set to plunge straight from pimply puberty into the growing maw of unemployment; it becomes less likely that young people are picky about jobs, because there are hardly any jobs for them to pick from.

To top it off, intense global competition levels effected a new basic currency in the job market - the college degree. As world education levels rise, more youth than ever hold degrees

- leading to a graduate glut and proportionately increasing underemployment. Academic stress was the leading cause of global suicide rates among young people aged 15-19 rising steadily in the past decade. Asian countries like Japan, India and South Korea were particularly hard-hit, experiencing record highs within the last five years. Youths’ professional prospects are further threatened by rapid technological innovation, which could render 70% of jobs and 60% of careers obsolete within another decade.

It is enough to make anyone despair.

Of course, this does not mean the Strawberry label has completely no merit. With an education system criticised for overpromising bright futures, many newly minted graduates have displayed ghastly levels of entitlement during interviews, which cost them jobs. But the term somehow seems more appropriate to describe a teenage phase than the mindsets of an entire generation: to be a Strawberry with a large and easily bruised ego at work is unsustainable in today’s economy. Save for a privileged few who can continue living off their parents’ dollar, a great majority of youth want to secure meaningful work, buy houses and start families (in other words, get on with adulthood) and are pragmatic enough to adjust their demands to match market realities. In fact, some are so desperate for working experience or a full-time offer that the popularity of unpaid internships have swelled in recent years.

But this is temporary. When markets recover, youth may feel emboldened to raise their expectations of jobs again. But consider that new working circumstances brought about by globalisation and technology may render Strawberries’ desired working conditions - flexible hours, mentorship, an innovative environment, international opportunities, diverse roles and most daunting for employers, work-life balance - an accurate reflection of the global workplace and its participants’ fresh demands.

Just like how vigorous campaigns beginning from the 1800s gave rise to the market’s beloved 5-day work week and 9-to-5 work day, so might Strawberries’ expectations pave the way for better working situations for future generations. So far, sociologists have noted their multi-tasking skills, inventiveness, and tech-savvy as suitable talents for the new work model, as well as their dedication towards social issues and cultural diversity as a movement toward greater social consciousness.

This is how the new generation will come of age: endeavoring to construct a satisfying career on the shaky ground of a hyper-connected world economy. If history is any indicator, they will not only survive it, but also improve it, like generations before.

But for now, the Strawberry Generation is still in a jam.

Going Beyond Your Passport Identity

Nanyang Technological University

Yan Shu Teng, Charlene

When I was a child, I mistakenly thought China was “backward” and that everyone who lived there reared chickens and cows for a living. I imagined it to be the opposite of Singapore, with high-rise housing and skyscrapers. However, this image was soon to change,

One day, both my parents came to my brother and I to announce we were moving to China. I had just turned 11 and still remember myself begging my Mom to let us stay. I didn’t want to move again as we had actually just returned back from the U.S three years before. However, my mom just replied coolly by saying she and my Dad had already come to this decision.

Over the next few weeks, fear crept into my mind about living away from the city and my friends. I awoke from nightmares of flying chickens and locusts outside my house. My mom tried to console me by saying that China was developing at a rapid pace but I just couldn’t believe her.

Soon, it was time for us to make the move. When I arrived, the images of farmhouses and plantations dissipated, and I saw an airport filled with grandeur, as it looked similar to the Singapore airport. After we collected our luggage, there was a driver holding a sign with my Dad’s name of it. He then drove us to our 20-story tall hotel building, and not a farmhouse that I was expecting. Over the next few years, I learnt that although China was a developing country, many aspects of it were as good as Singapore. Shanghai had large shopping malls, a developed subway network, and good education for international students. Before I knew it, I fell in love with Shanghai.

This was never an issue until we had to return to Singapore to visit our relatives. “Which country do you prefer”, asked my aunt. The end of the question was marked by silence, as I had never thought I would have to betray my country. It wasn’t that I hated Singapore; it was just that I had grown distant from it. All my cousins always complained about how they were stressed with upcoming national exams like the PSLE and O-levels, and it was the same with their parents. I disliked the vibe of competition and stress I got from Singapore. This led me to be even more contented with my life in Shanghai.

I was now no longer sure of my national identity. Going to an American school also meant that I had an accent. My cousins and friends would often tease me making me feel all the more un-Singaporean. I felt estranged from my own country. I had become a third culture kid (TCK). Eventually though, I had to go back to Singapore for university. It was time to assimilate back into Singapore’s melting pot of cultures and learn Singlish. I was afraid to go back but yet I felt obligated to, as Singapore was my passport country.

Growing up overseas, I experienced countless struggles in education and friendships, but I have to admit I learnt a lot about America and China in that seven year time period. I learnt the culture and politics of both countries in a unique

blend of Eastern and Western teachings. My school also taught us that education shouldn’t solely be academic-based students should be well rounded in sports and extracurricular too.

Looking back, if I had a choice between staying in Singapore and moving to Shanghai I would still choose the path to Shanghai; the path that taught me what it felt like to be a minority, what it felt like to live outside my comfort zone, and what it felt like to be open-minded about different cultures.

Currently, more children have to spend their developmental years outside of their parents’ passport culture, thus being named TCKs. Although they struggle through adolescence from confusion of national identity, they gain many valuable skills that others don’t. They can adapt to different cultures due to their nomadic lifestyle and are also more open to new ideas that others without a similar experience may find strange.

Adult TCKs are able to easier communicate with someone from a different culture as they were exposed to people of different backgrounds before.

In his article, “Third culture kids, future business expatriates”, Selmer (2003) discusses how evidence from his study shows that third culture kids will fare better as working expatriates (expats) because they can close the gap between demand for expat executives and supply. This is due to the fact that they were exposed to more cultural norms making it easier for them to conduct business transactions with others overseas.

Although a child growing up away from their country may struggle in their teenage years, who ever said going through trials in life was a bad thing? What a TCK gains in their developmental years is so valuable in our world that benefits far outweigh the costs. The world has reached a stage where your passport no longer dictates your nationality, but merely your birthplace.

The global youth now no longer has to be bound by a country’s borders but is able to venture out to other parts of the world to work and form a new identity of their own

The Age of Familiarity

National University of Singapore

Roy Lim Ruey

Almost a hundred years ago, world-acclaimed poet Robert Frost advocated taking the road less travelled in a rhythmic classic that left its mark in modern literature. But we will be having none of that, said youths of the 21st century.

Instead, adolescents are rebelliously embracing familiarity. From making the trivial decision of what to have for lunch at a popular Spanish restaurant to figuring out the answers to an essay-writing exam, we want only the tried-and-tested because they have been proven to work. Contrary to the defiant, prove-you-wrong image that adults have in their minds, many of us global youths today relish in adhering dutifully to former success stories, understanding them like they were imaginary instruction manuals, for they might represent our best chance to victory.

Our predecessors have been quick to label us a weak-willed generation that has been tamed by the many creature comforts found in urban societies. Our need for sure-fire methods, for dead-straight certainty in results – considered irresolute or even spineless – may have led us to a nadir in human history, they said. When we choose not to risk taking any chances, important qualities that are crucial to a society’s progress, notably innovation and efficiency, are lost.

But the idea of following in another’s footsteps is only unappealing because it has been vilified. Modern society has been hugely constructed and influenced by a group of phenomenal entrepreneurs; whenever these brilliant minds create, they change the way our world is run. Pokémon Go is only the latest novelty in an over-filled list of inventions that has altered the dynamics of human life, from social media platforms to wearable technology. It is within such context that innovation is glamorised, and familiarity frowned upon.

Mimicry is counterintuitively the cornerstone of creativity. Japanese goods are often known for their craft, but this adeptness is a result of Japan’s copying culture, not despite of it. Amateur Japanese craftsmen study their teachers’ methods rigorously, imitating them as closely as possible, and only when they have reached a high level of proficiency that they begin thinking about innovation. This makes a great deal of sense, because any critic who claims innovation is always the way to go forgets that thinking outside the box is a sizeably enormous task that can be difficult even for veterans. Hence, when greenhorns attempt to execute an advanced technique that requires a solid foundation to perform, usually the outcome is bad innovation – innovation that is poor, inadequate, or even worthless.

Successful paths are often travelled because they have been proven to work. Of course, we will have to modify these formulae as our surroundings change. Success can also never be replicated in its entirety, as that would be plagiarism, as that would be unoriginality. But some traits of success are universal, and some skills to make it big have to be carefully trained. What’s wrong with going the way the successful have gone then? I pray for the age of familiarity to last, for that will lead our generation to the heights our forebears have once scaled, and perhaps even beyond.

The Vitality of the Global Youth

Singapore Management University
Chim Sher Ting

When I was young, I used to wonder what it would be like to pursue academic exchanges in foreign lands – to tread on the cobblestone sidewalks of Paris, to cycle along cerulean canals in Brussels. Who would have thought that the fact that I was able to dream this dream was, in itself, a privilege? What was, for me, a natural progression in my path of education might become, for the generations after mine, an illusion of choice rendered obsolete by fear and paranoia. The rise in terrorist attacks by radicalised individuals and extremist groups has incited widespread panic and distress among the populace, who have scrambled to hold someone culpable, someone to vindicate the mass atrocities. In the turmoil, they have fallen back on well-worn stereotypes and internalised prejudice to manifest their hatred, be it through implicit discrimination or ostentatious acts of aggression. This has jeopardised not only the Muslim community but also, by extension, the immigrant population. It has also highlighted the pervasive notion of “outsiders”—the toxic ideological tension of “them” and “us”—that exists not just in the Western world but elsewhere as well.

Yet, the irony lies therein. Even amidst a burgeoning reluctance for overseas travel, one of the greatest keys to curtailing xenophobic sentiments would be a global community. The prophylactic to targeted hostility and violence would be a community that embraces other cultures and that has had meaningful interactions and forged strong ties with other communities. In travelling to other countries to immerse themselves in the culture, they would better understand the local people and their beliefs and allow locals to learn from theirs. Alternatively, extensive interaction with individuals of other nationalities, even in their home country, will open their eyes to realities besides their own. Youth, being the future generations of a country, are well-poised to take up the mantle and epitomise the idea of a “global youth”.

These global youth are the bulwark against bigotry and intolerance. Intolerance stems from ignorance and a lack of understanding of other communities. To be global in our interaction and communication is a form of education in itself – a self-enlightenment on culture, beliefs and lifestyles. Such education is the antidote to ignorance – global youth are less likely to be swayed by incendiary sentiments and impassioned rhetoric if they have learnt to view things from the perspective of the oppressed and marginalised. The campaign of Donald Trump denouncing Mexican immigrants as rapists, calling for a wall to be built on the US-Mexican border and supporting the deportation of illegal immigrants would have little influence on a youth who roundly condemns white supremacy, recognises the contributions of immigrants and understands that collective racial socio-economic advancement is not a zero sum proposition. The words of Marine Le Pen demanding an end to both legal and illegal immigration and

a ban on Islamist organisations would have little impact on a youth who understands that Islamic fundamentalists are only a minority and are far from representative of the views of the Muslim population. These campaigns are populist in nature, hence a pushback from the youth could prevent them from further gaining traction and setting in motion a vicious cycle of violence that only plays into the narrative of extremist groups as a tool for radicalisation.

Global youth contribute to cultural acceptance, promoting integration of other cultures. By interacting with a myriad of communities, beyond textbook exposition and media accounts, youth would have their minds opened to differences. They help to re-write the definition of cultural acceptance from one of assimilation into one which embraces diversity. Deeper interaction in Singapore, initiated by youth groups, has turned the tide of xenophobic sentiments plaguing the foreign worker population, largely comprising individuals from mainland China and India, which only earlier had deepened fissures in the pluralistic society and undermined the textbook narrative on multiculturalism. Conversation offered a humanising counter-narrative to racial stereotyping by shedding light on their economic depravity, harsh working conditions and, above all, their hurt at being branded as outsiders despite many having worked here for several years. In homogeneous societies—such as Japan and Korea—that uphold ideals of racial purity, it is ever more essential that avenues for engagement are implemented to combat xenophobia.

In a world of belligerence and misdirected vengeance, global youth are paramount in driving a paradigm shift to keep up with the rapidly evolving socio-political landscape. Even amidst rampant hate-mongering and fears of safety, one can never underestimate the value that global interactions and experiences have on individuals and whole communities. In your interactions, you will find that there is a common link of universal brotherhood that holds all of us together, an unbreakable bond that extends beyond race, creed and tongue. Thus, it may require stepping out of your comfort zone and leaving behind preconceived notions. However, on unfamiliar terrain, you will find that, to be an architect of dreams, you must first build bridges.

Global Youth For Global Change

Singapore Management University

Nicole Jo-Anne Varella

As the world spins on its axis, a girl walking alone on the street pulls her jacket tight. A boy worries that the colour of his skin will invite bullets from the same men he trusts to protect his home. A girl becomes a mother at thirteen for a few sacks of grain. As the world spins on its axis, a boy picks up a gun.

Our world is a scary place. Under the shadow of terrorism, political uncertainty, human rights atrocities, and a worsening environment, it is difficult for the young to be optimistic about what we have inherited. And yet, we are. The youth of today both have and hold tremendous hope for a troubled world. We are a global youth, who are not just aware and informed, but who also feel deeply for each other and are aching to help.

Today's youth possess a global spirit borne of globalisation and technological change. We are a generation that grew bigger as electronics grew smaller, that in ten years went from swapping Pokémon cards to catching the monsters on our smartphones in (almost) real-life. Technological advances have come hand-in-hand with an increased interconnectedness with the rest of the world. Unlike our parents, we need not hop on a plane or otherwise rely on the nightly news for a glimpse into foreign communities. We scroll through media sites, devouring events taking place in the White House down to a rural village in Kenya. The Internet has become our key to unlocking the globe with all of its treasures and challenges.

The youth of today are also global in a more traditional sense – we are avid travellers. More affordable flights coupled with the growth of emerging economies have allowed more young people to travel than ever before. We have been grabbing these opportunities by the wings. Reports by the WYSE Travel Confederation and the World Tourism Organisation estimate the size of the global youth travel market as 23% of all international tourist arrivals. Not only are we travelling more, we're also travelling with a purpose. Whether by volunteering in Cambodia, staying at a monastery in Tibet, or interning in New York, young travellers are seeking out international experiences. Unlike traditional vacations, the youth are more focused on learning from and/or improving the community, leading to a rise in demand for extended backpacking trips, global internships, and exchange programs abroad. By trying to adopt each new destination as a home and understand its heartbeat, the youth are quite literally becoming global citizens.

It is still a matter of debate, however, as to whether the overseas efforts of our global youth are as meaningful as we hope. The giddy images on social media tell one side of the story, but there are dark sides to the well-meaning ‘voluntourism’ projects many pursue. Although it is heartening that young people are trying to use their privilege to make a difference, it is important to take a step further to ensure that these efforts do not go to waste. For one, we must thoroughly research the organisations we support, to confirm that their head and heart are in the

right place. Many popular beneficiaries such as orphanages are run as scams, with volunteers' funds doing nothing to enrich its children in the long-term. It is also important for young volunteers to remain focused on the purpose of their helping, and question themselves if their efforts are truly making a substantial impact on the community, or are just making themselves feel good.

Despite these hiccups, there is still much to remain hopeful for, due to one simple fact – our global youth are largely a youth that cares. Some may chastise our idealism, but it is this same idealism that allows us to look beyond what is, and imagine what could be. The cynic would have never thought it possible to print functioning organs for transplant, or affordable space travel, but these gargantuan dreams are already a reality, or steadily becoming one each day. Already, young change makers like 23-year-old Luis Cruz, creator of the Eyeboard, an eye-controlled software for the disabled, and 24-year-old Kendall Ciesemier, founder of Kids Caring 4 Kids, a non-profit that helps needy children in Africa, are daring to dream as big as the visionaries before them, and are making an impact that reaches far beyond their neighbourhood and nation.

Indeed, it is our time and place to care deeply. The youth of today must remind ourselves that it is our time to be heard, and together, our voices can echo around the world to champion issues that matter.

As the world spins on its axis, young people everywhere are paving the way for change.

Youth Without Quality Education – a Great Waste; a Great Threat

Singapore Management University

Rex Lee Jia Hor, Averill Chow Mingni

She stood before her new husband in a stunning white wedding dress. Her make up was immaculate; she was practically dripping with pearls. But she pulled away when he tried to kiss her cheek.

Yasmine Koenig was 15 when her mother ripped her from her life as an ordinary United States (US) citizen to get married in Palestine. Yasmine is not alone. Each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18. In the 6 seconds you have taken to read this, 3 girls have been made child brides.

Child brides often leave school prematurely, without the requisite skills needed to find gainful employment to free their families from the vicious cycle of poverty. Nevertheless, child marriage and poverty are not the only problems confronting youth around the world. Unemployment, radicalisation by terrorists, and life threatening diseases are stumbling stones in the pathway of the youth to a better future.

In May 2015, the United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported that there are 1.2 billion youth aged 15 to 24 worldwide, accounting for 1 out of every 6 people on Earth. A different UN report stated that “[n]ever again is there likely to be such potential for economic and social progress”, but also warned that unless youth can secure access to healthcare, education, and jobs, they could be a destabilising force. A failure by the world to harness and unleash the potential of global youth for good would be a great waste, and a great threat.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that youth aged 15 to 24 accounted for 40% of all new Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infections among adults worldwide in 2011. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Director-General of the WHO, supported the view that education can curb the spread of HIV. 2015 saw several teenagers around the world radicalised to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). While David Phillips, former senior adviser on Iraq to the US State Department opined that radicalised teens “didn’t receive education or opportunity where they came from – they feel becoming a jihadi offers them an opportunity that didn’t exist back in the slums or villages from which they originate,” material gratification is not the only factor drawing youth to terrorism. The world was shocked when 3 high-achieving 15-year-old schoolgirls fled their privileged homes in London to join ISIS. Basic education and material fulfillment are necessary but not sufficient to exercise the full potential of global youth for good. What we need is universal education that equips youth with not only the good old-fashioned basic three “Rs” of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, but also equips them with critical thinking skills, knowledge of current

affairs, and strong characters to withstand not just peer, but also familial pressure. Yasmine escaped her fate as a child bride by using critical thinking skills and technology to contact the US Embassy in Jerusalem. She also needed the courage to defy the will of her family. What made Yasmine different from all

the other child brides? Perhaps, her 8 years of formal education in the US.

Education is crucial to the betterment of the lives of global youth and has been prioritised in development goals such as the World Programme of Action for Youth and Millennium Development Goals. Education ensures that youth participate actively and effectively in social, economic and political development. Effective education enables the youth to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed for them to fulfill their potential as agents of progress. More attention has to be directed to universal access to quality education, human rights education, and health education, with a focus on equipping youth with employability skills.

One of Education for All’s (EFA) goals was to ensure that all children have access to free and complete primary school education of good quality by 2015. However, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011 indicated that increased numbers of children completing primary school does not necessarily mean that youth literacy has increased. Indeed, millions of primary school graduates have poor reading, writing and numeracy skills.

Instead, we should ensure that by 2025, all youth have access to secondary school education, with grants and subsidies for those who need it. Additionally, EFA may introduce a recommended primary and secondary school curriculum for specific subjects such as Science and Mathematics with flexibilities for each country to modify the syllabus to meet the needs of the country. An emphasis on critical thinking, general knowledge, and character building should be included in the curriculum.

Additionally, formal education alone cannot ensure that our youth have the essential skills to seek employment and drive global development. Governments can introduce more programmes to impart work-related skills to their youth and encourage more work institutions to train their workers. For example, the Singapore Workforce Development Agency organises regular subsidised courses to encourage Singaporeans to upgrade their knowledge and diversify their skills. Employers also enjoy a 400% tax deduction on expenditure incurred for employee training. This is one reason why Singapore’s youth unemployment rates are one of the lowest in the world (9.6% in 2014). Other countries can adopt Singapore’s approach to ensure youth employability.

Quality education, with an emphasis on employability, critical thinking, current affairs awareness, health and human rights education, is the key to unlocking the potential of youth for good. Without quality education, youth are easily misguided and driven to desperate circumstances. Destabilising results, such as crime, radicalism, and disease could arise. For the sake of ourselves and for the sake of our future, we need to translate the dream of quality education for all youth into reality. We need more Yasmine Koenigs, and fewer teenage ISIS sympathisers.

My Page-Turner

Singapore Management University

Tan Qi

Waking up, I gazed blearily at the snowy white ceiling of my immaculate room, studded with a dozen glow-in-the-dark stars; I had stuck them there as a young girl to remind me of my dreams, my aspirations, my fantasies... This morning, again, my heart felt cold, empty, and I knew I had them no more. No longer had I the desire to be among the few women to walk the moon, or a distinguished pianist, or a world-renowned doctor... I am eighteen going on nineteen – old enough to drink, go clubbing, even drive. I should know what I want with my life, I have to choose, yet I am on the verge of surrendering to the mundanity of life threatening to engulf me. In school, I excelled in sports and music, even more in academics, most would label me a ‘success’. Following this logic, I am right on track to eminence at work. But I am not satisfied: I am despaired by such prospect. I have sprinted down this walk of life without turning back, trusting that I have been on the right road. Is it my destiny (or fate) to obediently journey down the only path that seems open? Or have I been betrayed by the deceptively apparent path promising to lead me safely ahead for (at least) the next few miles?

Blinking my eyes several times, I forced resolution into them. *Today (I blink), today (I blink again), today (I blink thrice). Today is the day I place a kink in my life.* And so I searched, and so my expedition began, fuelled by directionless motivation.

Little did I know that ‘today’ was the day – the origin of a strange and magical life of healing, love and meaning, for me and for him, and for all of them.

A tech-savvy Singaporean, I searched the net for “meaningful things to do in life”. Instantaneously, I was overwhelmed with floods of suggestions from Google. The first result said to “find purpose in life”. Wow, helpful, I thought sardonically, and dismissed it with a certain air of contempt. As if only to serve my sarcasm, the next few suggestions seemed just as useless. It was high-time to quit, but just as I averted my eyes, I saw it: “Save them from Poverty, Hunger, Death”, and I knew that this was it – exactly what I was looking for. For the eighteen-year-old me, this endeavour, this idea of saving lives seemed too noble, too imperial, too heroic to pass up on. For sure this is the perfect pivot to reversing this dreadful, trivial life of mine. Not fully aware of any consequences, I committed myself to the project and to a gap year before attending an undergraduate course I was bound to, which I chose just because...

Regret. It was too hot, too tiring, too uncomfortable, too dirty, or should I just say incorrigibly filthy. Never once had it crossed my mind that anyone lived in such unfathomable conditions – they dared to offer me water from the well? I had stared incredulously at the wimpy, malnourished 12-year-old boy who, on my first day in the foreign land, offered me water with exotic seasoning comprising flies, ants and a range of other insects. Nonetheless, I switched on a smile and accepted the

warm welcome gift. The first few weeks there were torturous: with a mere few grains of rice (well, maybe a little more than a few grains), coupled with two to three strands of bland, roughly presented vegetables, my fellow volunteers and I were fast draining our store of instant noodles and dried food initially meant to last us the full ten weeks of service at the orphanage. I missed the “zi char” restaurant beside my house, the extravagant western restaurants to which I frequent with my loving and supportive parents, the proper sanitation and hygiene back home, the convenience of Wi-Fi...

I spent my days grudgingly teaching my forte, English, according to plans made back in Singapore. The language barrier between me and the children was like an unbreakable glass panel, and I never once understood, or tried to understand the children. Though remaining acutely aware of my growing misery and disgust for this unfamiliar land I had wanted to be a hero to, I fell into the rhythm of waking up early, conducting daily classes and in general taking care of the children and engaging in compulsory activities as dictated by the mission leaders. Akin to a lifeless soul, I did whatever was required of me, impeccably, but once again I had lost hope – the resolution that occupied my eyes a few months ago shattered, leaving behind a distant gaze. Finally, FINALLY, the day to return home arrived! But he ruined my joyful farewell, planting in me seeds of doubt and guilt:

He hugged me tight, and whispered into my ear: “Sank you, aiyer wanterbey laiik you wheenai gwonup. Buhyee.”, and despite the atrocious pronunciation (I guess I should have taught him better?), my ears heard what he said, and my heart felt it. Unbelieving at first, I questioned myself: what had I done for him? How did I appear to him that was so inspiring? Then, it struck me like a bolt of lightning that I had been living too selfishly, taking too many things for granted, viewing the world through only my own eyes... and I saw a new path forming ahead of me – one I had forged myself. He changed my perspective, and me. Ten years later, I am a contented world-renowned doctor, often heading service trips all over the world; he speaks unbelievably fluent English as an inspirational speaker.

This is the warm story of two youths who became each other’s page-turner: like a seemingly insignificant page-turner who paves the way for a cantabile performance, they subtly helped each other in their journey towards a new and magnificent chapter of their lives. This is the life of a girl, a fictitious girl similar to me in many aspects, based loosely on my mission trip to Myanmar a few years back. She has taught me much in the time I spent designing and writing this piece, and who will continue living on in me, and hopefully in you. Do you want to be someone else’s page-turn?

2016

The New York Times **“Word (World) of Yours”** **Writing Competition**

Thank You

We would like to give a special thanks to all the teachers, students and judges who took part in this year's competition. Without your great support, the competition would not have been such a success.

The judges:

Jim Hollander - Copy Editor

Joe Ritchie - Copy Editor

Mike Ives - Freelance Writer

Philip Traynor - Copy Editor

Rick Martinez - Copy Editor

Sarah Anderson - Senior Staff Editor

The New York Times

Appendix

Competition Instructions



Competition Instructions

CONTENT (/50)

This is the essential part of the essay. It must include the main and supporting ideas of the writer on the theme of this year’s contest. This part is worth 50 points because the two components cover the substance of the essay. The essay writer must have demonstrated preparation toward the goal stated.

MAIN IDEA(S) (25)

It is essential that the theme of the contest is clearly addressed. (A strongly stated and clearly understood thesis gets 20 or near 20 points.)

SUPPORTING IDEAS (25)

The main ideas presented must be thoroughly discussed. The contestant can cite examples, observations, studies, experience, and activities in support of the main ideas of the essay.

FORM (/30)

This is the structural part of the essay--the “bones” upon which the rest hangs. It is essential to support the essay so form is worth 30 points as good form is expected. This allows more points for the subjective judging areas.

GRAMMAR (10)

(spelling, punctuation, etc.) Applicants are urged to proofread their essays and to ask for additional proofreading assistance. There is no excuse for mistakes.

ORGANIZATION (10)

Organization of an essay means the pattern of ideas expressed by the applicant, most usually top to bottom in an essay of limited length. A disorganized essay should earn no points.

CRAFTSMANSHIP (10)

(use of proper words, sentence structure, paragraphing, etc.) This includes reasonable paragraphing and creative word use of any sort. (Paragraphs in right place, excellent construction, correct punctuation, etc., give 10 points. Subtract points for run-on sentences, improper paragraphs, incorrect punctuation, etc.)

IMPRESSION (/20)

This part is for the judge’s reaction. It is worth 20 points and gives latitude to the variety of opinions reflected in the judges.

PROGNOSIS (5)

The judges must have the impression that the essay highlights the essence of the contest theme.

PERSONAL REACTION (15)

This is the place for the judge’s personal opinion. Also, the pathos/egotism abhorrence reaction can be reflected here. (If you love it, give 15 points. If you hate it, 0 points. Use the whole range with 7-8 points being a neutral reaction. This is the only category in which a judge may show his/her subjective feelings about the essay.)

Note: All essays appear in their original form and have not been reviewed for grammatical or typographical errors.

The New York Times

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