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**Global Youth Action Network (GYAN).** Why do many young people today demonstrate interest in activism but fail to get fully engaged? Why are new social movements inspired by globalization capable of mobilizing tens of thousands of protestors yet develop few links to lobbies that promote alternative economic policy? The Global Youth Action Network (GYAN) asserts that society and development are limited by "fragmentation" and that defragmentation—defined as the creation of new relationships between traditionally segregated groups combined with the new availability of quality information—can liberate many new opportunities. The WTO protester in Seattle and the overwhelmed finance minister of sub-Saharan Africa need each other. How can they be linked? GYAN facilitates the integration of global issues and local processes through a program that links personal relationships, collaborative projects, centralization of information on the Internet, and youth participation in democratic structures. This program was first implemented in June 2004 in São Paulo, Brazil, and is called the "local jam."

GYAN was founded in 1999 to support collaboration between youth organizations. In just five years it has launched several dozen global projects and incubated partnerships between youth organizations while supporting diverse activities ranging from campaigns and research to conferences and political lobbies. When designing a program, GYAN examines the actors in the field and proposes a structure for collaborative action, taking into account five

levels of youth participation in social change: (1) awareness, (2) action and recognition, (3) networking, (4) collaboration of social groups, and (5) policy. GYAN recently used this five-level model to design youth campaigns that support the United Nations millennium development goals (MDGs). It consulted hundreds of youth experts, wrote a white paper on the contributions of youth to MDG implementation, and published a campaign framework for groups to take action. Two of GYAN's largest projects include Global Youth Service Day, the world's largest celebration of youth volunteerism, and [www.TakingITGlobal.org](http://www.TakingITGlobal.org), a Web site with the Internet's largest community of youth activism.

The local jam is dedicated to "defragmenting youth" and was developed by GYAN's South American regional office in São Paulo, Brazil. It created a youth network in the city in response to two observations of local researchers: a majority of young people in the city wanted to get more involved in some cause, and as of 2003, only 8 percent of youth participated in cause-related groups. As a network-driven organization focused on international youth mobilization and participation in global decision-making processes, GYAN developed a program to integrate the activism of local youth organizations while addressing international goals.

In the first stage the organization mapped international youth movements and sought their contacts in São Paulo. It then mapped local youth movements, joining the work of the mayor's office, and placed the results into a municipal Web site that is integrated within the TakingITGlobal Web platform. The mapping process, originally led by the mayor's office of São Paulo, identified more than 1,700 youth groups. The Web site became a virtual space for ongoing local networking and at the same time became a node within the wider global youth movement.

For the second stage GYAN launched an outreach and selection process to connect with groups and identify representative

young leaders from diverse backgrounds in the city. They received applications from hundreds of activists and chose sixty to participate in thematic working groups, all focused on developing collaborative projects and facilitated by local partner organizations in the city. Two months of dialog culminated in a retreat or "local jam," a one-week informal gathering dedicated to building personal relationships, celebrating diversity, launching collaborative projects, and developing a strategy for youth political participation from the local to the global level. Thirty-seven people attended for seven days: twenty-five from São Paulo, five from other Brazilian states, five from other countries in the region, and two from other continents. Representatives of the mayor's office and other organizations attended for one day.

In the third and final stage GYAN evaluated the process and incubated some of the collaborative projects. A remarkable twenty new projects were created and set in motion (a handful adapted from preexisting activities). They ranged from the development of the São Paulo Center for Indigenous and Environmental Education to the launch of the Brazilian campaign for youth participation in municipal elections. The projects also helped network diverse groups and defragment the youth of São Paulo, creating opportunities to engage more youth in activism and to help more groups become politically active at local, national, and international levels.

In summary, a process of mapping and dialog between diverse groups culminated in a one-week jam. The process, with the exception of the mapping, lasted six months and has inspired similar efforts in other cities around Brazil and the rest of the world, most notably in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as a lead up to the World Social Forum 2005 and in the United States in New York City with a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The concept of a "jam" was originally developed by Youth for Environmental Sanity in Santa Cruz, California, and focused on building rela-

tionships at the global level. GYAN adapted the concept to focus on three goals, especially at the local level: (1) developing new projects, (2) building networks, and (3) strengthening the political power of youth. This local emphasis inspired the name "local jam."

The network created by the local jam continues to function, hopefully in perpetuity, decentralized from GYAN. At the same time its members have an ongoing strategy for youth political participation set in place that never existed before, encouraging youth dialog with political structures ranging from the local level in the case of the São Paulo mayor's office to the global level with the United Nations. GYAN sees itself as a catalyst that helps groups celebrate diversity and in the process generates new projects that facilitate development and renews democracy with fresh participation from new, young actors with local roots and global vision, members of a global network.

Where did GYAN come from? In 1996 seventeen-year-old Benjamin Quinto participated in a small discussion and networking session of international NGOs at the United Nations secretariat in New York. He was inspired to meet people whose lives were dedicated to global problem solving. At the same time, however, he was shocked to learn that few young people were involved. He read the UN charter, observed its call for the participation of young people, and set out to create a youth assembly within the UN system. After three years of consultation with politicians, international organizations, and youth from all over the world, he concluded that a youth assembly could not function in the UN system without demand for such a body from member countries. Quinto also concluded that young people around the world needed to get better organized among themselves, celebrate their differences, collaborate on projects, and exercise greater political influence at local and national levels. With an initial grant from the singer Jewel and the Lifebridge



Foundation, Quinto, together with Jonah Wittkamper and Bremley Lyngdoh, set up the Global Youth Action Network in New York to support collaboration between youth organizations. Since its launch five years ago, GYAN has grown into one of the largest networks of youth organizations in the world.

Young people are attracted to the concept of GYAN as a network because they recognize the weakness of separation—or fragmentation—in the face of the overwhelming challenges and opportunities in the world today. The network and the Web site, [TakingITGlobal.org](#), offer them connection to more than 50,000 other young activists in all countries of the world. Connecting to youth in other countries and contributing to the common cause of alliance building invites young organizers to step out of their local realities and consider the larger picture. Local organizers are attracted to the vision of "global community" while international organizers are attracted to a serious engagement with local realities. Together they integrate agendas, defragment, involve more and more "under-involved" youth, and create a new kind of movement.

The five-level model of youth participation that GYAN uses when designing its programs such as the local jam was inspired by integral theory, a concept of philosopher Ken Wilber that encourages planners to examine the internal and external dimensions of both individual organizers and their communities. Correspondingly, GYAN and its five-level model call for building an "integrated youth movement," a movement in which youth participate actively in the following:

1. *Awareness*: raising awareness of social issues and critical thinking about the future

2. *Action and recognition*: taking action to solve community problems and providing recognition

3. *Networking*: communicating to share information, relationships, resources, and knowledge

4. *Collaboration and trust*: facilitating collaboration and building trust between diverse social groups

5. *Political participation*: engaging with formal decision-making structures

The model suggests both a strategy for defragmentation and a framework for selecting and designing indicators to measure integral participation. Each level of the model builds upon the others. For example, political participation of young people (level five) will be mere tokenism if youth representatives do not have networks to support them—or if networks distrust each other and refuse to cooperate—thereby weakening the collective political power of youth.

The local jam process joins with existing groups working at the levels of *awareness* (level one) and *action and recognition* (level two), and then facilitates their partnership to strengthen the levels of *network* (level three), *collaboration and trust* (level four) and *political participation* (level five). To understand how the model works it is helpful to examine each level and consider how to measure progress.

Level one (*awareness*). The São Paulo youth network of the local jam involves many groups from diverse religions, social classes, races, and political parties. Among these are groups that raise awareness and run campaigns to educate youth about social and environmental issues. The prevalence of these campaigns and youth participation in them is a key measure of progress at this level.

Level two (*action and recognition*). In response to increasing awareness, more and more individuals take action to address issues. Within the São Paulo network there are groups that "take action" and clean litter from parks, organize cultural presentations, offer training courses to give young people skills, and much more. To support role models and encourage greater action it is important to recognize the contributions of young people to society, especially in the media. Frequent mobilizations of young people for volunteer activities and recognition

Article on [De-Fragmenting Youth Movements](#) and a proposed [Youth Participation Index](#) written by Jonah Wittkamper on behalf of the Global Youth Action Network, included in the book: "Youth Activism: an international encyclopedia," published in 2006 by Greenwood Press. ISBN: 0-313-32811-0

of their work in the media are indicators of healthy activity at this level. Although not part of the local jam process, GYAN addresses this issue of "recognition" at the global level by organizing the International Youth in Action Award and donating \$1,000 (U.S.) to the top ten youth-led community projects in the world every year.

Level three (*network*). To facilitate networking and information sharing GYAN encouraged the local jam participants to take part in several collaborative projects. Although these projects are components of the local jam process, GYAN encourages other youth organizations to replicate them around the world. The presence of youth-focused publications (off-line or online) and forums (such as conferences) for young people to build meaningful relationships across traditional barriers are important signs of progress at this level. Below are a few examples:

Informal monthly meetings—On the first Monday of every month young activists in São Paulo gather for an informal dinner to sustain their relationships, make new connections, and discuss their movement. Diverse groups from various backgrounds participate. Many uninvolved young people enter the movement for the first time by participating in such meetings. Organizing the event in a place not affiliated with any one organization (e.g., a restaurant) allows for decentralization of the process, thereby encouraging collective responsibility instead of singular leadership.

E-mail bulletins of local opportunities and events for youth activists—There are many communication networks of youth activists, too many to keep track of. To facilitate the flow of information within the movement, young volunteers gather information, package it into a calendar, and send it out to youth networks via e-mail. Such calendars help educators and other adults get students involved by providing a snapshot of what is happening in the city. As a goal for the future in São Paulo, organizers will try to convince com-

munity newspapers to publish the calendars as well.

Municipal Web site—The São Paulo Web site within the TakingITGlobal infrastructure contains profiles and blogs of young activists, lists of events, a database of organizations, articles written by young people about key issues, and much more. Started in 2000 for the global level, the site remains free for anyone on the Internet with more and more local-level sites opening up.

Level four (*collaboration and trust*). The local jam is GYAN's chief tool for building trust among diverse groups and facilitating collaboration. Building from the Web of trust created by the local jam, GYAN and the jam participants develop new projects ranging from exchange programs and campaigns to cultural exhibitions and conferences. An evaluation made three months after the retreat counted more than twenty activities and projects that resulted from the local jam process. In the future, GYAN plans to use the local jam methodology to build trust between entire social groups, hoping that it will change the political landscape for future generations and lower the barriers to entry in society and divisions by religion, race, social class, and so forth. Two important partner organizations already support GYAN's movement toward this goal. The Interfaith Youth Core convenes young people of diverse religions to educate each other about their faiths and organizes volunteer activities. The Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Youth Alliance organizes dialog between urban and aboriginal youth to build solidarity and foster partnership. GYAN believes that the celebration of diversity is the best mechanism for uniting young people and fostering greater activism. Many factors indicate progress at this level, primarily the size and frequency of collaborative projects and the diversity of youth involved.

Level five (*political participation*). GYAN believes that young people, united in their diversity, can form a powerful

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political force. To crosslink networks and build upon the collaboration and trust of diverse youth groups, GYAN promotes highly visible debates between political candidates and youth during election years. As a result of the relationships that formed at the local jam, GYAN was able to promote debates this year in Brazil for the first time. The organizers created a partnership with MTV to promote political awareness among youth and encourage

young people to organize debates throughout the country. GYAN also publishes information, facilitates networking, and lobbies for greater youth participation in political processes of local, national, and international governmental structures. The prevalence of youth participation in political processes and government spending on youth-led programs are important indicators of progress at this level.

### Suggested Indicators for a Youth Participation Index

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Level one ( <i>awareness</i> ):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Youth participation in issue-oriented awareness raising campaigns.</li> <li>(2) Successful responses of youth to questionnaires that measure awareness</li> <li>(3) Government spending to support youth-led campaigns</li> </ul>
Level two ( <i>action and recognition</i> ):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Percentages of youth who volunteer</li> <li>(2) Percentage of youth who participate in youth-led groups</li> <li>(3) Number of positive reports in the media about youth</li> <li>(4) Government spending to support youth-led action and recognition</li> </ul>
Level three ( <i>networking</i> ):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Numbers of young people who participate in networking focused gatherings</li> <li>(2) Numbers of youth-led publications</li> <li>(3) Quality of information available on youth opportunities</li> <li>(4) Cross pollination of youth networks identified by the number of young people who act in multiple networks</li> <li>(5) Government spending to support youth-led publications</li> </ul>
Level four ( <i>collaboration and trust</i> ):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Prevalence of groups dedicated to building trust between youth of different social groups</li> <li>(2) Diversity of young people participating in key organizations—such as government youth councils</li> <li>(3) Number and diversity of alliances and partnerships held by youth organizations</li> <li>(4) Number of collaborative projects run by diverse youth organizations</li> <li>(5) Government spending to support youth-led trust building projects</li> </ul>
Level five ( <i>political participation</i> ):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Percentage of young people who voluntarily vote</li> <li>(2) Percentage of youth who participate in political parties</li> <li>(3) Prevalence of youth participation within government structures</li> <li>(4) Government spending to support youth-led participation in government</li> </ul>

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GYAN uses the five-level model with the hope that it will integrate youth movements and support those working to "defragment" society. To guide this process, GYAN is calling for the development of a youth participation index for documenting and measuring progress toward these goals. By tracking and compiling diverse indicators, it may be possible to create a composite index that measures the integration of youth and their participation in shaping society. Local youth organizations could draw from available data about their cities and design their own indices, potentially forming a political tool to measure the performance of elected officials and hold them accountable. The following list of six sample indicators, drawn from data that is readily available in many countries, could provide a good "integrated" measure of youth participation in a given city or country:

1. Youth participation in issue-oriented awareness raising campaigns
2. Percentage of youth who participate in youth-led groups
3. Number of positive reports in the media about youth
4. Government and grant-maker spending to support youth-led publications
5. Diversity of young people participating in key organizations such as government youth councils
6. Percentage of young people who voluntarily vote

The preceding table provides a more comprehensive list of potential indicators, suggested by GYAN, for developing a youth participation index.

Finally, the diversity among youth and the obstacles for marginalized young people need to be taken into account. Organizers must recognize that many young people from impoverished communities with inadequate access to education, health care, and employment will not be able to participate fully in youth movements unless they are empowered to do so. As a result, the analysis of the indicators above must be considered carefully in

tandem with other development indicators. Such measurements could enhance planning, improve distribution of resources, indicate factors such as violence and poverty that inhibit participation, and strengthen democracy. Perhaps most useful for the near future of youth movements and decision-makers would be a global survey of existing youth participation indicators. The result could be a conceptual framework that aids groups in the selection of indicators and the design of indices that are relevant for local, national, and international bodies where needed.

GYAN's pilot project in São Paulo, Brazil, has had much success defragmenting the youth movements of the city and supporting youth activism from a local to a global level. But it is only a start, and much remains to be learned as the jam process and similar experiments take place around the world.

*See also* Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the United States; Global Justice Activism; Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Brazil); Transnational Youth Activism.

#### **Recommended Reading**

Wilber, Ken (2001). *A Theory of Everything*. Boston: Shambhala.

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Jonah Wittkamper and Luis Davila

**Grassroots Youth Movements.** Free bus passes for young people in Portland, a voting-age reduction in Cambridge, ethnic-studies classes for students in Los Angeles, and a brownfield turned into a park and recreation center in the Bronx—all of these are examples of victories young people have won to improve their communities. All are part of a growing movement called "youth organizing."

Young people have a long history of leading social movements. In the early 1990s, however, a new kind of youth activism began, a youth-led youth movement, that is, a movement dedicated to issues that directly concern youth also led by youth. Groups of young people from around the country began forming