

Flag it Up!

Aim

that young people explore the different ways in which young people around the world participate for a better world

Age

11 years and older

Time

45 minutes

Materials

young people's stories, art materials

Note to Leader

Sources of flags include atlases (available from the library) or charts in school suppliers. The website www.flags.net contains all the world's flags.

Depending on your group, you may wish to provide them with the relevant flag or the reference material to find it themselves.

What to do

Break participants into small groups. Give each group a story and allow time for them to read and think about it. Each group discusses the type of participation experienced by the young person in their story and the impact it had on her or him. Ask them to imagine how the young person feels. They then design a poster based on the story, using the colours of the flag of the country in which the story took place. Each group presents back their poster.

In the large group, ask what was common about the experiences of the young people in the different stories. What was different for the young people? Ask the group if they have participated for change in their community, nationally or further afield. Ask for examples. How did participating make them feel?

Take Action!

In the Republic of Ireland:

- What age do you have to be to register to vote? If you are 17 years old and will be 18 by 15th February next, you are entitled to register to vote.
- Who can register to vote? Irish citizens may vote at every election and referendum; British citizens may vote at Dáil, European and local elections; Other EU citizens may vote at European and local elections; Non-EU citizens may vote at local elections only.
- Where can you register to vote? The draft register is published on 1st November and is made available for examination at post offices, public libraries, Garda stations, courthouses and local authority offices up to 25th November. The public are invited to check the draft during this period to make sure that they are correctly registered. For more information, contact the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government www.environ.ie



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Continued

Young People's Stories

Arthur

Arthur, a young Traveller, participated in a project which brought together different groups of young people. The group included young asylum-seekers, young people with disabilities and young people who were gay. By participating together in different activities, the young people learned how much they had in common, while also respecting each others' different backgrounds and cultures. When the young asylum-seekers received letters from the government saying they were to be sent back to their country, Arthur joined their campaign to stay in Ireland. He distributed their petition and took part in a protest outside the Dáil.

Kabba

Kabba is from Sierra Leone. When he was nine years old a civil war broke out in his country and he was taken by the rebel army. At first he was used to carry water and wash uniforms but soon he was training as a soldier. Thousands of children were used as soldiers by both rebel forces and the government during the civil war. With the help of a charity, Kabba left the army and started school. Now Kabba and other former child soldiers make radio programmes which teach children about their rights through stories, quizzes and dramas. Kabba says *'Even in the worst of all things something good must come out. I am a victim of the war. I should be able to challenge those who do this to children. The programme that I run there is called "My Story." I interview children affected by war. Without forgiveness there will be no reconciliation and without reconciliation there is no sustainable peace. Peace should not only be in our mouths but in our hearts.'* Source: Plan www.plan.ie

Laxmi

Laxmi is a young girl who lives in India. Since the death of her father, she has had to look after her family. She finds food for them to eat and things to sell. However she dreams of a better future and has lots of ideas about how life could be improved for people like her. Laxmi and her friends learned how to write scripts and use a camera and other recording equipment. She made a cartoon called 'Laxmi's Dream' which tells her story. Some of her friends have made films about their experiences of child prostitution, water pollution and working in rubbish dumps. Laxmi and her friends have all learned new skills and taught other people about the issues affecting them. One of their films called *Mrituchakra (Circle of Death)* led the government to shut down a polluting factory. Source: Plan www.plan.ie

Jonson and Bukasa

Jonson, a young Nigerian and Bukasa, who comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, live in Dublin. Although they have only been living in Ireland for a few years, they helped to set up a club for young asylum-seekers who have had to leave their parents, friends and families behind in their home countries. They are now volunteer youth leaders and every month they bring the group of young asylum-seekers on fun trips or help them to take part in activities such as sport and music.

Benson

Benson lives in Nairobi in Kenya. He is chairperson of a club in his school which was set up to improve the health of young people in his school and community. The club meets once a week. Members discuss the health problems facing young people and come up with ways of addressing these problems. Pupils come to Benson for advice on issues such as drugs, HIV and violence. Benson says: *'My peers know about sex and HIV transmission and that cigarettes and drugs are bad. We also know we must keep our school clean. We know the symptoms of cholera and how to treat people living with AIDS.'* He feels that young people are more likely to turn to other young people for help and advice. The club has also offered their advice to the Kenyan government. Source: Plan www.plan.ie

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Continued

Young People's Stories

Gabriel

Gabriel is 13 and lives in Portugal. He is a member of his local youth club. Gabriel saw a programme on TV about how many farmers in poor countries are paid very little for the produce that they export to Europe. As a result of this, Gabriel and his friends asked their youth leaders to buy only Fairtrade biscuits, juice, tea and coffee which give a fair price to farmers in poor countries. People who come into the youth centre have noticed the difference and ask questions about Fairtrade. Gabriel hopes that his action can encourage other people to buy Fairtrade products.

Sagar

Sagar lives in Nepal where people are divided into different categories called "castes". Sagar is a member of the Dalits which is the 'lowest' caste. The Dalits are also known as the "Untouchables". Sagar and his family are not allowed to enter the same temple or to eat with people from the higher castes. Sagar works on the farm of a rich family for very little money. Sagar and other people from the Dalit caste are trying to fight for more rights. They come together and sing about their struggles in their traditional folk music. Using their own music reminds them that they have a strong culture and that they are worthy of respect.

Adapted from: *New Internationalist* 359 (2003)

John

John lives in a small town in Northern Ireland. He left school when he was fifteen and got a job in a local garage. Although he had money in his pocket, he found that outside of school, there were very few places in his town for young people to meet. One day, John noticed an old outhouse in need of repairs that wasn't being used. He approached the owner with an idea to use it as a venue for youth activities. The owner agreed and John and his friends cleaned the place up. Young people now use the centre regularly.

Sadeka

Sadeka is 14 years old and comes from Saidpur in the north of Bangladesh. In her youth club, Sadeka and other children wanted to do something about the lack of toilets and basic washing facilities in their community, which was leading to a lot of diseases. They created a map of their village and looked at where taps and toilets were needed. They then worked with experts to provide the facilities. They also created a hygiene campaign with simple messages, making posters and short dramas for the community. Sadeka and her friends monitored the hygiene practices in the community. She says, "We measure the soap, if the soap gets smaller then people are washing their hands. If it stays the same, then they are not and we visit the children and their parents again with our hygiene campaign."

Source: *Plan* www.plan.ie

Yelena

Yelena is 15 years old. She lives beside Lake Izabel in Guatemala, near the border with Belize. Yelena is a part of a group of young people who looked at the issue of over fishing in the lake. They wrote a story to highlight the effects that over fishing has on the lake itself and on the people who depend on fishing for their livelihood. Yelena and her friends presented their story to the community. It had an impact on the local Mayor who attended the presentation. He asked for copies of the CD that they made and shared their presentation with key regional and national decision makers, including the Minister for the Environment. Yelena hopes that their initiative will lead to action in her area.

Adapted from: *Plan* www.plan.ie.