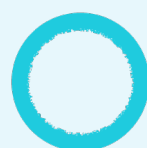


# Youth Participation In Development: **A Practical Guide (APG)**



Oaktree

## **Acknowledgements**

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# ■ Introduction

*If you're a development practitioner or policy-maker, this is a guide for you.*

*At Oaktree, we believe that young people are capable of leading, demanding and creating a more just world. So, it may come as no surprise that we're advocating for increased youth participation and youth mainstreaming in the development sector.*

*But we want to be clear. **The inclusion of youth perspectives is not merely an optional undertaking — it is a prerequisite for inclusive, sustainable and effective development work.***

*We are living in a world where over half of the global population is under 30 and where 9 out of 10 young people live in underdeveloped countries. To ignore the impact development initiatives have on the youth demographic would be careless. And to ignore the participatory potential of young people in informing development work would be short-sighted. Who better to help improve development outcomes than those experiencing the challenges of poverty, resource-scarcity and disempowerment first-hand?*

## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Practical Guide is to provide you with actionable advice on how to increase youth participation and mainstream youth issues in your development work.

Whether your expertise is in organisational governance, project implementation, or policy-making, we have written this guide with you in mind. We hope you find it useful.

This guide was developed as a companion piece to Oaktree's 2016 Practice Note, '[Youth Participation in Development](#)', which outlined a comprehensive rationale for youth participation in development.

The information contained in this document is an extension of the material covered in the Practice Note. We strongly recommend reading the Practice Note first.

## RECAP: WHAT IS YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH MAINSTREAMING?

We'll be referring to these two overlapping concepts throughout the guide. Youth participation refers to young people's ability to participate in the decision-making processes of the development sector. Youth mainstreaming refers to the intentional inclusion of young people in internal governance structures or programmatic decision-making processes beyond youth-targeted programs. Similar ideas, but with a conceptual twist.

The emphasis on 'mainstreaming' reinforces the idea that youth have hitherto been neglected as a distinct focus area and as a source of knowledge. As a result, youth issues, and young people themselves, need to be 'mainstreamed' across development work in order to rectify this historical neglect and to fuel a sustained commitment to youth participation.

## WHY NOW?

You may be asking - why now? In an industry already inundated with countless other priorities, why dedicate the time and resources to young people?

The answer is simple. **As our world changes to adapt to new geo-political, security and environmental conditions, so too must our approach to development.**

The existential threat of the climate crisis. The devastating economic impact of COVID-19. The reality is that young people often bear the brunt of these changes. And if we can recognise that fact, then adopting a youth focus to resolve the world's most pressing issues is only logical and prudent.

So, invite young people to participate in climate change negotiations! Consult young people in regional economic recovery programs! Youth participation and youth mainstreaming don't operate in a vacuum. They can, and should, be used in tandem to help you reach existing programmatic and strategic objectives.

## OVERVIEW

This Practical Guide is divided into three main sections:

1. Organisational Governance
2. The Program/Project Cycle
3. Policy and Planning

Each section will set out a vision of what youth participation will look like in those respective areas, identify barriers to that vision and provide solutions.

To help you navigate our advice, each section will also include:

- A summary of key takeaways
- A checklist of actions
- Key questions to ask yourself and your team

Finally, by no means is this a comprehensive manual to youth participation and youth mainstreaming. We'd like for you to treat this document as a starting point.

# ORGANISATIONAL GOVERNANCE

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*This section outlines the conditions and actions required to work with young people at an organisational level. It lists the pre-conditions required for change, and practical steps to help foster sustained youth engagement in your organisation.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Your organisation's values, systems and decision-making can be improved by identifying and understanding the interests of young people and using the knowledge and skills that they have to offer.
- Your organisation must be clear on what it intends to achieve by involving young people, and have a clear rationale of why it is making the effort to do so.
- There must be an attitudinal shift towards the role and value of youth participation by individuals in the organisation before organisational policies and procedures are modified. The necessary groundwork must be laid in advance before relevant policies can be effectively implemented.
- Young people are not a homogenous group. Your organisation should interact with a diversity of young people. This is relevant in the recruitment process, as well as in communications with young people during consultation.
- Young people should be adequately supported throughout their participation, whether that be through training or financial support.
- Achieving the necessary cultural change in your organisation might be difficult. To overcome this barrier, establish a clear commitment to youth participation, deal with misconceptions, cultivate individual champions for youth participation and institutionalise your commitment in internal documents.

## Defining Organisational Governance

Organisational governance, is the distribution of responsibilities, processes for decision-making, and mechanisms for accountability for the sustainable operation of an organisation. We recognise there is a need for structural reform within organisations, for them to modify the systems in place to improve the ways they engage and work with young people.

This development occurs through joint processes of negotiation, reflection, and learning by the organisation as a collective whole.

## Why Should Organisations Practice Youth Participation?

In order to practice youth participation externally and demonstrate accountability to young people, it is important for organisations to practice youth participation internally. Young people have unique perspectives on particular issues that can help improve organisational values and systems. Accessing the knowledge and skills that young people have to offer leads to better organisational decision making; by better identifying and understanding the needs of young people, organisations can develop more effective policies around these issues.<sup>1</sup>

**As stakeholders in a wide range of issues, young people also have a right to be included** in decision-making by boards and committees, and organisations can make better decisions when their voices are heard. In this way, there is a need for organisations to be accountable to the interests of young people.

## Case Study: Loddon Mallee Women's Health

Loddon Mallee Women's Health (LMWH) is a non-profit and non-government organisation providing information, support, and health services to women in the Loddon Mallee area in Victoria.<sup>2</sup> It aims to increase the participation of younger women on the Council of Management, in line with the organisational philosophy of nurturing leadership skills and mentoring young women's ability to participate in community organisations. For them, community contribution is a two-way process. The experience is enriching and rewarding for the young women involved, adding to their skills, but it also augments the reach of LMWH's consumer input, assisting decision-making within the organisation.

Here, youth contributions help to ensure that services, events and decisions are relevant and appropriate, which allows organisations to build effective links with young people in the community. Promoting these kinds of active partnerships between youth and other community members can lead to improved and strengthened communities, which, in turn, increases the organisation's relevance and credibility to young people.



<sup>1</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet, State Government of Western Australia. 2006. Working Together: Involving Community and Stakeholders in Decision-Making. Perth : Office of Citizens and Civics, Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth. 2008. Preventing Youth Disengagement and Promoting Engagement . Perth: Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth .

<sup>2</sup> Women's Health Loddon Mallee. 2019. What we do. June 13. Accessed August 10, 2020. <https://whlm.org.au/what-we-do/>.



## Key Steps for Youth Participation in Organisational Governance

### 1. Outline Goals and Objectives

The Commission of Children and Young People in Western Australia outlines three major steps for organisations deciding to involve young people in their work.<sup>3</sup> These are:

#### A. Decide what you want to achieve

What is your organisation aiming to achieve? These might include the previously mentioned benefits of working with young people: better organisational decision-making, the creation of policies which are more relevant to young people, or more efficient and cost-effective outcomes for your organisation.<sup>4</sup>

#### B. Decide the extent of youth involvement

**Create a realistic timeline** – does your organisation have enough time to meaningfully incorporate youth contributions into the project? Does your organisation possess adequate staffing and budget resources for the project, and will involvement be in the interests of young people?

#### C. Decide what action you will take.

Does your organisation have a commitment and plan to increase youth participation? This must be determined before requesting youth to be involved.

Be clear on what your organisation intends to do once young people begin to participate internally. Will you incorporate the advice and ideas they are given into their wider policies and projects? Is the organisation willing to give up power and take criticism? Do all areas of your organisation understand the commitment they will be making, and will they support this? Are your promises achievable, i.e. can barriers to action be overcome? Finally and most importantly, is this a long-term commitment to change, and not a one-off event? Your organisation must be internally clear on what it aims to achieve, and how it intends to incorporate the feedback of young people, not

only in the short-term but in the long-term. To better navigate this process, various engagement checklists for organisations have been developed, providing a framework for early-stage organisational youth engagement. The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia in their 'Better Together' document offers a checklist to ensure engagement aligns with best practice,<sup>5</sup> and the Commonwealth Secretariat offers a similar resource.<sup>6</sup>

### 2. Prepare Your Organisation to Mainstream Youth

Reviewing how well your organisation is set up to support youth participation is an important step in engagement. Some questions to ask yourself include:

- Do strategic planning documents, policies and project plans describe youth participation and its importance?
- Do processes and resources support staff to build respectful, ongoing relationships with children and young people, to listen to their views and have it influence their work?
- Is your organisation prepared to seek and respond to feedback from young people about ways their participation could be improved in the future?

The successful integration of youth participation depends on the level of support and commitment the initiative receives from the organisation as a whole. This might require making presentations, speaking to managers and participating in team meetings to discuss the project's aims and objectives<sup>7</sup>. Without this commitment from the outset, it is unlikely that participation will be taken seriously. Rather, participation may be tokenistic. In this case, the potential benefits will be unrealised and replaced by negative consequences for the young people involved in the project.

**To ensure meaningful participation, organisations must be clear on why they want to involve young people in the organisation's processes and**

<sup>3</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia. 2009. Involving Children and Young People: Participation Guidelines. Perth: Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

<sup>4</sup> Smail, Pat. 2007. Blast Off: GUIDES TO INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. Cardiff: Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales.

<sup>5</sup> Youth Affairs Council of South Australia. 2016. Better Together: A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People. Adelaide: Youth Affairs Council of South Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat. 2017. Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

<sup>7</sup> Smail, Pat. 2007. Blast Off: GUIDES TO INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. Cardiff: Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales.

**decision-making.** Some reasons are value-based (e.g. it empowers young people, young people have a right to involvement), and some are focused on achieving specific outcomes – for example, seeking young people’s views with the aim of improving a particular service. Importantly, determine whether it is actually appropriate to involve young people. It is never appropriate to initiate engagement if the organisation is not willing to incorporate change based on participant feedback.

**The process of change within your organisation must occur jointly on two fronts.** Firstly, through its organisational values; this refers to a change in values and attitudes towards young people across the wider organisation. This can take the form of an organisation valuing young people’s knowledge and experience, and a wider understanding of the purpose and benefits of youth engagement by individual members within the organisation. This shift in understanding and subsequent shift in attitudes and values by members towards youth participation is necessary to initiate the second stage of the process, which involves changes to an organisation’s policies and procedures, articulated for example in organisational strategy documents.

A deep, organisation-wide understanding of the purposes and benefits of youth mainstreaming enables the organisation to design responsive strategies and programs, which will both benefit the young people involved and the organisation itself. In this way, organisational governance is a two-way process; if policies are implemented without conducting the necessary ground-work in advance, i.e. ensuring wider understanding of youth mainstreaming processes and the purposes behind them, participation will be largely tokenistic, and benefits will be lost.

## Case Study: United Nations Youth Strategy

The United Nations Youth Strategy outlines steps to mainstream young people across the wider working bodies of the UN.<sup>8</sup> They include, among other things:

- Creating a Youth Focal Point Function in each UN country team and mission to support system-wide country level coordination on youth.
- Establishing youth engagement platforms such as youth advisory boards within relevant UN entities to provide a channel for input and feedback from young people on UN work.
- Providing orientation briefing on youth issues to UN entity representatives, resident coordinators and other senior management positions to build capacity of staff to understand and address youth needs.

By building knowledge-bases and platforms for dialogue, the youth strategy is able to comprehensively mainstream youth voices throughout its organisation, with better representation leading to more effective decision making on a wide range of issues.

## Embedding the Needs of Young People

Building youth participation into the core structure of your organisation, is a vital component to ensuring young people’s views have maximum impact on policy development processes.<sup>9</sup> Embedding young people within the organisation can be achieved through actions such as including young people throughout organisational documents. Organisations looking to include young people should develop policies and procedures that inform their design of participation practices, which are in turn informed by youth perspectives and participation. This kind of approach ensures that organisational governance is informed on

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Youth Strategy. 2018. Youth 2030: Working With and For Young People. Geneva: UNICEF.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Youth Affairs Coalition. 2010. Where are you going with that? Maximising Young People’s Impact on Organisational & Public Policy. Sydney: Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

an ongoing basis, and adapted where necessary to ensure genuine and effective youth inclusion.

Young people's inclusion must be entrenched at a strategic and business planning level, as opposed to short-term and tokenistic practices of inclusion.

### 3. Build Partnerships with Young People

#### A. Recruit Young People

There are a variety of ways your organisation can involve a diversity of young people in both its internal processes and external projects. **Existing youth organisations, government and non-government services, youth groups and clubs** are a good way to reach specific groups of young people. Schools are an effective avenue – however, keep in mind that you will need to go through the approval process of the school in question, which can be time-consuming.<sup>10</sup> **Digital recruitment** can also be very effective through harnessing social media platforms frequently used by young people, such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.

Often, there are certain groups of young people left out of decision making processes. These can include young people with disabilities and/or mental health issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those in out-of-home care or in the juvenile justice system, young people from particular cultural backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ young people. Organisations should attempt to include a diverse range of young people in its decision-making processes. It is easy for organisations to continually engage with a single group of young people (e.g. established “youth leaders”) without taking steps to diversify engagement with other groups. **Consulting and engaging with the same voices repeatedly often exacerbates marginalisation for other youth groups whose perspectives are not represented.** All young people have a right to participation, and including diverse social groups will strengthen youth participation in organisational governance, making it more robust.<sup>11</sup>

### Case study: Oaktree's Recruitment Tactics

At Oaktree, all our volunteers and employees are under the age of 27, so we have a fair bit of experience in recruiting young people. In order to reach diverse young people, we tap into social media and networking platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. Of course, we also advertise in traditional ways via our website and university careers hubs. To encourage applications, we explicitly value ‘passion over degrees’ in our recruitment materials. We know young people might not have much experience - so we don't expect it! We recognise much can be learned on-the-job. Lastly, to streamline our online application process, we use Typeform, which is both aesthetic and functional.

#### B. Communicate with Young People

During meetings or consultations, both adults and young people should make their expectations of each other and of their involvement clear at the outset. This will prevent problems from arising later down the track. When speaking with young people, engage in active listening. The organisation should take responsibility for creating and perpetuating an environment where young people feel able, and welcome, to contribute.

Taking notes of or recording young people's comments show that you value their contribution - obtain their consent first, of course. Combined with stating clearly what you will do with the information given, these actions are necessary components of effective participation. The organisation should also make it clear to young people what information, feedback or guidance it is seeking at specific times. For example, if asking for feedback on a report, ask for comments on a specific section or theme. Being clear in your organisation's asks is an integral part of effective participation.

<sup>10</sup> Queensland Department of Education. 2016. GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH. Brisbane: Queensland Government.

<sup>11</sup> Smail, Pat. 2007. Blast Off: GUIDES TO INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG

Young people are not a homogenous group. They vary in their circumstances, capacities, and interests. Therefore, adapting your engagement methods for young people from different backgrounds (accounting for factors such as age, cultural background, religion, and language) is necessary. It is difficult to attach specific methodologies to fixed ages – young people's cognitive capacities and maturity levels will differ with each age group. If working with young people, especially those below age 18, will require a specific skill set, consider engaging a partner with expertise in this area.

### Case Study: Youth Fellowships By the UNFPA

As part of the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) Special Youth Programme, six fellows from developing countries were selected to join the organisation for a remunerated internship for a nine-month period, based on their experience in development work.<sup>14</sup>

The Fellowships sensitised UNFPA staff on the aims of working with young people. It placed young people in positions of power within the organisation where they could engage in policy development and programming, making a real impact on overall direction and strategy. As partners, young people utilised their unique perspectives to review annual country reports, advise on policy improvements and develop national youth profiles for their own country to inform wider strategy.

Training plans were established for fellows depending on their needs, and dedicated mentors monitored the fellows' professional development, providing regular feedback. Through the fellowship, UNFPA invested in the development of certain groups of young people, which then translated into organisational benefits through strong strategic contributions by young people on a range of relevant issues.

### Case Study: The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) 'Speak For Yourself' Event

The ACYP 'Speak For Yourself' is a one day event for children and young people up to the age of 24 who are involved in decision making in organisations and/or are a part of a youth advisory group. The event allowed young people to hear and learn about the experiences of other children and youth young people from all over NSW, and about different models of participation. The event provided a platform for children and young people to speak about the most important things **they felt they needed to meaningfully participate in organisational decision making**.<sup>12</sup> These are listed below under relevant categories, and can be used as a starting reference for the kinds of support your organisation can provide to young people involved in the process of participation.

#### Practical Training

- Training and development to improve knowledge, decision making and judgement
- Public speaking skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Skills to work with diverse groups – training in diversity
- Time management skills

#### Desired Attitudes

- Help to develop their ideas
- Take their ideas seriously
- Mutual respect
- Encouragement

#### Recommendations

- Open communication
- Constructive feedback
- Adults to work alongside children and young people as advisors
- To be fully informed
- Time to think things through thoroughly

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People. 2016. Speak for Yourself: Hosted by the Advocate for Children and Young People & the NSW Youth Advisory Council. July 26. Accessed August 15, 2020. <https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/speak-for-yourself>.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank. 2019. World Bank Launches Lebanon's Youth Advisory Group. June 30. Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2018/06/13/world-bank-launches-lebanons-youth-advisory-group>; UNICEF. 2019. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD. March 27. Accessed August 12, 2020. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/working-with-young-people/youth-voice/>.

## Young People in Positions of Power

For youth mainstreaming to be genuine and effective within an organisation, young people must be given the opportunity to participate in high-level governance structures and decision-making processes. Some organisations that have engaged in youth participation have designated youth positions at the board level. For example, both UNICEF and the World Bank have designated youth advisory boards at multiple organisational levels.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of organisations founded, led, and managed by young people demonstrates their ability to perform with respect to their legal responsibilities on boards. It also proves young people can think insightfully on how they can use this power to make clear decisions about the futures of their organisations. However, in the process of ensuring young people are involved in decision making processes, **simply designating young people into positions of power is not enough.** They must be provided with sustained support to undertake their roles, with the consideration that young people often have different needs to adults. For example, they may need advice on making fiscal decisions, or financial support to sustain their involvement at a high level.

## Achieving Cultural Change

Scepticism over the viability and merits of youth inclusion is a significant challenge to organisational youth participation and mainstreaming. Young people are often excluded from participating in organisational governance due to doubt over the meaning, value and methodology of youth participation. Common anxieties and misconceptions include:<sup>15</sup>

- Young people not being interested in what is being discussed.
- Boards or committees not being relevant to young people.
- Young people lacking the relevant experience to be involved.
- Not having the time to provide a supportive environment for youth participation.
- Young people not staying engaged in a process long enough to be involved.

However, through processes of negotiation, reflection and learning, consider:

- Young people have a diverse range of interests and opinions – an effective recruitment strategy might result in a wide variety of youth whose interests and experiences are relevant to the organisation.
- Young people are often active and engaged members of the community,<sup>16</sup> and have an interest and stake in a wide range of issues (beyond those youth-based), in the same way as other members of the community.
- Young people may not have practical experience on boards and committees, but have a range of other experiences that will enrich the diversity of views brought to the decision making table.

**Dealing with resistance towards youth inclusion is the number one critical issue that limits the impact of youth views on organisational change and decision making.** Overcoming this kind of resistance is integral to ensuring youth views have an impact in your organisation.

## Limited Knowledge, Capacity and Resources

Another significant barrier is a lack of training amongst staff on youth participation and mainstreaming practices, leading to a limited understanding among organisation members on how to work with young people. Providing training to staff in the specific skills required is critical. Some examples of training, professional development and first steps that can be taken to deal with resistant attitudes towards youth participation and organisational change can include:<sup>17</sup>

- A questionnaire prior to training that gauges current organisational levels of participation.
- Implicit bias training to minimise the extent that preconceptions of young people colour individuals' interactions with them.<sup>18</sup>
- An overview of the benefits participation brings to both the organisation and the young people involved.

<sup>14</sup> Schellekens, Saskia. 2008. Special Youth Programme Report. New York: United Nations Population Fund.

<sup>15</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. 2004. Taking Young People Seriously: Young People on Boards and Committees. Melbourne: Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities

<sup>16</sup> Braun-Lewensohn, Orna. 2016. "Sense of Coherence, Values, Youth Involvement, Civic Efficacy and Hope: Adolescents During Social Protest." Social Indicators Research 661–673.

<sup>17</sup> Smail, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Applebaum, Barbara. 2019. "Remediating campus climate: implicit bias training is not enough." Studies in Philosophy and Education 38(2), 129-141.



- Outlined barriers to participation, and how these can be overcome.
- Training targeted at encouraging positive attitudes toward managing and implementing change in organisations, which should ideally be designed, developed and delivered by young people themselves.
- Training targeted at young people and youth participation practitioners to assist them in dealing with negative attitudes towards the inclusion of young people.

Dedicating financial resources to staff training, capacity building and operational resources, as well as subsidising the time of young people by covering costs such as transport and catering will be vital to the overall process.

## Overcoming Barriers

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As discussed in previous sections, building multidimensional partnerships with a diverse range of young people is an effective strategy to overcome organisational barriers to youth participation. These can include:

- Reaching out to youth networks, such as political youth organisations, civil society organisations, youth centres and youth councils.
- Involving young people on decision making boards, to demonstrate first-hand the positive contributions that young people can make (for example, the World Bank works with youth advisory groups,<sup>19</sup> and at UNICEF, young people serve on decision-making boards.<sup>20</sup>
- Young people in professional roles – volunteering and internships play a large role in many organisations. But to enable young people to genuinely contribute to an organisation, it is important to move beyond short-term, unpaid positions, and consider the professional roles they can occupy in the long-term (for recruitment considerations, see the previous section ‘Recruiting Young People’).

## Solutions

### *Establish a clear commitment*

A key strategy for dealing with internal organisational barriers is to establish a clear commitment at the upper-management level to young people’s participation in all levels of decision making. This can be achieved through modifications to organisational policy, vision, purpose statements, or constitutions. This ‘whole of system’ approach is necessary to translate a commitment to participation into practice and effect change.<sup>21</sup> This can be supplemented with clear channels of communication between boards and committees that young people are participating in to promote the capacity for young people’s ideas to feed into decision making processes.

### *Deal with misconceptions*

In dealing with misconceptions about the capacity of young people and the purpose of their involvement, it is important to make clear to all involved on a given board or committee the reasons why they are working together, and why youth contributions are valuable – misconceptions about young people’s capacity are reinforced by tokenistic forms of engagement. A clear appreciation, and defence, of youth engagement at the highest levels of management can be extremely effective in shifting embedded perceptions. It increases the likelihood of meaningful engagement and long-term organisational change.

### *Cultivate individual champions*

Leaders and senior staff should champion youth participation themselves. Often, youth participation will require a cultural shift within the organisation, and this is unlikely to occur if organisational leaders see it as a low priority. Through the efforts of individual champions, youth mainstreaming is likely to become entrenched in organisational culture overtime, which leads to a long-term commitment to youth participation as an ongoing activity, rather than a one-off exercise of the project.

### *Institutionalise*

Cultivating individual champions alone is not enough. The institutionalisation of youth participation is also

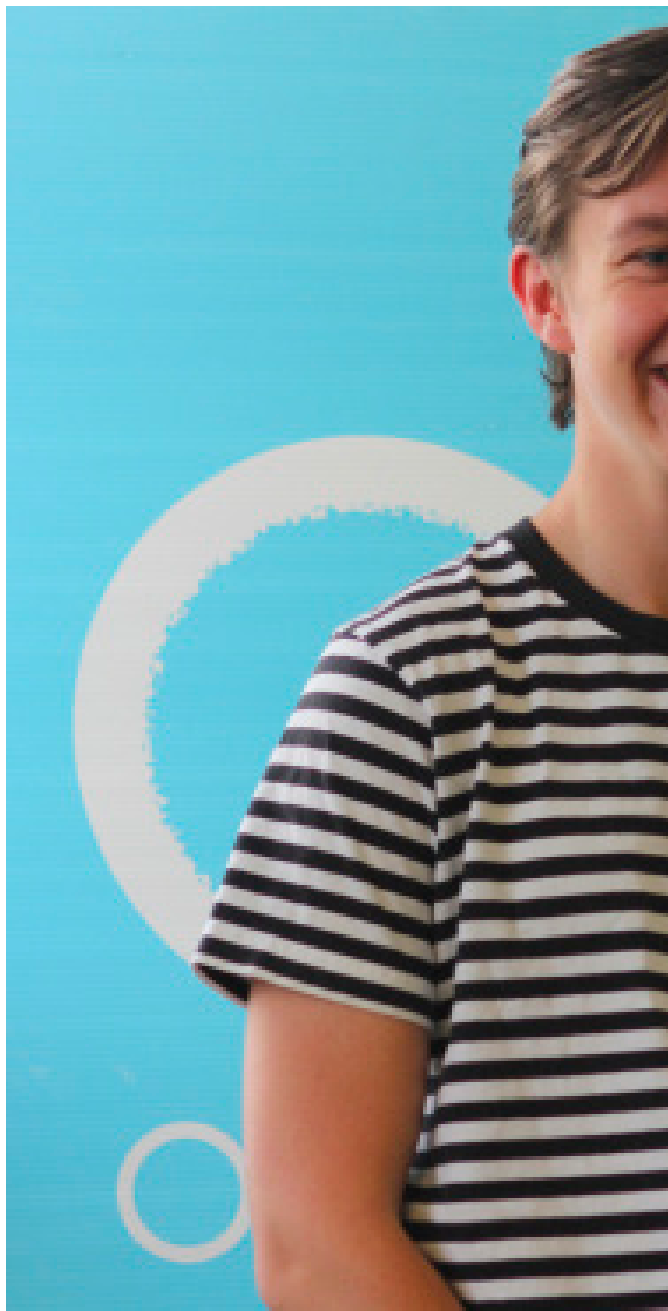
<sup>19</sup> World Bank. 2019. World Bank Launches Lebanon’s Youth Advisory Group. June 30. Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2018/06/13/world-bank-launches-lebanons-youth-advisory-group>.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF. 2019. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD. March 27. Accessed August 12, 2020. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/working-with-young-people/youth-voice/>.

<sup>21</sup> Testro, Paul. 2006. Listening, hearing and acting: Approaches to the participation of children and young people in decision making – a review of the literature. Brisbane: Queensland Government Department of Child Safety.

necessary. **Structurally embed these principles into the wider operations of the organisation.** For example, consider modifying project planning forms to contain youth indicators and a youth focus or adding youth-focused sections in organisational strategic documents.

If the work of individual champions does not translate into a wider shift within the organisation, or if the champions themselves leave, youth participation will remain a one-off exercise as opposed to an ongoing activity.



## Organisational Governance: Youth Engagement Checklist

*The following is a checklist for organisations looking to mainstream youth, irrespective of the form or level of participation.*

- ☐ Has your organisation determined some desired outcomes from working with young people?
- ☐ Have you set a realistic timeline for achieving your desired outcomes?
- ☐ Does your organisation possess adequate staffing and financial resources?
- ☐ Will your organisation incorporate the advice and ideas they are given into their wider policies and projects?
- ☐ Is your organisation willing to give up power and take criticism?
- ☐ Do all areas of your organisation understand the commitment they will be making, and will they support this?
- ☐ Will this be a long-term commitment to change, or a one-off activity?
- ☐ Are you able to secure support for youth participation throughout the wider organisation through cultural change?
- ☐ Do you recognise that young people are not a homogenous group – will you recruit a diversity of young people?
- ☐ Will you effectively support young people throughout the consultation process by recognising the unique individual circumstances of each participant?

# PROGRAM/ PROJECT CYCLE

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*This section is designed for practitioners looking for ideas about how to mainstream youth participation throughout the program/project cycle.*





1. The **Research and Analysis** section highlights what young people can contribute to the research process and data analysis. It outlines key steps on how to encourage youth participation in these activities and provides examples of youth-friendly research methodologies.
2. In **Program/Project Design**, you will find the major considerations to keep in mind when planning for youth participation in development programs or projects, ideas on how to enable young people to participate in and lead design activities, and the key challenges to plan for when considering youth participation in this phase.
3. **Program/Project Implementation** will outline critical ways young people can improve programs through the implementation phase, provide key steps for practitioners to consider, and spotlight examples of youth-led program implementation and peer-education development programs.
4. In the **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning** section, you will find the rationale for youth participation in MEL design and implementation, the key steps to help you put this into practice, and how to overcome barriers to youth participation in MEL.

# Research and Analysis

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Youth participation adds immense value to research activities. Young people can help generate highly accurate data, confidently wield modern technologies and contribute to a richer analysis of data gathered.
- A number of classic and contemporary research methodologies lend themselves to youth participation, including participatory action research, participatory rural appraisal, focus groups and interviews as well as surveys and questionnaires. Young people should also be involved in the data analysis to assist in contextualising the data and contribute their unique reflections and insights from the research process.
- When planning for youth participation in research and analysis, careful consideration of safety and risk, the allocation of adequate time for training, planning for appropriate remuneration, as well as meaningful and empowering ways to present young people's research and analysis is required.

## Defining Research and Analysis

The research and analysis phase refers to the initial scoping and research activities involved in initiating a development project. Often described as part of the identification phase of a project, research and analysis identifies the development problems and needs of a particular population. Research aids this process through the collection of relevant data through a range of different methodologies. Data is then analysed to identify common trends and generate ideas and solutions for the development project.

## Youth Participation in Research and Analysis

*‘Youth participation in research refers to the way young people are involved in conducting studies which investigate the nature of development issues in particular countries or communities.’<sup>22</sup>*

When appropriately trained, young people can add value to many types of research methodologies as well as in data analysis. Some research methods particularly suit young people, and draw on their unique positioning and skill sets.

## Benefits of Youth Participation in Research and Analysis:<sup>23</sup>

- **Generate accurate data:** In the context of youth-targeted programs, young people conducting research with/on their peers is a powerful way to collect nuanced responses. Young people can build rapport and often will make participants feel more comfortable than engaging with an adult researcher. This leads to more accurate data that better reflects young people’s needs and priorities.
- **Embrace new technologies:** Young people are quick to utilise new technologies, which can assist in the efficiency of the training process and add

value to research that, for example, involves the rapid collection of data. Young people also have skills in social media that can assist in modern forms of social research.

- **Generate richer analysis:** Young people can enhance data analysis by providing the research team with ideas regarding trends, or anomalies identified amongst youth respondents, and shed light on a problem from a unique youth perspective, drawing on their own experiences. This could result in a far richer and more grounded analysis of the data collected.

## Planning for Youth Participation in Research and Analysis: Key Considerations

- **Ensuring safety and managing risk:** Thorough planning is required to ensure young people’s exposure to risk when conducting research is managed and mitigated.
- **Time allocated to training:** Sufficient time must be allocated to properly train young people. This is especially relevant when working with young people in development contexts with limited exposure or experience to research or research methods.<sup>24</sup>
- **Remuneration:** Organisations must plan how young people will be compensated for their contribution to the research project, including their expertise, time, and for various expenses (travel, catering, etc).
- **Presenting Findings:** Organisations must plan how they intend to present and disseminate the findings of their youth-led research, in a manner that is empowering for young people involved, leads to positive impacts for engaged communities and encourages continued youth engagement in research and development.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Oaktree, Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development, (October 2016), 12, [https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource\\_document/ACFID%20Practice%20Note%20-%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Development%20FINAL.pdf](https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID%20Practice%20Note%20-%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Development%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> ibid, 12

<sup>24</sup> ibid, 54

<sup>25</sup> ibid, 54

## Key Steps for Youth Participation in Research and Analysis<sup>26</sup>

### 1. Choose your research methodology

- Investigate various research approaches/ methodologies with young people before making a final decision, or pre-empting a research approach.
- Take into consideration that some methodologies facilitate young people's creativity and input better than others, and that the young people you are working with may have preferences or strengths relating to certain types of research over others.

### 2. Train young people

- Train young people in relevant research theory, research methodologies, and practical skills that are key to performing research.
- It is important to ensure that this training does not stifle their creativity by creating rigid boundaries and processes to follow, and therefore limit opportunities to approach the research from a unique perspective.

### 3. Investigate power dynamics

- Before young people conduct research, it is important to investigate the power dynamics in the communities they will be working in. Young people can be a key resource in developing a clearer understanding of the local social context, helping to reveal any gatekeepers within communities, or identifying any challenges relating to youth-led research.
- Keep in mind that, in some cases, young people will have a strong advantage when conducting research with their peers, however, they may not be equally respected when interviewing adults.

## Youth-Friendly Research Methodologies

Young people can successfully participate or lead in a range of different classic or more contemporary research techniques. These include:

- Participatory Action Research
- Participatory Rural Appraisal
- Focus groups and interviews
- Surveys/questionnaires

### Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research approach that seeks to redistribute power within the research process to those who are most affected by, or benefitting from, a program. In this principles-driven approach, participants are jointly responsible for choosing what aspects are to be researched and how the data is to be collected. In projects with young people as beneficiaries, it can be young people participating in PAR; selecting the research techniques and tools that best suit them, and deciding how to showcase their results. This approach leads to young people gaining increased control over their lives.<sup>27</sup>

### Case Study: 'Stronger Together'

Plan International conducted a Photovoice participatory action research project with 60 adolescent girls in Solomon Islands to uncover what young women viewed as the main challenges to their completion of secondary schooling. The research was conducted in 2018–9 by adolescent girls across three locations in SI – Honiara, the Settlements (villages on the outskirts of Honiara), and a community in West Guadalcanal.

Young women co-designed their research question and used the PhotoVoice method to capture the challenges they saw through their own eyes (or lens). This involved training young women in photography, and different effective photography

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, 13

<sup>27</sup> "Participatory Action Research", Child Family Community Australia, August 2015, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/participatory-action-research>

techniques for capturing meaning. This method honours and amplifies the voices and experiences of adolescent girls' and young women's subjective experience(s).

Young women also conducted 164 interviews with peers and family members to further gather opinions on the barriers to education. The findings were collected and showcased through a report 'Stronger Together', providing powerful visual representations of the key challenges young women face. The research also informed the creation of the report 'Our Education, Our Future', which provides further political and contextual analysis, and communicates key recommendations to Solomon Islands' Government on the issue of young women's access to education.<sup>28</sup>

## Case Study: SRHR Needs Assessment

UNICEF, Sierra Leone, in partnership with local civil society organisation SPW Sierra Leone, trained young people as researchers on the issue of HIV/AIDS education amongst out-of-school children in Sierra Leone. Twenty young people (18-22 years) were trained to conduct focus group discussions, interviews, consultations, and piloting and producing questionnaires. Afterwards, they gathered data on children's needs across 20 communities in Sierra Leone. Those targeted by researchers included street children, child sex workers, child labourers, child-led households, school dropouts and child miners. **Participants acknowledged that speaking to young researchers was easier than speaking with adults.** A final report was presented to a delegation of UN agencies, NGOs, and other civil society groups, and informed UNICEF on the creation of appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention programs for out-of-school children.<sup>30</sup>

## Participatory Rural Appraisal

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) refers to a family of approaches/methods enabling rural people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of their life and social conditions, to aid in development planning and action. Equally, PRA could be used for enhancing youth participation, creating an emphasis on young community members participating in the research process, and enabling ideas and perspectives from local youth to take prominence<sup>29</sup>. PRA techniques tend to favour collecting visual over verbal or written data, which facilitates participation from young people with limited literacy skills. This approach places the highest value in the empowering process of research for those involved.

Examples of common participatory methods/tools used in PRA include:

- **Community Participatory Mapping:** community members create a map of their local environment, noting key resources, destinations and activity sites. Mapping can reveal key problems or resource issues facing the community. Separate mapping activities for men and women can reveal key differences in the way environments are seen or utilised, and reveal different issues experienced according to gender. Similarly, young people could be encouraged to map their communities, revealing important places or resources for them, and the key issues they face.
- **Daily Activity Charts:** Common in Gender Analysis, daily activity charts are typically carried out at the household level, where different family members each draw the key tasks/activities they carry out across key intervals of the day. This reveals important information such as the household gendered division of labour, or highlights the busiest time of the day for different family members, to inform the scheduling of development interventions. This technique can reveal key development issues faced by young people and how they are gendered, by indicating

<sup>28</sup> Plan International Australia, Our Education Our Future, (plan.org.au: Plan International Australia, 2019), 9 [https://www.plan.org.au/-/media/plan/images/learn/who-we-are/blog-media-images/2019/200519-sols-report/our-education-our-future\\_policy-reportcompressed.pdf?la=en&hash=C58B84266055B5E31D8C-0088475DA3942B258032](https://www.plan.org.au/-/media/plan/images/learn/who-we-are/blog-media-images/2019/200519-sols-report/our-education-our-future_policy-reportcompressed.pdf?la=en&hash=C58B84266055B5E31D8C-0088475DA3942B258032)

<sup>29</sup> Robert Chambers, "The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal." World Development, vol 22, issue 7 (1994): 953–69.

<sup>30</sup> DFID- CSO Youth Working Group, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 53-54

how much time they dedicate to different activities, ie. education or household chores.

### Focus Groups/Interviews and Surveys

For youth-targeted programs, young people are particularly well placed to facilitate focus group discussions and interviews with other young people. This is relevant for development issues that cover sensitive or taboo topics such as sexual health. Young people can choose to work in teams and divide roles. One researcher can facilitate the focus group while another takes notes.

Young people can gather findings from focus groups and interviews to inform the design of survey questionnaires, pilot surveys, and final survey instruments. It is extremely important to consider gender in the manner social research is conducted. For example, it may be culturally appropriate, or incite greater openness amongst participants if the youth facilitator's gender matches those within the focus groups, interviews or surveys they are conducting.

### Youth Participation in Data Analysis

Young people can not only be involved in the research underpinning development projects, but also in data analysis. Analysis is crucial. It is where data is interpreted, and where trends and themes are identified. In essence, the analysis phase gives meaning to the data. There are a number of approaches young researchers can be trained in to analyse their data, whether it be in qualitative or quantitative form, or alternative forms of data such as photographs or visual media.



## Research And Analysis: Youth Engagement Checklist

*The following is a checklist for practitioners looking to mainstream youth throughout the research and analysis phase of the development cycle:*

- ☐ Have young people been adequately trained in relevant research theories and methodologies?
- ☐ Has the social/cultural context been assessed and deemed appropriate and safe for youth to conduct research?
- ☐ Have young people been provided opportunities to explore numerous forms of research and analysis, and are equally involved in choosing the methods?
- ☐ Are the chosen research and analysis methods empowering to young people involved?
- ☐ Are young people equally involved in the analysis of data collected?
- ☐ Has thorough planning and risk mitigation been conducted with young people in mind?
- ☐ Has adequate time and resources been allocated to training young people on research and analysis?
- ☐ Has the organisation planned for how young people will be compensated for their contribution to research and analysis, including various considerations of time, travel, catering, accommodation etc?
- ☐ Has planning been undertaken on how the findings of the youth-led research will be presented/disseminated in a way that is empowering to young people?



# Program/ Project Design

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Young people can offer their personal insight and experiences to feed into the development of best-practice programs, particularly those involving development issues that young people are severely impacted by, for instance HIV/AIDS, unemployment, displacement or climate change. Young people bring unique perspectives, creativity and online skills to youth issues, which can be leveraged for project design.
- Planning is a critical aspect of youth participation in project design, where specific goals, objectives and performance indicators should take shape concurrently to the broader project design and documentation. Key planning questions to consider include: Which youth? Why? Where? With whom? When is it relevant to engage with youth?
- Young people need to be trained appropriately in the skills involved in project design. Training must be age appropriate, but equally accessible and engaging. Visual and participatory activities such as using problem trees can be powerful entry points for young people to contribute to development problem solving. Where possible, young people should be further encouraged to translate their ideas into formal forms of documentation.
- There are many entry points for young people to not only participate in program design activities led by adult facilitators, but, take the lead on training or facilitation roles themselves. Once trained, youth facilitators can engage further young people to consult on the project/program design process. Youth facilitators reduce power imbalances, which encourages young people to be more forthcoming with their suggestions.
- Partnering with youth-led organisations ensures that young people are actively engaged in all aspects of the program cycle. When designing programs or projects with youth-led organisations, establish partnership principles to develop trust with young people and guide positive interactions. Incorporate flexible funding options where possible.



## Defining Program/Project Design

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In the program/project design phase, ideas are refined into concrete operational plans that can be assessed in relation to criteria. The design phase of a project is divided into two main components: the design process and design *documentation*<sup>31</sup>. Most organisations follow the process of a 'program logic' to identify the causal links between goals and actions.<sup>32</sup> This information is communicated through documentation, commonly a Theory of Change or Log Frame Matrix, which provide detailed road maps for projects and are living documents throughout the project cycle.

## Youth Participation in Program/Project Design

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*"Youth participation in program/project design refers to young people's involvement in planning and designing initiatives to address particular development challenges".<sup>33</sup>*

We're referring to young people's active involvement in the design process and design documentation. Young people can both **participate** in design activities for development programs, as well as take on **leadership roles** throughout the design process and documentation.

Adhering to principles of participation in the design of development programs is broadly accepted by development practitioners as best practice. Nevertheless, youth perspectives are not often captured, and rarer still are young people provided opportunities to lead in program design. **This is despite many programs having either direct impacts - ie. an education based program - or indirect impacts on young people.**

## Benefits of Youth Participation in Program/Project Design:

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- **Personal insight:** Young people are often severely impacted by urgent development issues including HIV/AIDS, unemployment, displacement or climate change. Their experiences can be invaluable in informing the project in question.<sup>34</sup>
- **Unique perspective:** Young people are best informed about their peer group's priorities, interests and concerns. They are best placed to form relationships with, and consult with, other youth stakeholders, especially regarding taboo or censored topics.
- **Drive creative solutions:** Young people can offer creative solutions to issues faced by their community that older generations may not consider. In particular, youth have great technological capacity, including online skills on social media which can be leveraged in project design.<sup>35</sup>
- **Propose modern or best-practice approaches:** Young people may be currently studying or recently finished training or degrees, exposing them to up-to-date information, research experience, or theoretical approaches that can greatly benefit the design phase of a project.<sup>36</sup>

### Case Study: Pacific Girl Design Workshop

Pacific Girl is a multi-country development program funded by the Australian Government, under the Pacific Women umbrella program, designed to empower adolescent girls in Pacific Island countries.

In recognition of the principle 'nothing about us without us', Pacific Girl has been designed in partnership with young women across the

<sup>31</sup> Learning4Development, ACFID Introduction to Project Management, (Learning4Development, 2012) 12, [https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource\\_document/ACFID-Introduction-to-Project-Management-Workbook.pdf](https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID-Introduction-to-Project-Management-Workbook.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, 9

<sup>33</sup> Oaktree, Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development, 13

<sup>34</sup> DFID- CSO Youth Working Group, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 37.h

<sup>35</sup> Oaktree, Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development, 13

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, 13

Pacific. 220 young women from six countries in the Pacific participated in focus group discussions, 88 completed online surveys and 20 participated in the Pacific Girls design workshop.<sup>37</sup>

At the design workshop, young women were able to bring their development priorities and solutions to the table, closely informing the design of the Pacific Girl program. Young women from the workshop also attended the Pacific Girl Stakeholder's Dialogue where they were able to share their ideas with a network of key stakeholders from Australia and Pacific Island countries.<sup>38</sup>

## Planning for Youth Participation in Program/Project Design

### Setting goals and objectives

Planning is one of the most important steps in preparing for youth participation in not only the project design phase, but also through the entirety of the Project Cycle. Here, as the details of the project begin to take shape, planners should begin to envision their goals and objectives for youth participation. As such, goals, objectives and performance indicators for youth participation can also be woven through project design and documentation.

Broad questions to be considered include: which youth? why? where? with whom? and when is relevant to engage with youth?<sup>39</sup>

#### Which youth?

What age demographic is relevant to the project? Will a diversity of youth be included in the project? Will youth of diverse backgrounds, taking into account socio-economic status, race, gender, and disability be included?

#### Why?

Relate the participation of youth with the program goals and objectives. This will ensure a clear and

guiding foundation for youth participatory measures and actions. Consider not only why the project would benefit from youth participation, but why youth will benefit.

#### Where?

Consider whether your designated location is an appropriate place for youth to participate in the project. Will youth be required to travel? Will project staff travel to them? Is it a safe environment for youth to participate?

#### With whom?

With whom will young people be interacting with? What are their qualifications? Have they completed Child Safeguarding training?

#### When?

Consider the timing or time frame for youth participation. What times will youth be most available? How long will their participation be required? How long is appropriate or proportionate? When will training occur, and how long will adequate training take?

### Other key considerations when planning for youth participation in Program/Project design:

- **Recruiting diverse youth:** A proactive approach to including young people from diverse backgrounds must be brought to any participatory project design.
- **Sourcing skilled trainers:** It is critical to source or train existing staff who are competent trainers in participatory project planning and design or working with youth.
- **Participatory environment:** It is important that the environment encourages youth participation. For example, a formal office environment may not encourage young people to feel a sense of belonging in the space.<sup>40</sup>
- **Available resources:** If organisations have

<sup>37</sup> "What is Pacific Girl?", Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, accessed August 2010, <https://pacificwomen.org/stories-of-change/what-is-pacific-girl/>

<sup>38</sup> "Pacific Girls – the next 'Wonder Women'", Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, accessed August 2010, <https://pacificwomen.org/news/pacific-girls-the-next-wonder-women/>

<sup>39</sup> DFID- CSO Youth Working Group, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 37.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 37



limited resources, they may require young people to travel to office locations to participate in project design. Some organisations may not have the resources to compensate youth and their guardians for their time or travel requirements. This may also impact the diversity of young people who can participate in project design.

- **Accommodating to young people's needs:** Project design must be sensitive to young people's availability, resources, and cultural or gendered constraints to their participation.

## Key Steps for Youth Participation in Program/Project Design:<sup>41</sup>

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### 1. Train young people:

- Introduce young people to the basic theories and techniques used in program design. The organisation they join will often have its own theory of change and approaches to program design, such as log frames.
- Adapt the training to be age appropriate. Do not focus too much on technicalities, as this can stifle creative thinking.

### 2. Deconstruct the problem in partnership with young people:

- Facilitate a process where young people are able to break down the problem that the program seeks to address. (e.g. use a 'problem tree' activity)

### 3. Align goals:

- Make sure young people are on the same page as the organisation when it comes to project goals. Ensure there is a consensus with young people before commencing further project design activities. If there is mismatch between what the goals are perceived to be, tensions will likely arise later in the project cycle.

### 4. Identify solutions:

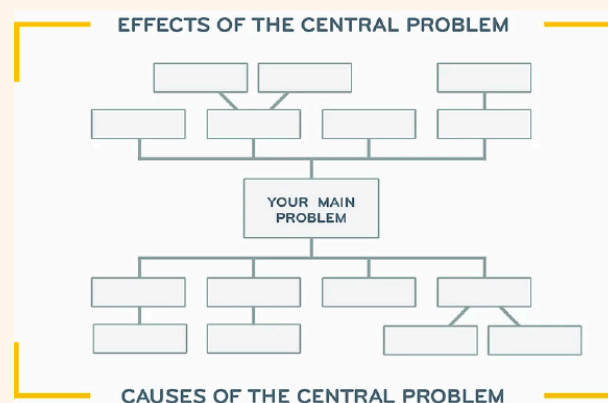
- Give young people the opportunity to identify and problem solve solutions to development issues.
- Solution trees, and design thinking activities are useful for this process. Ensure that facilitation is inclusive and allows young people to actively engage in conversation. Encourage ideas to be developed before restricting the scope of solutions based on practical constraints.

### 5. Test solutions:

- Test potential solutions by helping young people translate their ideas into professionally recognised formats such as program logics or theories of change. Ask young people about their preferred approach, and facilitate accordingly.
- Young people may also envision alternative formats to communicate their design approach, such as visual or oral approaches. These ideas should be encouraged.

## Practice Tip: Engage Young People Through Problem Trees

Training through participatory tools such as problem trees can help young people to develop an understanding of the program's focus, visualising the root problems, the impacts and opportunities for intervention.<sup>42</sup>



<sup>41</sup> Oaktree, Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development, 14.

<sup>42</sup> 'Tools for Project Planning in Community Development', Grassroots collective, accessed December 2020, <https://www.thegrassrootscollective.org/problem-objective-tree-development>

## Remember to Encourage!

It is critical that young people are encouraged to participate to their maximum potential. In many social environments, young people are not encouraged to voice their perspectives. This means that you should dedicate extra effort to encouraging young people throughout the design process to feel confident enough to voice their ideas for solutions to problems, share their understanding of the program in their own terms, as well as how they perceive the program to impact their demographic

## Youth-Led Program/Project Design

Throughout these steps, there are many opportunities for young people to take on leadership roles, rather than simply participating in adult-facilitated design workshops/activities. By stepping back and enabling young people to take the lead and facilitate training or workshops, the program amplifies its positive impact. By allowing young people to take the lead in program design, a development program can broaden its focus to include empowerment outcomes, where youth can further develop leadership skills.

### Opportunities for young people to lead in program/project design:

- **Facilitate Training:** Young people should have the opportunity to be the trainers well as the trainees. Where this may involve an adult trainer guiding an initial group of youth, these youth can then become training facilitators themselves. Peer-to-peer training can have a powerful impact in developing confidence, communication and leadership skills. Young people are often more successful at relating to and communicating with other young people, particularly if the program relates to taboo or sensitive topics

- **Facilitate Design Workshops:** Young people can facilitate design and brainstorming sessions such as problem and solution trees and activities for other young people. Young people may be more forthcoming with their ideas when presenting them to another young person, as there is less of a power distance between them.

## Partnering With Youth-Led Organisations in Program/Project Design

Oaktree partners with youth-led development organisations across the Asia-Pacific, including in Cambodia and Timor-Leste. The vast number of youth-led organisations and movements across the region demonstrate the capacity for young people to lead, demand, and create change within their communities and nations. Partnering with youth-led organisations ensures that young people are actively engaged in all aspects of the program cycle. This challenges the traditional donor-beneficiary model by centralising young people's expertise, experiences and innovation.

Here are some lessons Oaktree has learnt from our own experiences of partnering with youth-led organisations:

- **Values-driven partnership:** Oaktree has a number of principles that underpin our partnership approach to ensure we generate sustainable change with our local partners. Our partnerships are built upon the following principles: shared vision, equity, transparency, accountability, solidarity, youth empowerment, locally-led implementation, and sustainability. These principles guide our interactions with youth-led organisations and help build trust between the young people leading development organisations and Oaktree's youth volunteers and staff. Communicating our partnership principles effectively in the initial phases of a

program, including program design, ensures that our partners understand Oaktree's values and intentions, which helps to manage their vision and expectations for the project.

- **Online workshops:** Productive design workshops can be conducted with youth-led organisations remotely. There are numerous online platforms that are accessible and engaging for young people and can encourage idea sharing and freedom of thought, including Google Jamboard. At the beginning of workshops, it is important to establish shared expectations and workshop goals. This creates a safe workshop environment and enables participants' ideas to be heard, behavioural norms to be established, and ensures there are clear goals for the allotted time. When facilitating, enable contributions to be conveyed in different formats. Some young people are more confident in voicing their ideas, while others may prefer to write or express themselves in more visual ways. Workshops are about encouraging creative thinking and problem solving, so be sure to encourage diverse ideas and original thoughts.
- **Flexibility and managing unexpected events:** When partnering with youth-led organisations at any scale, it is important to factor in flexibility within the project design and implementation. As recently experienced with the Covid-19 pandemic, unexpected crises or disasters can strike and broadly disrupt the initial intention or design of development programs. Factor in the chance of such disruptions into program design to ensure your relationship with youth-organisations can be maintained during difficult periods and shifting priorities. Building flexibility into financial and funding arrangements is also worth exploring with your partner so that if disaster strikes, there is enough flexibility to ensure the donor can respond to emerging needs, or pivot their programming.

- **Capacity building and the road to independence:** Many youth-led organisations strongly benefit from capacity building training provided to their internal staff. In designing programs, consider whether resources can be dedicated to the professional development of local staff and whether staff within donor organisations are well placed to provide training or mentoring. It is important to keep in mind that youth-led organisations should aim to develop their skills towards greater organisational independence. So, whilst assistance with administrative tasks such as report writing and documentation may be beneficial to begin with, a youth organisation's independence in such tasks should be the end goal.

### Oaktree Case Study: KYLA's Path To Independence

Oaktree has been working with the Cambodian development organisation KAPE (Kampuchean Action to Promote Education) for over ten years, with a shared vision for improved quality of education and access to opportunities for young people. Oaktree is in its third year of working with subsidiary program KYLA (Kampuchean Young Leaders' Action). KYLA is youth-led and governed by a Secretariat composed of previous scholars and alumni of KAPE initiatives. It is powered by a growing volunteer base across target schools within the Kampong Cham and Tbong Khmum Provinces. KYLA builds on the work of KAPE, to provide further opportunities for young people, including strengthening networks, scholarship support, knowledge sharing, and career counselling. Since forming the partnership, Oaktree has been working to support KYLA's long-term goal to function as an independent organisation from KAPE. KYLA is making significant strides, particularly in the areas of policy planning and financial management, enabling Oaktree to slowly adjust its partnering role accordingly.

# Program/Project Design: Youth Engagement Checklist

*The following is a checklist for practitioners looking to mainstream youth throughout the program/project design phase of the development cycle:*

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- ☐ Have you planned for youth participation alongside the broader program design, incorporating tangible goals, objectives, and performance indicators?
  - ☐ Have you considered how to recruit young people from a diversity of backgrounds?
  - ☐ Have you sourced or trained existing staff in participatory project design and working with youth?
  - ☐ Do you have an appropriate environment or setting for young people to contribute to program design?
  - ☐ Does your organisation have adequate resources to remunerate or accommodate young people for or during their participation in project design?
  - ☐ Is your organisation able to accommodate the needs of young people, including being flexible to their commitments and schedules?
  - ☐ Have you adequately trained young people in project design theories, adapting it so it is age appropriate, and introduced them to the organisation's goals, objectives, theory of change, etc?
  - ☐ Have you used participatory tools such as problem trees to engage young people in design thinking?
  - ☐ Have you checked to ensure all young people involved share an understanding of the project goals and objectives of their participation?
  - ☐ Have you encouraged young people to share their ideas for solutions to development problems during design workshops?
  - ☐ Have young people had the opportunity to communicate their project design ideas into formalised or alternative documentation?
  - ☐ Have opportunities been facilitated for young people to take the lead during project design activities?

# Program/Project Implementation

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Young people can take on a vast array of roles in project implementation, from administrative roles to peer educators or consultants.
- Young people are strategic assets throughout project implementation. They bridge communication gaps to project beneficiaries, key stakeholders and particularly with other young people. Young people are also receptive to new ideas, and can encourage community-wide adoption of project activities or interventions.
- Peer education is where young people can lead in project implementation and occupy roles such as teachers or facilitators amongst their peer age group. Not only does this create opportunities for young people to develop their leadership and communication skills, young people are highly effective in designing and conveying content that is engaging to other young people.
- When partnering with youth-led organisations, set expectations early so parties understand their respective responsibilities clearly. Online collaboration options created must be appropriate and accessible as possible for young people. Traditional donor requirements should be revised to ensure they are proportionate to the youth organisation's capacity.

## Defining Program/Project Implementation

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Project Implementation refers to the delivery of interventions or activities planned in development projects or programs.

## Youth Participation in Program/Project Implementation

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*'Youth participation in program/project implementation refers to the role that young people can play in the execution of program/project plans'.<sup>43</sup>*

Young people have their own unique skills and attributes to offer in the project implementation phase. Young people are not often granted opportunities to take responsibility for seeing through project activities that impact the lives of others. It is incredibly empowering for young people to see their ideas and efforts translated into action.

Young people can participate in a range of activities including facilitation or demonstrative activities, administrative or assistant roles, consultants, peer educators or community liaison officers. There are countless opportunities for young people to participate in development projects, and they should be engaged to share their own creative ideas on how they could best assist the project.

### Case Study: Child Centred Climate Change Adaptation (4CA) Program Phase II

Plan International's Child Centred Climate Change Adaptation (4CA) Program seeks to put children and young people at the heart of climate change education and action. Phase II of the program was implemented across three South East Asian countries: Indonesia, Vietnam and Myanmar. Between 2014 and 2016, Phase

II reached thousands of school aged children through targeted climate change education programs.<sup>44</sup>

The 4CA program empowered children and youth to take action on what they'd learnt, through the provision of small grants for communities and schools to design and implement adaptation activities. In Vietnam, the program also involved the launching of seed grants for children and young people's climate change adaptation strategies. In schools, young people were trained as leaders, advocates and facilitators, enabling many to develop CCA plans, conduct advocacy sessions with local government, and facilitate peer-to-peer learning with other children.<sup>45</sup>

## Benefits of Youth Participation in Program/Project Implementation<sup>46</sup>

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- **Bridge communication gaps:** Young people may be best placed to communicate the strategy of the project to diverse members of the community or beneficiaries of the project. Young people can demonstrate actions, creating a bridge between the implementing organisation and a target group or key stakeholders, particularly if these groups are predominantly composed of other young people.
- **Facilitate community-wide adoption:** Young people are often more adaptable and receptive to new ideas, or development interventions. Young people can work to communicate or promote a new development intervention or idea with the community,

## Key Steps for Youth Participation in Program/Project Implementation<sup>47</sup>

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### 1. Offer support and guidance:

- Whether young people are involved in

<sup>43</sup> Oaktree, Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development, 15

<sup>44</sup> Plan International, Evaluation of Plan International's Child Centred Climate Change Adaptation (4CA) Project: South East Asia Region Phase II, (plan.org.au: Plan International, 2016), 6

<https://www.plan.org.au/-/media/plan/documents/reports/evaluation-of-plan-international-child-centred-climate-change-adaptation-project-july-2016.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Plan International, Climate Change Adaptation, (plan.org.au: Plan International, 2019), <https://www.plan.org.au/-/media/plan/documents/program-profiles/2019-program-profile-climate-change-adaptation.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Oaktree, Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development, 15

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, 15



the implementation stage as consultants, partners or leaders, they can benefit from constructive feedback on their performance and recommendations about how they can be more effective in their involvement. Consider appointing a staff member as a dedicated youth liaison so that young people have a point person with whom they can raise concerns.

## 2. Encourage improvement:

- Create a positive feedback culture whereby improvements to project implementation can be discussed freely between young people and more experienced staff.

## 3. Strengthen relationships between young people and other stakeholders:

- Encourage young people and other stakeholders to build relationships. This may be facilitated through activities where you recognise each other's strengths and unique inputs.

## 4. Mediate tensions:

- At times, tensions can arise if young people's expectations of their involvement do not align with practice. Effective communication with youth, and encouraging young people's ongoing feedback is critical to maintaining positive relationships, and to ensure any conflicts are resolved as they arise.

## 5. Maintain a reflexive approach:

- Throughout the implementation phase, it is critical that actions reflect the original goals of youth mainstreaming, including the full integration of youth in project activities where possible. This requires regular reflection on project activities, and their progress, and ensuring strong, open communication to young people where their role may need to evolve or be adapted to respond to project alterations or challenges.<sup>48</sup>



## Examples of Youth-led Program/ Project Implementation

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There are many creative opportunities for young people to not only be beneficiaries of development programs, but also to take on **active leadership** roles throughout the implementation phase of development programs.

### Peer Education

Peer education has shown to be a powerful entry point for young people to participate in project implementation. Young people engaged in peer education as teachers or facilitators, have the opportunity to develop their leadership and communication skills. Young people can be highly effective in conveying their message to other young people, as they can seem more credible in some subject areas. Young people can not only be trained to deliver educational content to other young people, but can participate in the process of designing the content and the formats of the lessons themselves. Young people have highly valuable insights into how other young people like to learn, and their creative ideas should be drawn upon.

### Case Study: Mainstreaming SRHR in Education

Senegal's Population Council together with organisation Frontiers ran a nation-wide adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights program from 1999-2007, funded by USAID. The program aimed to improve the approach to SRHR in Senegal at both the national and local level. Over 28,000 young people across three regions were reached through peer education programs, including at risk youth, with 70 young people recruited and trained in education for SRHR and delivering a core curriculum. The community response for youth implementation of SRHR initiatives was overwhelmingly positive and gained support from a range of critical gatekeepers such as local political and religious leaders. The program was influential across different government ministries and the initiative was scaled up and delivered across all regions of the country.<sup>49</sup>

## Partnering With Youth-Led Organisations in Program/Project Implementation

Here are some tips Oaktree has gained from our own experiences partnering with local youth-led organisations:

- **Setting expectations:** Youth-led organisations may exist in various stages of development and be unaccustomed to engaging a donor partner. Based on our learnings with youth-led organisations, it is important to ensure young people have clear expectations of their communication responsibilities and administrative requirements when embarking on a partnership with a donor. As such, Oaktree recommends prioritising an expectation setting workshop and/or creating a shared expectations and working norms document during the orientation process alongside MOU signing. This will help manage youth-organisations' expectations from the outset, forging an open and trusting relationship with their donor partner.
- **Managing capacity and administrative requirements:** Working with youth-led organisations, particularly, those that may be unregistered or have limited administrative capacity, can pose difficulties when complying with donor requirements. In fact, donor requirements may be so burdensome that it may compromise youth organisations ability to conduct their programs. In Oaktree's learnings from partnering with youth-led organisations, it is highly impactful to make adjustments to administrative requirements such as MOU documents to ensure they are as accessible as possible, and proportionate to the youth organisation's capacity. This also encourages greater trust between organisations, which is highly valued when building relationships with youth organisations.
- **Remote Collaboration:** Working in partnership with youth-led organisations can have the added difficulty of accessibility, requiring remote collaboration. There should be confidence in young people to have the skills to navigate online platforms, but also the provision and support in place to upskill where needed. Preemptive efforts to scope youth partners' proficiency and comfort in utilising various online tools should be made, as well as open engagement to find which communication platforms are most accessible and affordable for young people in their local context. For example, social platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook may be far more effective communication tools. Funds also may need to be allocated to ensure youth-led organisations have access to reliable internet or mobile plans.
- **Upholding commitment to partnership principles:** From the donor's perspective it is extremely important that partnership principles are regularly revisited, to reflect and make evaluations on how well the principles are being upheld. Donors may face strong pressure to make the maximum impact in the most efficient way. However, it can be easy for these pressures to override upholding the partnership principles, particularly in relation to honouring the youth-led organisation's vision for programming. Instead of creating barriers which deter young peoples' ideas, consider how you can develop their vision into a shared vision - one that encourages solidarity between donor and implementing partner.

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<sup>48</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives, 173.

<sup>49</sup> DFID- CSO Youth Working Group, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 61-62.



## Program/Project Implementation: Youth Engagement Checklist

*The following is a checklist for practitioners looking to mainstream youth throughout the program/project phase of the development cycle:*

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- ☐ Have young people been consulted on their key skills and ideas as to how they could best serve the development project?
  - ☐ Have you considered the benefit of a dedicated youth liaison to provide feedback and support to young people engaged in the development project?
  - ☐ Have processes been established to create positive feedback channels between young people and more experienced staff?
  - ☐ Have young people had opportunities to meet and engage with project stakeholders?
  - ☐ Have clear expectations of youth involvement been established from the outset, and clearly communicated to young people throughout the project?
  - ☐ Have the goals of youth mainstreaming been regularly revisited, ensuring young people's integration in project activities is being maximised?

# Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Young people are invaluable in MEL design and implementation. Firstly, when designing MEL frameworks, young people are best-placed to provide indicators relevant to their age group. Secondly, in the implementation of MEL, young people can help collect more accurate information and data. Using youth facilitators decreases the power imbalance between program participants and program evaluators, yielding better data for future MEL work.
- To best equip young people with the ability to design, consult on and implement MEL frameworks, young people must be trained and given relevant, effective techniques to carry out their duties. Power dynamics must also be addressed and supervisors should provide proper support and guidance.
- Young people face many barriers to participating in the MEL process. These include: a lack of training, tokenistic participation and adults dismissing the value of youth ideas and interpretations. These barriers can be mitigated by providing training, consulting young people and enacting cultural changes within the organisation.

## Defining Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning phase identifies the targets, results, changes and challenges of development programs.<sup>50</sup>

Monitoring	Using indicators to measure program effectiveness over time.
Evaluation	The long-term and systematic assessment of an ongoing or completed project.
Learning	Incorporating lessons learned into ongoing practices to increase effectiveness and sustainability.

## Youth Participation and Youth Mainstreaming in MEL

For too long, young people have been seen merely as the beneficiaries of development programs rather than a **prime resource**.

Young people are particularly well-placed to participate in MEL processes for programs that have a youth focus. In designing MEL frameworks for youth-centric programs, young people should be consulted. They have intuitive knowledge of what young people would best respond to. In implementing those MEL frameworks, young people can assist in data collection and analysis.

Involving young people in MEL allows them to experience first hand the issues involved in development monitoring and how initiatives impact communities.

## Participating in consultations for designing MEL frameworks

Young people can be consulted during MEL framework design. As young people themselves, they are more inclined to understand what young people respond to. In order to assess programs you need to know what you are trying to achieve and how: that is, your aims, objectives and planned activities. Young people can contribute to this stage of MEL by ensuring that data collection methods and indicators are relevant to youth.

### Case Study: Oaktree MEL

Young volunteers from Oaktree attend annual review trips to evaluate their partner projects in Timor-Leste and Cambodia. Prior to these trips, Oaktree volunteers are trained in monitoring and evaluation techniques, relevant theories and how to develop evaluation plans for their projects. Project beneficiaries are predominantly young people, making this youth-led monitoring and evaluation process a peer-to-peer endeavour.

Youth-to-youth semi-structured interviews and focus groups provide detailed qualitative data. In practice, it has led to interesting project insights that have improved future initiatives. Additionally, the experience builds the capacity of the young volunteers and supports their professional development. Oaktree volunteers have been able to use this experience to educate other aspiring MEL practitioners on the processes they need to take to execute a successful program.<sup>51</sup>

### What does Youth Mainstreaming in MEL look like?

- **Collecting age-related disaggregated data:** Breaking down data by one's age ensures that the distinct opinions and experiences of certain groups can be identified. This data should be accompanied by data on gender, locality (urban/rural/remote), sub-nationally (province/

<sup>50</sup> "Monitoring and Evaluation for learning and performance improvement," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Date of Access: 4 August, 2020, <http://www.fao.org/investment-learning-platform/themes-and-tasks/monitoring-and-evaluation/en/>

<sup>51</sup> OAKTREE, ACFID Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development (October 2016), 17, [https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource\\_document/ACFID%20Practice%20Note%20-%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Development%20FINAL.pdf](https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID%20Practice%20Note%20-%20Youth%20Participation%20in%20Development%20FINAL.pdf)

state), socioeconomic status, and disability. Age is a common reason for exclusion or marginalisation due to perceived inferiority or social status of younger people.<sup>52</sup> By collecting age disaggregated data, you ensure that the MEL framework is able to identify whether differing age groups are benefiting equally from the program.<sup>53</sup>

- **Youth indicators:** These are indicators of what the program intends to achieve, relative to the context.<sup>54</sup> Youth indicators, which are targets for youth involvement, are integral to ensuring that the program empowers the emerging leaders of our region to participate. Indicators that monitor youth mainstreaming in development aims to ensure that initiatives are meeting broader endeavours of youth-focused programming.

## Why Involve Young People in MEL?

### Youth participation in the design of MEL

- **Evaluation planning and design:** Young people can help develop indicators that are relevant and reflect young people's needs and priorities. The impact of a project or a policy on youth can be dramatically different to the experience of adults. It is therefore vital to include youth perspectives in MEL framework design to better understand the effectiveness of projects and programs.

### Case Study: Family Health International

"Participation of young people in evaluations may lead to issues being identified which might otherwise be overlooked. For example, in the evaluation of the Families Orphans and Children Under Stress (FOCUS) programme in Zimbabwe, children and young people identified stigma and sexual abuse as major issues."<sup>55</sup>

As seen in the example above, by ensuring that young people's voices are heard when designing means of evaluation, you can ensure that it is encompassing of the issues that matter to youth, not just what is thought to matter to them.

### Youth participation in MEL implementation

- **Data collection:** Youth-led peer-to-peer MEL activities provide young people with the opportunity to feel comfortable and develop trust and rapport, helping to alleviate researcher-participant power imbalances and can lead to responses that are more honest and nuanced. Additionally, young people are usually equipped with social media and mobile phone technology that enables them to provide a rapid feedback loop with MEL implementers.<sup>56</sup>
- **Youth-led accountability :** Young people have the capacity to lead the MEL process due to their ability to process, analyse and review the data that is collected. Young people offer unique perspectives and insights to data analysis and interpretation. They can identify themes that adults may not readily identify with, leading to a more accurate reflection of the experiences of young people.

### Youth mainstreaming in MEL

- **Accurate, refined data:** A lack of age disaggregated data and specific measurable, achievable, realistic objectives is a significant problem. The absence of this data means that the vast majority of programming efforts are unable to identify the impacts of the initiative on different age groups. There is a lack of systematic country-level indicators and data that can help to form a better understanding of the impact of initiatives. One's experiences are unique and should be treated that way. By failing to acknowledge the range of ways initiatives can impact people, you are missing the opportunity to identify the means to make programming better for the range of demographics involved.

<sup>52</sup> DFAT, Education Learning and Development Module: Monitoring and Evaluation (2018),15, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/practitioner-monitoring-and-evaluation.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Commonwealth of Australia- DFAT, Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy (February 2016),27,<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 29

<sup>55</sup> Department for International Development, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 71<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 29

<sup>56</sup> Overseas Development Institute, Communications monitoring, evaluation and learning toolkit (January2018),15,[https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/long-form-downloads/odi\\_rapid\\_mel\\_toolkit\\_201801.pdf](https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/long-form-downloads/odi_rapid_mel_toolkit_201801.pdf)[https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/long-form-downloads/odi\\_rapid\\_mel\\_toolkit\\_201801.pdf](https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/long-form-downloads/odi_rapid_mel_toolkit_201801.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Helen Cahill and Babak Davdand,"Reconceptualising youth participation: A Framework to inform action,Volume 95,(2018),250, <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0190740918304614?token=D49F696CBE3B272D8A8992ADF43935CEEE503E3776F81DE889E84B5A3CD466E291983BAEF2F1E847FF0827D62D5A4B63>

## Key Steps For Youth Participation and Youth Mainstreaming in MEL

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### What needs to be done to create an environment conducive to youth participation

#### 1. Train young people

MEL is a specialist skill, so young people will likely require training before undertaking this activity. Train young people in monitoring and evaluation techniques and theories - consult with them regarding the standard of difficulty. Adapt to an age-appropriate level where advised. Young people must be trained in areas such as researching and data collection.

#### 2. Address power dynamics

Consider the power dynamics that exist that could make it difficult for young people to lead MEL. In certain local contexts the position of youth in society may make it inappropriate for young people to run MEL sessions with older generations. It is vital to have an understanding of the age hierarchy from the outset

The process of addressing and resolving power dynamics can be aided through recognising that power is relational which leads to subsequent reflection on how individuals are positioned to each other. By doing so, it helps us to acknowledge that not everyone has equal positions within a project or even a community. From this, further considerations can be deciphered such as how the roles are assigned, adopted and enacted and how relationships are managed to ensure equity and respect between all parties.<sup>57</sup> This process can be further enhanced by undertaking communication exercises where participants practised respectful and assertive communication and effective listening to those senior or junior to them.

#### 3. Choose effective, relevant techniques

Consider which MEL techniques might be most appropriate for young people to carry out. Be mindful of contextual factors (for example, cultural age-related power dynamics). Involve young people in the development of evaluation plans and ask for their input regarding what techniques they would consider to be most effective. This can include traditional MEL techniques as well as more visual methods such as storyboards, body-mapping and role-playing.

#### 4. Offer support and guidance

Provide young people with feedback on their ideas and performance. Giving advice and feedback is valuable to their development as a leader in MEL.

#### 5. Encourage young people's unique ideas and interpretations

Be mindful that dismissing young people's methodology ideas or interpretations of data may be disheartening. Nurture new and unique ideas, and workshop them together to build young people's confidence.

### Case Study: The Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP)

The Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP) in Uganda has young people leading field based MEL as part of their activities on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), livelihoods and conflict resolution with their peers in schools and communities. Their experiences were discussed and recorded during a youth guidance project workshop.<sup>58</sup>

The young people involved in the process were given interactive group-based training on the definition of MEL and the purpose it serves in a development context. They were also trained in evaluation tools such as focus group discussions, life skills checklists and surveys. Additionally, they were taught how to practice monitoring through forms such as daily log sheets and books, demonstrations and replication records, and participant lists.

The hands-on training resulted in significant benefits to MEL outcomes - it revealed a need to rephrase questions to ensure more user-friendly data collection methods. This led to the rephrasing of questions to ensure that it was more suitable to local contexts.

## What needs to be done to create an environment conducive to youth mainstreaming in MEL

Key steps to ensure that young people are an increasing focus in development programming efforts:<sup>59</sup>

### 1. Build a case for placing young people and social inclusion at the centre of developmental practice

The evidence supporting the case for mainstreaming young people in development is abundant. Help generate buy-in from relevant stakeholders on the benefits and merits of youth mainstreaming in MEL contexts and the broader development sector.

### 2. Establish a clear theory of change

Make sure that both the program manager and the evaluator have a common understanding about the program and can differentiate between “what the intervention does” and “what it wants to achieve”. This enables clear goals to be set and the benefits of reaching them.<sup>60</sup>

## Barriers & Solutions

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### The need for training

A common barrier to youth participation in MEL is the need for training, not only for the young people in question but also the trainers responsible for training young people.

*How to overcome this barrier*

- *Reach out to youth networks: Youth-led organisations may have experience training youth in MEL. Their experience in the field is invaluable and is easily transferable to organisations looking to involve youth more.*
- *Allocate resources: Training can be costly, but if an organisation is committed to youth participation and empowerment, they will need to reflect this commitment in terms of financial resources. It will pay dividends in the succeeding years*

## Tokenistic participation

Tokenistic participation occurs when young people leading or participating in MEL are given menial and unimportant tasks or roles. This is youth participation in name only and fails to tap into the substantive benefits young people can bring to MEL.

*How to overcome this barrier:*<sup>61</sup>

- *Ask questions: Take the time to ask young people what works, what doesn't and whether they feel valued. This could be in the form of anonymous questionnaires, in which young people are given an opportunity to voice their opinions.*
- *Actively encourage youth participation: It is imperative that there is room specifically for young people in meetings and the design and implementation of MEL. An 'open door' approach may not be enough for some youth. Being proactive is necessary to ensure that youth feel as though they are being heard.*

## Dismissing the value of youth, their ideas and interpretations

Young people present new and unique ideas to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. It is crucial that their suggestions are nurtured and crafted to form constructive and effective practices. By working with young people, they will be able to assist in the development of evaluation plans and identifying what techniques they would consider to be most effective. Their knowledge of the unique challenges of youth are invaluable to ensuring that MEL practices are as effective as possible. Some stakeholders will be sensitive about discussing faults or failures with young people due to their perceived inferiority. It is integral that the benefits of youth participation in MEL are emphasised.<sup>62</sup>

*How to change the mindsets of those who doubt the benefits of youth mainstreaming in MEL*

<sup>58</sup> Department for International Development, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 77

<sup>59</sup> DFAT, Education Learning and Development Module: Monitoring and Evaluation (DFAT, July 2018), 15, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/practitioner-monitoring-and-evaluation.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> International Labour Organization, Guide on Measuring Decent Jobs for Youth: Monitoring, evaluation and learning in labour market programmes (ILO, 2018), 4 [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms\\_627311.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_627311.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Youth Friendly, What is Tokenism and How to Avoid It, Page 2, [http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/what\\_is\\_tokenism\\_and\\_how\\_to\\_avoid\\_it.pdf](http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/what_is_tokenism_and_how_to_avoid_it.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Department for International Development, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 71



The benefits of having a youth focus in MEL are unbeknown to many in the development sector. Many people believe that young people are not worth investing in or focusing on.

*How to overcome this barrier:*

- Seek the expertise and knowledge of youth organisations: We advocate for youth participation and youth mainstreaming because young people are key stakeholders in development and deserve to be heard. Get in contact with organisations such as ours who give you the resources and knowledge you need to help change minds.
- This is explored in greater detail in the Organisational Governance section.



## Monitoring, Evaluation And Learning: Youth Engagement Checklist

*The following is a checklist for practitioners looking to mainstream youth throughout the MEL phase of the development cycle:*

- ☐ Are there organisational mechanisms in place to support youth mainstreaming in MEL operations?
- ☐ Have local contexts been taken into consideration? Is it appropriate to have youth-led MEL in this context?
- ☐ Is there a designated leader to work with young people in MEL? Have you determined whether they need to undertake any training or certifications to work with young people?
- ☐ Are you collecting age-related disaggregated data and utilising youth indicators?
- ☐ Are young people provided opportunities to lead MEL activities, including data collection?
- ☐ Have you considered which MEL techniques are most suitable to young people, and involved them in the decision-making process?
- ☐ Is there suitable and adjusted training provided for young people in your MEL, and not a one-size-fits-all approach?
- ☐ Is there periodic training provided to young people, given the proven benefits of on-the-job training?
- ☐ Are there adequate resources dedicated to efforts to mainstream young people throughout your MEL process?
- ☐ Are you collecting evidence on the benefits of youth participation in MEL?

# POLICY AND PLANNING

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*This section details how young people add value to national and regional-level policy planning processes and provides advice on how to meaningfully engage with young people.*





## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Young people, due to their large global demographic, are often disproportionately affected by development issues. As important stakeholders on a wide range of issues, young people should be involved in development policy and decision-making processes.
- A wide range of factors such as political will, resource availability, cultural practices and the existence of pre-existing frameworks determine the viability of youth participation.
- Consultations yield the best results when they are conducted with a representative and diverse sample of young people. Engagement strategies should be implemented to ensure this outcome.
- Giving feedback to young people on their contributions is a vital component of the engagement process.
- Do not confine young people to 'youth issues'.

## Young People in Policy and Planning

Young people make up the majority of most developing nations' populations.<sup>63</sup> As a result, development issues often disproportionately affect young people.<sup>64</sup> They are therefore an important stakeholder in development policy and should be included at every stage of the policy cycle. This section outlines how young people can participate as leaders and partners in local, regional, and national decision-making structures, the factors that affect youth participation and the key steps to secure meaningful youth engagement.

### Purposes and Benefits of Youth Participation in Policy Development

**Young people are best able to convey the ever-evolving nuances of the issues they face everyday.** Young people bring value to policy development processes with their unique skills, experiences and perspectives on a wide range of issues. Young people face the brunt of urgent development issues such as unemployment following economic downturn (e.g. GFC, COVID-19), and sexual health issues such as HIV/AIDS. As such, they have valuable on-the-ground experience through which to inform policy.

**Youth participation in the policy process strengthens inclusivity.** Involving young people increases representation of underrepresented or marginalised groups, enabling policy and planning processes to better serve the interests of the wider community.

**Engaging young people can also minimise civil unrest,** especially in post-conflict nations prone to instability. Consulting and partnering with young people on policies that affect them increases the likelihood of their long-term commitment to development processes and minimises conflict that can arise out of feelings of disempowerment or

disenfranchisement. Participating in policymaking gives young people a sense of ownership over projects and initiatives,<sup>65</sup> leading to them becoming invested in the long-term effective implementation of those policies.

### Factors Influencing Young People's Policy Impact

It's important to recognise that youth participation and mainstreaming do not occur in a vacuum, but within wider societal, political, institutional and legal contexts.

#### What is Policy Impact?

Policy impact can be loosely defined as 'having had a consequential, measurable change on the direction of a particular issue'.<sup>66</sup> For youth participation, policy impact focuses on whether young people's views genuinely and tangibly influence legislative change or organisational policy.

Documents such as *Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning* by the Commonwealth Secretariat provide frameworks to identify enablers (contexts conducive to change) and disablers (contexts adverse to change) to effective youth mainstreaming.<sup>67</sup>

Below is a list of relevant factors and key questions you should consider, before engaging with young people, in order to maximise their policy impact.

#### Societal Factors

Social norms dictate the extent to which youth participation is valued and possible.

- What is the prevailing view of young people, and what is their status in society?
- Are they seen as equal partners in public and private domains?

<sup>63</sup> Inayatullah, Sohail. 2016. "Youth bulge: Demographic dividend, time bomb, and other futures." *Journal of Futures Studies* 21-34.

<sup>64</sup> Gyampo, Van. 2013. "Youth Participation in Local and National Development in Ghana." *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5.9.

<sup>65</sup> Hoy, D. 2008. "Building Capacity And Community Resilience To HIV: A Project Designed, Implemented, And Evaluated By Young Lao People." *Global Public Health* 3(1), 47-61.

<sup>66</sup> Start, Daniel, and Ingie Hovland. 2004. *Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>67</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat. 2017. *Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

- Are there historical factors that discourage young people from engaging in the political process?

## Societal Barriers to Youth Participation in Cambodia

Through social media and NGOS like the Union of Youth Federation of Cambodia (UYFC), young Cambodians are becoming more informed and engaged in civil society.

However, the age and knowledge hierarchy within Cambodian society downplays young people's potential for change, which is a primary barrier to meaningful youth participation. Many young people living in rural areas and migrant workers in other countries are left out of initiatives organised by political parties and NGOs. Mistrust in political agendas and the justice system is also rife. Given the historical legacy of war in Cambodia, young people are cautious about participating in political activities. Civic engagement is widely associated with risks,<sup>68</sup> leading to a lack of support and encouragement from parents and the wider community. Due to these societal factors, youth voices are rarely incorporated in Cambodian policies and programmes, at the local or national level.

### Meso-Level Structural Factors

- What are the current political and investment commitments to youth mainstreaming in terms of political will and financial spending?
- Is there a strong and facilitative youth sector?
- Are organisational structures and processes congruent with the goals of national youth mainstreaming? Check out the Organisational Governance section for more information.

### Political Will

To generate and sustain political will for youth

participation in development policy, you must assess and negotiate the wider political context under which policy development is being undertaken. What are the incentives and disincentives for policy-makers in this situation?

It may be necessary to frame youth mainstreaming in line with dominant political narratives to obtain wider political support for policy change.

### Spending Commitments

Political will, alone, will not automatically lead to public spending or donor commitments to youth mainstreaming - pre-existing budget commitments may be prioritised. Securing financial support may require additional systematic evidence-based advocacy to justify investing in youth.

It is also important to note that a youth focus, if not adequately mainstreamed and made an integral part of planning across sectors, may be one of the first victims of defunding.<sup>69</sup>

### Macro-Level Structural Factors

Global and national social and economic policy systems influence the ability of organisations to implement youth mainstreaming effectively.

- To what extent are human rights conventions concerning young people translated into domestic policy or programmes?

### Conventions and Legislation on Non-Discrimination and Equality

Ratification and legislative enactments of human rights conventions strengthen the case for youth mainstreaming. Unlike other social groups, young people do not yet have a specific set of human rights instruments. Contrast this to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which is a powerful tool in the gender mainstreaming movement.<sup>70</sup> A similar convention on youth rights becomes an important subject in this context. Youth

<sup>68</sup> OECD. 2013. OECD.org. August. Accessed August 15, 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesanddevelopment/youth-issues-in-cambodia.htm>.

<sup>69</sup> YMCA. 2020. OUT OF SERVICE: A REPORT EXAMINING LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE ON YOUTH SERVICES IN ENGLAND & WALES. London: YMCA England & Wales.

<sup>70</sup> UN General Assembly. 1979. Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Geneva: United Nations.

mainstreaming planners will need to examine their own legislative environments to reinforce their rationale for youth mainstreaming.

**Example:** The existence of affirmative action programs mandated by legislation (e.g. quotas for young people's meaningful participation as political party candidates) can help you build a case for youth participation and mainstreaming.

### *Policy Commitments to Peace, Social Equality and Democratisation*

Youth mainstreaming has a greater chance of success when the macro-policy environment is committed to social equality, public goods such as health and education, and non-violent resolutions to conflict. For example, in Scandinavia, success in gender mainstreaming and attaining equality was attributed to the welfare state, where ideologies of social security and care were linked to women's participation in the economy, in political parties and political movements.<sup>71</sup> The supplementation of social security safety nets for young people who 'fall through the cracks', in the forms of education and healthcare services can be significantly advantageous in youth development contexts. Political paradigms based on austerity, small government and increasing cuts to the social sector strains the ability to prioritise social safety nets, enhance youth participation and welfare, and ensure access to healthcare, education and other services. These kinds of paradigms pose additional barriers to potential public investment in youth mainstreaming processes.



## Case Study: India's Right to Information (RTI) Act

The Right to Information Act was passed in India in 2005 to uphold the Indian government's commitment to transparency and accountability, as well as to encourage public participation in governance. The Act gives citizens the right to request and receive information on any government program (including its process, spending or outcome) and has been recognised by the Supreme Court of India as an integral part of the right to freedom of speech in the country.

The YP foundation, a youth-based organisation in India, played a key role in disseminating information about the RTI to young people in India and training them on its potential application in their lives. Through these initiatives, young people across India have been exercising the rights granted through the Act, actively seeking out information pertaining to government processes in programs that affect them. In one estimate, the RTI has been '*taken over by young people*',<sup>72</sup> with young people using the act to seek further transparency and accountability from the government.

## Engaging Young People in Policy Frameworks

### - How Do Young People Participate? Beyond Tokenism to Meaningful Engagement

It is important to adopt a partnership approach to working with young people in policy and planning contexts. This means treating young people as equal stakeholders and as partners to be worked alongside, where their knowledge, experience, expertise, and input are valued.<sup>73</sup> Examples of the partnership approach in policy-making include **shared decision-making** with young people and meaningful **youth consultation**.

<sup>71</sup> Borchorst, Anette, and Birte Siim. 2008. "Woman-friendly policies and state feminism: Theorizing Scandinavian gender equality." *Feminist Theory* 9.2, 207-224.

<sup>72</sup> GN Bureau. 2010. *Governance Now*. April 1. Accessed August 12, 2020 . <https://www.governancenow.com/gov-next/rti/rti-and-power-youth>.

<sup>73</sup> Youth Affairs Council of South Australia. 2016. *Better Together: A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People*. Adelaide: Youth Affairs Council of South Australia.

Practice models of engagement also provide frameworks to ensure that engagement with young people is appropriate and meaningful. Hart's Ladder of Participation<sup>74</sup> is a model for youth participation practice that has been embraced by organisations across Australia, notably including a number of state and territory peak youth bodies.<sup>75</sup> Hart's ladder focuses on the levels of influence for young people participating in engagement processes. It measures youth engagement via rungs of a ladder, which represent levels of real participation. In the forms of participation in the first rungs of the ladder, young people are present, but not participating – this manifests manipulation, decoration, and tokenism.

The ladder places the highest form of youth participation as the situation where young people and adults share decision-making. The ladder emphasises the need to distinguish between forms of participation that tokenise and manipulate young people, as opposed to those that empower them to create real impact on issues that affect them.

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria outlines three critical principles that underlie effective youth participation practice.<sup>76</sup> These are:

- **Empowerment:** Young people having greater control over their lives through participation.
- **Purposeful engagement:** Young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant and influencing real outcomes.
- **Inclusiveness:** Ensuring that all young people are able to participate

The Foundation for Young Australians also outlines some common themes for meaningful youth participation<sup>77</sup>: meaning, control and connectedness.

**Meaning** refers to establishing connections between young people's own value systems and stories, and

the mission at hand. The extent to which young people engage will be determined by the overlap between their own stories about what is meaningful, with the bigger stories of 'what are we doing here'. Recognising and establishing a clear link between young people's own experiences and the task at hand can make for far more meaningful engagement.

**Control** refers to young peoples' feelings of meaningful involvement in that they can clearly see where their unique contributions make a difference.

**Connectedness** refers to relationships within the group and with a wider community. Recognising and supporting young people through a network of relationships that provide a sense of security and connectedness is vital to meaningful and sustained participation.

The above models and others overlap on a number of key concepts in involving young people in participation processes. The below checklist offers a number of key questions to consider before engaging young people in participation processes.

#### Before you engage young people:

- Have you clearly defined your purpose for involving young people in the policy process?
- Will their engagement revolve around issues that matter to them?
- Is participation genuine – is it being done for the right reasons, and is the partnership approach lying at the heart of engagement?
- Are you adhering to the values and contributions of young people?
- Do young people have the skills to participate, or can they be otherwise trained in the required skills, so as to not feel overwhelmed or disconnected?

<sup>74</sup> Hart, Roger. 1987. "Children's Participation in Planning and Design." *Spaces for Children* 217-239.

<sup>75</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. 2004. *Taking Young People Seriously: Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions*. Melbourne: Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities; Youth Affairs Council of South Australia. 2016. *Better Together: A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People*. Adelaide: Youth Affairs Council of South Australia.

<sup>76</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. 2004. *Taking Young People Seriously: Young People on Boards and Committees*. Melbourne: Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities.

<sup>77</sup> Wierenga, Ani, Anna Wood, Gabrielle Trenbath, Jessie Kelly, and Olivia Vidakovic. 2003. *Sharing a New Story: Young People in Decision-Making*. Melbourne: Australian Youth Research Centre



- Is the project adequately resourced, in terms of financial resources, people and in kind support? Young people are more likely to participate if there are no out-of-pocket expenses – are access to transport, subsidy of training and meeting costs accounted for?
- Will you hold yourselves accountable to young people's contributions by keeping participants informed of outcomes on an ongoing basis? Keeping participants informed will increase the likelihood of future engagement, especially if they know that their contribution has made a difference and led to tangible change.

### Which Young People will Participate?

Young people are not a homogenous group. They differ in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, age, gender and values. When engaging young people on a specific issue, consider:

- Which young people are being affected by this issue, or have an interest in this issue?
- Which young people would benefit from engagement?

Consultations benefit most when they are conducted with a representative sample of young people. This sample should represent a diversity of demographics within the youth community (in terms of characteristics like gender, age and cultural background). As there is no 'one size fits all' engagement tool that will work with all young people, different engagement tools will be required to target different groups of young people in society in order to engage a representative sample.

### Be aware of cultural and historical sensitivities:

Working with youth from diverse backgrounds may require involving their families, representatives and communities. For example, when engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, support and

facilitation by cultural elders may need to be part of your engagement practice and factored into your engagement timeline. Similarly, people with disability, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, or individuals with histories of traumatic abuse may need specific support to overcome any barriers to consultation.

**Be aware of barriers to participation:** Generally, barriers can include a historical distrust of government, limited literacy skills or knowledge of English, accessibility issues, suspicion of organisers' motives, limited knowledge of political and decision making structures, and fear of being 'outed' to their parents, peers or community. Using interpreters and multiple forms of communication in a variety of languages will help reach the widest possible audience, minimising language barriers. Ultimately, engagement should be culturally sensitive, flexible, and delivered in a variety of ways tailored to young people's cultural and social circumstances.

### How Will Young People's Contributions be Valued?

Giving feedback to the young people consulted is a vital component of the engagement process. It gives them an indication of whether their contribution is valued and an understanding of how their participation is being utilised in the policy space. At the outset, young people should be notified how the information they give is going to be used, and should receive regular feedback on their suggestions and recommendations.<sup>78</sup>

This does not mean that every recommendation given by young people must be implemented in some form. It does need to be made clear, however, that their views and opinions are being taken seriously. If they can see that the process to come to a decision on their contribution was fair, young people are more likely to accept outcomes, even when they are negative.

<sup>78</sup> Children in Scotland. 2017. The Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People: Our Principles and Guidelines. Edinburgh: Children in Scotland..

**Example of best practice:** Each time the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People in New South Wales consults with a group of children and young people, the results are collated and sent back to participants within a few days of engagement.<sup>79</sup> In doing so, children and young people are able to see that opinions and recommendations have been accurately recorded and considered. The full report is also sent back to all participants, so they are able to see the outcomes of their recommendations to the ACYP.

### Working With and Supporting Young People through Various Methods of Engagement

There are a wide range of platforms you can use to engage with young people. These include:

- Youth council
- Non-ongoing youth committee
- Youth audit
- Youth forum
- Focus groups
- Direct consultation
- Indirect consultation
- Self-completed survey

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these approaches. **The key factor is the trade-off between the ability to collect detailed feedback and the ability to gain a comprehensively representative view of perspectives** from a wide range of young people.

Smaller group engagement methods such as direct consultation are useful for obtaining individual detailed data, but may not represent the wider perspectives of young people in the community. On the other hand, youth forums can effectively achieve broad representation of young people in the community, increasing the credibility of the information gathered. However, this kind of approach makes it difficult to gain detailed accounts of youth views on issues, with large size groups making young people more reluctant

to share information. **It is essential to not rely only on one means of consultation, and use a variety of platforms to develop a comprehensive account of youth perspectives on relevant issues.** “Where Are You Going With That”, a report by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, provides more details on the advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches listed above.<sup>80</sup>

### Providing Support

Young people are more likely to become empowered if they are supported to engage in the consultation process. **Trust** must be developed between the consultant and the participants, and between the participants themselves.

**Establish working guidelines** (e.g. participants’ agreements) to create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing ideas. Reaffirm expectations such as ‘everyone has the right to be heard’ or ‘this discussion is confidential’. These protocols should be established with participants where possible.

**Create opportunities for participants to debrief** after the consultation, especially if personal or potentially distressing issues have been raised. Provide young people the chance to give feedback on the session or raise issues with you if they felt triggered at any point.

If you are working with the Australian Indigenous community, you should keep in mind that they can feel/have felt over-consulted by a variety of agencies without feedback or little outcome, and may be sceptical of consultation processes.<sup>81</sup> In these cases, a strong emphasis may need to be placed on follow-up reporting of outcomes to participants.

### Engaging Young People in All Steps of the Policy Cycle

Comprehensive youth participation in policy development necessitates involving young people in all steps of the policy cycle. These are:

<sup>79</sup> Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People. 2019. Engaging children and young people in your organisation. Sydney: Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People.

<sup>80</sup> Comrie, Craig. 2010. Where are you going with that? Maximising Young People’s Impact on Organisational & Public Policy. Sydney: Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

<sup>81</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. 2004. Taking Young People Seriously: Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions. Melbourne: Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities.



- Research and Analysis
- Policy design and planning
- Implementation
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Advocacy and Participatory debate, feeding back into ongoing situation analysis

Throughout the policy cycle, forms and levels of participation can differ. Legal and political frameworks can impede young people from engaging in all steps at all levels. Often in practice, youth participation is seldom limited to one step, or one form of participation. Below are examples of youth involvement in some of these different stages.

### *Research and Analysis phase: Sri Lanka National Youth Parliament*

The Sri Lankan Youth Parliament has 335 members, and are elected by 500,000 members of youth organizations and clubs across Sri Lanka in district-wide polls.<sup>82</sup> Twice a month, relevant issues are debated by youth parliamentarians in the capital, the dialogue shadowing the work of the national parliament – thirty youth ministers follow national ministries. Youth parliamentarians national Parliament committees and consult national members, learn about electoral processes, and are included in national decision making. The national Parliament has included the youth parliament's recommendations in the national youth policy.<sup>83</sup>

Sri Lanka's national youth parliament is a key example of young people participating autonomously in the first step of the policy cycle (situation analysis) and being consulted in the second step (policy design and planning). It includes young people in national decision making in a representative way and enjoys strong political support in Sri Lanka.

### *Policy Design and Planning phase: Youth consultations in Vietnam's poverty-reduction strategy*

Throughout the development of the Vietnamese government's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP),

Save the Children was commissioned to conduct three consultations with young people in low-income urban areas over the course of five years.<sup>84</sup> The consultations aimed to provide young people the chance to contribute and review the implementation of the strategy. The consultations ranged in purpose, including: to inform national development planning, to gain feedback on interim PRSP policy, and to seek reviews of the first year of implementation of Vietnam's PRSP.

Surveys, discussion groups, participatory workshops and interviews were used to engage young people.<sup>85</sup> Some young people also acted as peer educators by facilitating consultations. Sessions facilitated by young people would be run independently of adult run sessions to maintain a youth-friendly space where young people could act and express themselves freely without fear of adult judgement.

This process highlighted a range of previously unregistered youth issues, forced policy makers to confront the lived experiences of low-income Vietnamese youth and showed officials that youth engagement during policy development is an indisputable strategic asset.

### *Building the Knowledge and Skills of Young People*

Participation in the policy-making process often requires basic knowledge of politics, policies and negotiations, as well as skills in clear communication. Empowering young people with these skills is a fundamentally necessary step in supporting young people to engage in the policy making process.

A European Youth Forum report groups the sets of skills and competences needed for successful participation in the policy making process under three headings, listed below.<sup>86</sup> Of course, this is set in a democratic context and should be viewed as a template you can adapt for your own purposes.

<sup>82</sup> Sri Lankan National Youth Services Council. 2018. Youth Parliament. June 2. Accessed August 10, 2020. [https://www.nysc.lk/aboutParliament\\_e.php...](https://www.nysc.lk/aboutParliament_e.php...)

<sup>83</sup> Lührmann, Anna. 2013. Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle: A Good Practice Guide. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>84</sup> International Monetary Fund. 2006. Vietnam: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Washington D.C. : International Monetary Fund.

<sup>85</sup> O'Malley, Kate. 2004. Children and Young People Participating in PRSP Processes: Lessons from Save the Children's Experiences. London: Save the Children.

<sup>86</sup> European Youth Forum. 2002. Life-wide Learning for Active Citizenship. Brussels: European Youth Forum Position Paper.

# Skills and Competencies For The Policy Making Process

## A. Political Literacy

- a. Understanding of democratic concepts
- b. Knowledge of political rights, basic laws and democratic institutions
- c. Understanding of the role of interest groups and political parties
- d. Knowledge of how to influence policy development

## B. Democratic values and attitudes

- a. Social Justice
- b. Human rights
- c. Identity
- d. Diversity
- e. Conflict resolution

## C. Critical thinking

- a. Ability to collect information from different sources
- b. Skills in communication for political discussion
- c. Ability to take a position based on prior critical analysis
- d. Capacity to interpret, analyse and make judgement on information

Political literacy is the basic knowledge and values needed to understand ‘the rules of the game’. In participation and consensus, young people should share democratic attitudes and values as the foundation for dialogue. Young people also must be able to clearly communicate their opinions and ideas, and be able to think and act critically.

## Barriers and Solutions to Youth Participation in Policy and Planning

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### Inaccessibility

A key barrier to involving young people in policy formulation is the overly formal nature of current policy dialogue, which prevents diverse young people from participating. Unfamiliarity with the policy processes and decision-making procedures, particularly formal meeting processes, poses an acute accessibility barrier for many young people who are untrained or unfamiliar with them.<sup>87</sup> For example, a lack of understanding of the language used, or the context and background of issues under discussion prevents participating youth representatives from contributing constructively, discouraging them from making contributions from a fear of being outed as uninformed.

In these circumstances, an openness to alternative, flexible and varied engagement methods that are more accessible to young people is necessary. For many young people, traditional avenues of engagement such as forums and seminars can be unfamiliar and difficult to navigate due to a lack of understanding of the established rules of engagement. Therefore, when engaging young people in policy processes, new and alternative methods of engagement must be considered in cases where traditional methods pose barriers to constructive dialogue. Key factors to consider include functionality, accessibility, time commitment, cost, or any other additional support young people may require.

Organisations must be flexible and recognise the variety of barriers may face in accessing traditional forms of consultation, seeking input and feedback from young people to optimise the engagement process according to the needs of the young people with which they work. This is particularly relevant considering new engagement methods revolving around social media and online tools. Incorporating these kinds of flexible, multi-faceted approaches

<sup>87</sup> Comrie, Craig. 2010. Where are you going with that? Maximising Young People's Impact on Organisational & Public Policy. Sydney: Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

help groups to engage with a more diverse, more representative sample of young people, which then increases overall youth impacts on policy development and planning processes.

### Difficulty in Seeing Impact

Another key barrier is the difficulty of measuring the impact of youth engagement strategies in terms of tangible policy change. Without a formal tool to measure impact, anecdotal evidence of policy evolution must be relied upon. Politicians and decision makers are often unlikely to release information regarding who has influenced a decision making process due to an unwillingness to transfer power or agency to particular stakeholders. This makes measuring the policy impact of engagement strategies particularly difficult.

It is much easier to measure this kind of change at an organisational level, through the progression of organisational policy or procedures, or the inclusion of youth perspectives in executive level decision-making. However, in larger scale policy and planning processes, such as those at state or national levels, this becomes far more difficult. Some anecdotal evidence points to federal youth engagement mechanisms in Australia having at least a basic level of influence on decision making – for example, outcomes of youth engagement practice have been mentioned in Parliamentary Hansard.<sup>88</sup>

Without a formal method through which to directly measure the policy impact of youth engagement processes, we are unable to quantify or qualify the outcomes of young people's participation, and therefore limit the potential outcomes of such engagement. More details on measuring and monitoring the impact of youth engagement practice can be found in the Monitoring and Evaluation section of this guide.

### Confining Young people to 'Youth Issues'

Limiting the engagement of young people to issues determined to be "youth-related" is another barrier to comprehensive youth engagement in policy development. If participation is structured so that young people are only able to work on issues deemed to be 'youth issues', they are prevented from offering their contributions on other key issues that are important to their community and would benefit from a youth perspective.<sup>89</sup>

A key factor contributing to this barrier is the perception that young people are simply developing into adulthood, leading to outdated distinctions between 'young people' and 'adults', which fails to recognise young people as contributing, engaged and independent members of the community. For example, certain groups of young people may have informed and valuable views on traditionally 'adult' issues such as taxation. However, they are not consulted on various elements of legislative and organisational reform due to the assumption that these issues are irrelevant to the lives of young people. Also, many young people may not have any experience or insight into traditional 'youth-issues', and are better positioned to speak on a broader range of issues which affect the wider community.

Considering the specific perspectives and experiences of individual young people in consultation mechanisms is necessary to ensure that young people are able to offer their perspectives on issues that are uniquely relevant to them. Young people must be consulted not only on areas which decision makers think are most relevant to them, but those areas which they deem to be important for their lives and their community.

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<sup>88</sup> Parliament of Australia. 2008. "Questions in Writing." 2020 Youth Summit. Canberra: House of Representatives Hansard. 10444.

<sup>89</sup> Heath, Ryan. 2006. Please Just F\*\*K Off It's Our Turn: Holding Baby Boomers To Account. Sydney: Pluto Press Australia.

# Policy And Planning: Youth Engagement Checklist

*This checklist is designed to ensure that your decision to engage young people in policymaking (at any form, level, or step in the policy cycle!) proceeds strategically, transparently and, above all, meaningfully.*

## **BEFORE YOU ENGAGE - To maximise the benefits of participation, both for the young people themselves and for your organisation:**

- ☐ Decide who will participate  
WHY: Young people are not homogenous.
- ☐ Decide which methods of engagement are most appropriate  
WHY: There is no 'one size fits all' model of youth engagement.
- ☐ Secure adequate financial and operational resources  
TIP: Young people are more likely to participate when there are fewer out-of-pocket costs.
- ☐ Make sure young people have the requisite skills to participate OR the opportunity to be trained in those skills prior to engagement
- ☐ Make sure facilitators understand the value of youth participation and are trained to work with young people
- ☐ Ensure your premises and facilities are accessible (if engagement is in-person)
- ☐ Develop a communications plan to keep participants informed

## **DURING ENGAGEMENT - To build trust and provide support to participants:**

- ☐ Inform participants how their perspectives will be used and implemented
- ☐ Create working guidelines (also known as a participants agreements) at the start of the session to set expectations and a respectful tone
- ☐ Create opportunities to debrief after the session

## **AFTER ENGAGEMENT - To maintain trust and transparency after the engagement:**

- ☐ Collate and send results to participants within the next few weeks
- ☐ Send full report to participants when it is released
- ☐ Organise an internal debrief to review what went well and didn't. Incorporate learnings for future instances of youth engagement.

# Appendix

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Commonwealth Secretariat, Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives, 173

## Australian Youth Development Organisations/Youth Consulting Agencies:

Australian Youth Development Organisations/ Youth Consulting Agencies:

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) : <https://ayac.org.au/>

Foundation for Young Australians: <https://www.fya.org.au/>

YLab: <https://www.ylab.global/>

Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC): <https://www.aycc.org.au/>

Seed: <https://www.seedmob.org.au/>

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria: <https://www.yacvic.org.au/>

Youth Disability Advocacy Service: <https://www.yacvic.org.au/ydas/>

Koorie Youth Council: <https://www.koorieyouthcouncil.org.au/>

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia: <https://www.yacsa.com.au/>  
Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People: <https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/>

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA): <https://www.yacwa.org.au/>

Plan International Australia: <https://www.plan.org.au/>

Save The Children Australia: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/pdf?la=en&hash=C58B84266055B5E31D8C0088475DA3942B258032>

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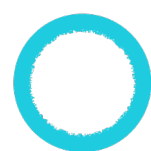
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