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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT:
EFFECTIVE APPROACHES AND ACTION-ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

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EFFECTIVE APPROACHES AND ACTION-ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

" Efforts to engage youth involve elevating their voices and ensuring meaningful opportunities to contribute to resolving issues and promoting positive change in their communities and nations… There is a need to improve the quality of partnerships with youth, to provide more concrete platforms for youth participation, to support existing local youth networks and initiatives, and to include youth in science, technology and innovation initiatives. USAID will collaborate with other USG agencies to support youth engagement through Youth Advisory Councils and other types of consultation mechanisms (online or in person), at home and abroad. "

- USAID Youth in Development Policy (USAID, 2012a, p. 11)

BACKGROUND

The first guiding principle in the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Youth in Development Policy is to "recognize that youth participation is vital for effective programs" (USAID, 2012a, pg. 2). Furthermore, one of the Policy's two objectives is to "mainstream and integrate youth issues and engage young people across Agency initiatives and operations" (USAID, 2012a, p.1). This report was commissioned to identify effective approaches and recommendations to meaningfully engage youth in programs, policies and operational practices. Based on a review of various organizations'

strategies to solicit youth participation, this report offers findings and action-oriented recommendations that are applicable to a wide range of actors in the field.

The review took place between September 2012 and July 2013 and looked at documentation from more than 20 organizations of various types including youth-focused organizations, multilateral donors, bilateral donors, intergovernmental organizations, and foundations (see Appendix 1 for full list). Interviews were also conducted with 20 staff and 10 youth from 13 of these organizations

in order to gather further detail on the benefits and challenges of youth engagement activities and strategies for successful implementation.[1] Information was also gleaned on the kinds of resources needed to support youth participation and possible opportunities for USAID to collaborate or coordinate with others in this effort.

WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Youth engagement is a term that can be interpreted in many ways. Some define it as simply enrolling young people as program beneficiaries; however, the organizations included in this review involved youth in more meaningful ways, such as through decision-making, program design, policy making and advocacy efforts. Some of the roles young people have taken on as staff and volunteers include participating as board members, trainers, lobbyists, and correspondents.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT—
"The active, empowered, and intentional partnership with youth as stakeholders, problem solvers, and change agents in their communities." (Youth Leadership Institute 2009, p.13).

For these organizations, prioritizing the participation of youth is based on the premise that youth have the right to express themselves, be involved in decisions that affect their lives, and be active participants, rather than just beneficiaries. Relevant to this is the idea of "youth choice" or the notion that for young people to be truly engaged, they must be active and informed participants. They must be aware of what they are doing, what is expected of them, and why they are doing it. Without this, the danger is that youth can be used merely as tokens of youth participation and included only in a perfunctory manner.

"When we think about a young person being engaged, we think of a young person being inspired, informed, and involved… It is important that they are actively aware and are making a conscious choice to be a part of something. So they are doing something not because they have to, but because they want to."
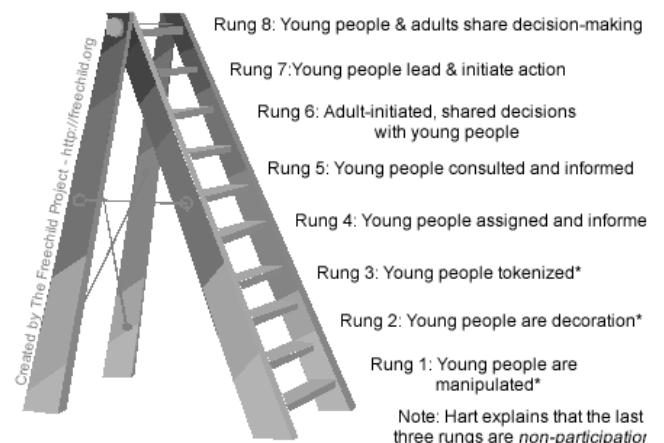**—Taking IT Global**

Tokenism and half-hearted initiatives are not only unsuccessful, but can be detrimental to the youth involved.

Many young people involved in these programs are extremely passionate about development issues (e.g., sexual and reproductive health, education), advocacy, and community development. To promise youth a chance to make a change or have a say in decision-making and then not deliver can foment dissolution and erode trust (USAID, 2009). Many young people also participate in these initiatives for personal improvement – some from disadvantaged backgrounds. If they are denied opportunities to excel and grow as leaders, there could be long-term negative repercussions for those young people and their families.

Hart's Ladder (1992) is one of the foundational frameworks in the youth engagement literature (see Figure 1). It illustrates the various levels of youth participation and highlights the fact that manipulation, decoration, and tokenism are examples of non-participation. It is the higher rungs of the ladder where participation really occurs – when youth are informed, consulted, provide leadership, and participate in decision-making.

Figure 1:

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

Created by The Freechild Project - http://freechild.org

Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making
Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action
Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed
Rung 4: Young people assigned and informe
Rung 3: Young people tokenized*
Rung 2: Young people are decoration*
Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*
Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are *non-participatio*

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship.* Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

WHY IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

While some organizations reviewed began as youth-led or youth-serving entities, others have recognized the importance of youth engagement more recently. Youth are now more widely seen as key players in country development and global stability; as ActionAid puts it: "youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but are the drivers of change today." Whether it is because of the

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1. Organizations were invited to participate in interviews if they were either 1) using innovative strategies for including youth; 2) incorporating youth into programming or policy-making; and/or 3) conducting activities that seemed particularly relevant to USAID.

increase in the youth population in developing countries (e.g., youth bulge) or the more recent civic outcries for change (e.g., the Arab Spring), organizations recognize the importance of including youth in a positive way. In developing countries where there are daunting challenges such as poverty, lack of employment, and limited access to education, the youth voice is especially important for catalyzing positive change socially and economically.

> *"Eighty-five percent of Taliban recruits are under 25 and the majority of people in Egypt in the square were young people. So you see a trail of positive or negative in which young people are already involved…"* —**Restless Development**

Young people are an important stakeholder group for achieving inclusive development. Comparable to the experiences of women, people with disabilities, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, and those suffering from extreme poverty, youth have historically been excluded from policy and program decisions. In fact, while young people represent a large proportion of the population in many developing countries, they are still regularly overlooked in the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs. In order for programs to be relevant, authentic, and responsive to youth needs, young people must be involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating them.

> *"You can't make decisions about young people in the absence of their voices and ideas. With youth involvement the work is much more meaningful, much more relevant, and to be perfectly honest, a lot more fun. Their perspectives are very fresh and new, they challenge a lot of old assumptions, and you get a much stronger decision making process if you're working with the young people who are going to benefit from your program."* —**YouthBuild**

USAID's Youth in Development Policy states: "Increasing youth participation in the development of policies, programs and services should inevitably lead to better results" (USAID, 2012a, pg. 9). While there is currently a lack of rigorous evidence that supports the hypothesis that youth engagement leads to better program outcomes and impacts, anecdotal evidence from this review indicates that organizations are indeed seeing increased effectiveness of

PHOTO CREDIT: ROBIN HAYES

programming and organizational strategy (National Youth Agency, 2010). There is a need, however, to follow up on this with more evaluation and research on the benefits of youth engagement.

Young people are generally more effective than adults at understanding the needs of their peers and knowing how to reach and engage them. A young person from Advocates for Youth put it well saying, "young people are the experts of their own experience." Even a very in-tune adult ally working with young people will not have the same dynamic as a young person working with his/her peers.

Because young people often have an openness and willingness to take risks, they have great potential to come up with outside the box, innovative ideas. Youth can be visionaries when given the chance - in fact, young people shape programs in response to the needs they experience first-hand and/or see amongst their peers. In addition to organizational and programmatic advantages, adults themselves often see benefit from engaging youth, such as better understanding the needs of young people and enhancement of adults' energy and organizational commitment (Innovations Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003).

> *"It is making me realize that I am not alone in this movement and that there are a lot of people who are interested in getting these goals [accomplished]… it has made me realize that we are a large community."* —**Young Person, Advocates for Youth**

Participating in the work of these organizations also benefits the individual development of young people. Gains include skills improvement (e.g., communication, responsibility, leadership, organization, etc.), increased self-confidence, and connection with mentors. Youth also have the opportunity to learn about community and international issues, and gain experience that will help them in their future careers and personal lives. But perhaps of most importance is the chance to associate with other passionate young people

who have similar interests. Many organizations have built strong youth communities (e.g., Taking IT Global's online community, tigweb.org) where youth can share ideas, provide support and motivation to one another, and organize advocacy efforts. Other examples include alumni networks, forums focused on advocacy around specific issues (e.g., gender-based violence, employment), and blogging sites.

HOW ARE ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGING YOUTH IN THEIR WORK?

The Hart's Ladder framework (see Figure 1) can be used to categorize the types of engagement strategies implemented by organizations. The framework identifies levels of participation that range from assigning young people to activities to shared decision-making by youth and adults. Based on the review, four levels of participation were identified as most prevalent:[2] Levels 5 - 8

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

LEVEL 5 – YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED AND INFORMED

Not surprisingly, one of the main reasons organizations engage youth in their work is because they are looking for *input* or the "youth perspective." The information is used to get a better understanding of the needs and desires of young people in order to develop more relevant policies and programs. Mechanisms developed to foster input include the development of blogging spaces, youth advisory councils (YACs), and organization-sponsored youth surveys. Other examples include young people conducting site visits to programs and providing their feedback, soliciting input from program beneficiaries, and conducting youth consultations on specific topics (e.g., the post-2015 development agenda).

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGY: UN-HABITAT is the only UN entity that has a youth advisory board. The governing council made a decision that if they wanted to serve youth populations they had to institutionalize a mechanism where youth could provide continuous dialogue and feedback.

LEVEL 6 – ADULT INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Organizations also engage youth in *designing, implementing, and evaluating programs.* Specific youth activities include conducting community assessments and formative research, coming up with program ideas, selecting strategies, recruiting youth for participation, implementing components, and collecting and analyzing evaluation data. This can be accomplished through internships, volunteer programs (e.g., service learning), or hiring young people onto project teams or into staff positions.

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGY: Save the Children Norway trains young people to administer needs assessment tools and facilitate meetings in order to gather information from their peers. They find that when children or youth facilitate data gathering, they come up with different information than adults.

There are several ways that organizations *involve youth as trainers.* Youth often act as peer educators on a variety

2. While some of the activities listed in this section (e.g., program design) could fall under multiple levels of participation in the Hart's Ladder framework, this report categorizes them by how they were most commonly found in the organizations reviewed.

of issues from HIV prevention to lobbying techniques. Activities may take place in the community with program beneficiaries, or may involve training other youth staff/volunteers within their own organization. Advocates for Youth, for example, holds an "Urban Retreat" once each year and invites young leaders from around the world to take part in trainings, lobby in Congress, and share experiences. Many of the workshops (e.g., LGBT 101) are led by young participants.

> **HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGY:**
> At the Innovations Center for Youth and Community Development, youth act as master trainers in areas such as youth development, civic engagement and youth leadership.

LEVEL 7 – YOUNG PEOPLE LEAD AND INITIATE ACTION

Several of the innovative organizations included in this review realize that youth who get involved do so because they are passionate about a certain topic and dedicated to making change. As such, many young people participate in the development agenda as *activists and advocates.* At the Latin American Youth Center, for example, young people have been leading an initiative to lobby for immigration reform, as well as raising awareness of teen

mental health issues. For ActionAid's Activista network, the focus is on capacity building for young leaders to effect social change. The network attempts to include young people from developed and developing countries to exchange ideas and work together towards shared goals.

> **HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGY:** ActionAid has a youth campaign network called Activista made up of over 50 partner organizations and thousands of volunteers… They use various approaches, including flash mobs and invisible theater…. In The Gambia, the Activista group worked on food rights and helped increase the national agricultural budget for farmers by four percent.

LEVEL 8 – YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS SHARE DECISION-MAKING

At a further level of engagement, organizations include youth in *decision-making* processes. Such opportunities can include sitting on a Board of Directors, participating in youth advisory councils, steering the direction of an intervention, or helping to select which programs to fund. This helps organizations prioritize activities of most interest to youth and better assure their success right from the start.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO MAKE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WORK?

In order to engage youth meaningfully, they need to *have an opportunity to voice their opinions and follow their interests, with the support of adult mentors.* Youth must have the freedom to disagree or offer a different opinion, and unequivocally be able to express themselves. One example of this is the Advocates for Youth global youth website www.amplifyyourvoice.org where youth can blog about their thoughts and opinions. There are rules such as no profanity, violent themes etc., but otherwise youth control the content.

> *"I think we are very lucky, very privileged, to have been given responsibilities at quite an early stage - to take on roles and responsibilities, and ensure our voices are heard."*
> —**DFID-CSO Working Group youth member**

Youth also do better when they are provided with *clear roles and expectations* (Innovations Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003). Some organizations, such as Advocates for Youth, develop contracts with young people that outline deliverables, remuneration, and responsibilities. Youth and adults prefer the idea of outlining expectations as this helps promote clarity, accountability, and transparency with regard to youth as well as the organization. In addition, young people should be offered choices about their activities and roles.

> *"Youth led activity is fantastic, but that doesn't mean abandoning young people to do it by themselves. I think there's a real role to be played around guidance and support that organizations and older people can play..."*
> —**Commonwealth Secretariat**

Training and support for youth participating in engagement activities are also necessary. While it is important to foster empowerment and ownership, this must be balanced with sufficient preparation and support for young people to succeed (DFID-CSO Working Group, 2009). It is critical that youth in all roles receive training, whether they are conducting a community needs assessment, speaking at a conference, or helping design an HIV intervention. Training can be provided in a specific competency (e.g., program evaluation) or content area (e.g., early grade reading), or be a part of general skills building (e.g., public speaking or financial management).

PHOTO CREDIT: VUGAR NAGHIYEV/USAID

Training for adults is also essential, as some adults are not comfortable trusting young people with traditionally "adult" tasks, let alone interacting with them as peers on a Board of Directors (National Youth Agency, 2010; Pittman, 2007). Caution on the part of adults is natural and normal, as they may be responsible for project outcomes or have fiduciary responsibilities for the organization. Depending on the context, it may be important to move toward greater youth engagement through incremental implementation, testing, and trust-building. Training itself may cover topics ranging from positive youth development to interacting with young people on a multi-generational project team.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

When Advocates for Youth introduced young people onto their Board of Directors, the entire group went through youth-adult partnership trainings using the *Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation* (developed under the USAID-funded YouthNet program). The training focused on breaking down attitudinal barriers. These kinds of training opportunities could also be effective at a broader community level, whereby programs can support youth-adult partnership trainings between community leaders and young people to increase intergenerational understanding, elevate youth voice and foster youth leadership within the community.

Human and financial resources are also needed to implement successful youth engagement efforts. Most organizations reviewed employ someone with dedicated time who focuses on planning and implementing youth participation activities. Often this person's role includes fostering an ethos of youth engagement within the culture of an organization. Along with coordination tasks, this individual should have primary responsibility for guiding the youth engagement strategy. A representative from the DFID-CSO Working Group said: "Everyone in the group recognizes that not having anyone who can work on this full-time… to steer and coordinate the group… creates a lot of challenges." In addition to coordinating youth engagement activities, some organizations also provide mentoring and job placement services for youth. These can be quite resource and time intensive to implement, requiring more staff time.

> *"If you decide to institutionalize youth voice, you are essentially designing and launching a whole new project that needs resources, oversight, and direction."*
> **—YouthBuild**

Financial resources are needed for a number of youth engagement tasks, including training, remuneration or stipends for youth, and related activities such as youth website maintenance, travel costs for youth lobbying events, refreshments for youth advisory meetings, etc. Costs are determined by the types of youth engagement activities an organization takes on, some being more resource intensive than others. UN-HABITAT, for example, said they were able to make strides in youth engagement with 'limited' resources.

> *"UN-HABITAT put the youth agenda high in the UN system. We are a very small UN entity, but we played the right card at the right time and our Executive Director has stood by us. Our youth advisory board said 'we want this to happen,' so we are walking the talk with quite limited resources."* **—UN-HABITAT**

Lastly, *youth engagement efforts should consider the needs of various youth populations.* The definition of 'youth' varies among cultures and contexts. In some communities, youth are identified based on their level of responsibility to family and community. Most organizations, however, use some type of age range to describe the population – but even these differ. While it is up to each organization to select how they define youth, it is important to remember that young people in the lower

age ranges (say 10-15 years) are going to have very different needs than those in older ages ranges (say 16 years and above). Youth engagement efforts must take this into account.

In addition, youth have other characteristics that make their life experiences unique, such as gender, socio-economic status, geographical location (e.g., urban/rural; more developed/less developed, etc.), whether they live with a disability, or if they live in a conflict or crisis-affected community. Outreach activities and youth engagement initiatives must consider how best to include and encourage these groups. In some instances for example, it might be good practice to separate young men and women so that they can freely express their thoughts and share their feedback. Other suggestions for empowering marginalized groups include: mentorship, specialized leadership training, self-efficacy workshops, and increased family involvement (Search for Common Ground, 2008).

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES WITH ENGAGING YOUTH?

A key challenge to engaging young people across the board is *exclusivity,* wherein only the most privileged young people have opportunities to participate (O'Donaghue, et al, 2003). This creates a lack of representativeness, in which young people from disadvantaged groups have few or no opportunities to provide input and are excluded from decision-making processes. These young people are often leaders in their families or peer groups, yet they can be overlooked by implementers and policy makers that do not

know how to reach them, feel it would be too resource intensive to include them, or fail to see their potential. It is important that development organizations invest in outreach, training, and empowerment of young people that represent the populations targeted by their programs.

Local partners and young people themselves can assist in providing access to hard-to-reach populations (International Youth Foundation, 2012). Similarly, the process by which youth are chosen to participate is an important factor in their legitimacy as youth representatives. The *process of choosing members for a YAC or other such entity can be highly politicized.* Often youth are appointed by government officials – not by their peers. When developing this type of youth engagement initiative, electing youth through a fair and transparent process is a promising practice for increasing representativeness in youth leadership.

There is also the issue of the digital data divide; *few developing countries have succeeded in providing technology and the Internet to all youth* although these infrastructures are rapidly emerging in many locations. Lack of ICT infrastructure can cause difficulty when recruiting youth for engagement activities or soliciting input. Connecting with youth through social media and websites can be an effective strategy, but less so when dealing with the most marginalized populations (mEducation Alliance, 2013). For hard-to-reach populations, it might be possible to gain access via a paper survey, through youth or faith-based groups, or at community meetings.

> *"Now if you're really serious about engaging young people meaningfully, you can't limit yourself to a work day schedule. And you can't resent that fact."* —**Advocates for Youth**

Since youth generally have many competing priorities (e.g., school, work, house chores, etc.) *it can be difficult logistically to bring them together.* Organizers must be able to accommodate a flexible schedule and understand that some youth might devote more or less over time depending on other things on which they may be working. Meetings may have to be scheduled in the evenings and on weekends to encourage more youth involvement.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

Keeping youth engaged for an extended period of time can also be a challenge. Many organizations have difficulty maintaining young people's involvement or following up with them after they have completed agreed upon activities. Sometimes building alumni networks using social media or other technologies can help. Through these networks, alumni have the opportunity to take on leadership roles (e.g., participating on an alumni board, becoming trainers after graduating from a program) and can also mentor current program participants.

Finally, because this work involves young people, *it is always important for the organization to take extra precautions to ensure youth are safe.* This often involves a commitment to monitoring, chaperoning, and other support from adults (Save the Children, 2004). Save the Children Norway makes a point to have a staff person whose role is to ensure that all children and youth are comfortable with involvement in any activity. While other staff may be organizing the meeting or event, this person is charged with ensuring that all young people have what they need and feel safe.

WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY?

Technology can be useful in supporting youth engagement efforts. One of the main benefits is that *it can be used to organize activities or events* for a large number of young people quickly. One post on Facebook or Twitter can be seen by youth around the world in seconds and reactions can be immediate. Youth often organize and mobilize advocacy activities via social media.

Since it is sometimes difficult to get young people together in one room at the same time, *technology also acts as a coordinating tool.* Organizations can use web meeting applications, Skype, or Wikipages to bring youth together virtually for meetings, planning, and brainstorming. Not only does it help to overcome busy schedules, but it also fosters communication among youth in various geographic areas.

> *"We run an e-course called Sprout and it is helping people launch their ideas. It is tailored to social innovation. We've also run e-courses on fundraising and political advocacy."*
> —**Taking IT Global**

Some organizations, such as Taking IT Global, also provide *online training opportunities* for youth. Training can be focused on content area topics (e.g., entrepreneurship, social innovation, etc.) or subjects that help prepare youth for engagement activities (e.g., fundraising, advocacy, etc.). The use of technology helps reduce the costs, logistical barriers like transportation, and often provides a more flexible schedule.

> *"Currently we have a database here a mailing system called city mail and we're able to keep in touch with all our graduates via email. We know, however, that that is not always the best way. And so we rely heavily on social media and social networking. Facebook and Twitter have been a great way to increase the number of graduates we are connected with."* —**YouthBuild**

As mentioned above, technology helps overcome the issue of keeping up with youth over time since it can be used to *build alumni networks or other kinds of communities.* Reaching out to youth who have participated in organizational activities through Facebook pages and encouraging youth to become Twitter followers helps to keep them informed about new initiatives. In fact, @YouthBuildAlum has helped YouthBuild develop a strong alumni network whose members have advocated for the program with the United States Congress. LinkedIn can also be used to create a network of "youth graduates" to encourage young people to stay active in organizational initiatives, and encourage their own online professional branding.

Some organizations *use technology platforms to gather feedback and input from youth.* They offer space for youth to blog on certain topics, hold virtual conversations, and survey youth on their opinions. In fact, Restless Development used technology to gather feedback from youth on the post-2015 development agenda. One issue associated with collecting this information, as noted by a representative from Taking IT Global, is the amount of resources needed to monitor, filter, and analyze it. For example if an organization offers a youth website where posts can be made anytime, in order to use that input, an organization must regularly organize and analyze the data. The same is true if an organization wants to follow discussions on its Facebook page or Twitter account. While mining youth profiles can also provide interesting data, this also takes dedicated effort.

Although technology includes many benefits, it is also limited by the digital data divide. *Some young people still find it difficult to participate in online activities due to lack of access.* While the growth of internet, mobile phones, and other tools has minimized this to a certain extent, there are still some populations who do not have access to these tools – these may include rural youth and girls or young women from more restrictive cultures (mEducation Alliance, 2013).

ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACHES TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Based on the information gathered during the review, seven promising youth engagement approaches are discussed. Each one includes an example of successful implementation by an outside organization, best practice advice gathered during the review, potential benefits and challenges, and some discussion on needed resources.

1. DEVELOP A SMALL WORKING GROUP OF "CHAMPIONS" WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

An internal working group can act as a coordinating body for youth related activities within an organization. This group would be the flash point for all youth engagement initiatives, and could act as an internal "youth engagement community of practice." The working group would provide a space to share best practices and resources, coordinate and map efforts, sponsor workshops and trainings, and design research activities.

EXAMPLE: ACTIONAID

ActionAid is a federation of 43 country programs dedicated to livelihoods, governance, women's rights, and youth education. Youth engagement is now a strategic

priority for ActionAid. As a first step in their push for greater youth participation, an internal community of practice was set up across all of their country programs (ActionAid, 2013). As part of this process, ActionAid started an online Google Group to connect young people and adults from various participating countries interested in moving youth engagement forward. Additionally, to make it more than just a listserv, the community of practice has begun hosting webinars, Google Hangouts, and brown bags. As much as possible, country programs are encouraged to take an active role in the group and share what they are doing around youth engagement.

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

- Have a clear purpose, agenda, work plan and achievable goals for the group.

- Use entities within the organization that already exist and build on them, if possible.

- Put procedures in place to reduce barriers to participation (e.g., flexible meeting times/formats).

- Include young professionals and interns to bring the "youth perspective" as much as possible.

- Allow different levels of participation by group members depending on time and interest.

- Include trainings for adults on positive youth development and working with young people in multigenerational groups.

- Provide a set of talking points for working group members to advocate for increased youth engagement within the organization.

RECOMMENDATION 1: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CHAMPIONS

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• Acts as catalyst for and coordinator of organization-wide efforts related to youth engagement • Sponsors or organizes workshops and trainings on youth engagement • Helps design and oversee research/ evaluation activities related to youth engagement • Acts as a place to share best practices and resources	• Lack of staff time to participate in working group and its activities • Retention of working group members • Competing priorities	• Some level of coordination and facilitation by the organization • No direct funding needed

2. ACTIVELY MAINTAIN A CURRENT MAPPING OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Surveying the landscape of youth engagement across an organization through mapping is helpful in establishing a "starting point" with regards to the current state of commitment to youth engagement efforts. The mapping process can enable organizations to take inventory of and coordinate existing youth engagement programs, activities, and initiatives. Investing time in this initial activity can clarify where capacity-building efforts should be focused and inform program and work planning. As a complement to the mapping effort, organizations can conduct a "youth audit" to assess their readiness to implement youth engagement activities (for more information, see DFID-CSO Working Group, 2010, pg. 87).

EXAMPLE: UNFPA NEPAL

In 2009 UNFPA Nepal conducted a youth audit while developing their in-country youth strategy. The audit focused on assessing how the organization was currently engaging youth, through programs as well as within the organization. An audit tool or "youth scorecard" was created.[3] This process allowed UNFPA staff to reflect on how the organization was engaging youth and the potential for increasing meaningful participation. Young people were involved in designing, testing, and implementing the youth scorecard (DFID-CSO Working Group, 2010).

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

- Establish a clear mapping process. Which areas of the organization's work are most critical to map with regards to youth engagement?
  How will the mapping results be used/disseminated?

- Encourage the use of youth engagement indicators in program monitoring and evaluation.

- Ensure there is a dedicated set of individuals to carry out the mapping activity, as well as a group that will act to incorporate lessons learned from the exercise into future programming and policy.

- It is important to periodically assess the organization's strengths, expertise, and challenges around youth engagement as populations served evolve, as well as to continue to be relevant in the context of changes in funding and policy priorities. A process should be put in place to ensure mapping results are kept current.

RECOMMENDATION 2: MAPPING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• Identify and build on strengths and key areas of expertise in youth engagement • Find and address gaps and redundancies • Identify tools, practices, and activities that can be shared across programs • Connect key players across projects/programs through dissemination	• Getting buy-in across the organization to participate and ensure reporting for the collective mapping effort • Developing a standard, systematic mapping process and identifying an appropriate reporting mechanism • Keeping mapping information current means repeating the process regularly	• Point person will be needed • Members may need to be strategically placed to cover all aspects of the organization and obtain complete information • Dedicated time allocation for a staff person

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3. The scorecard can be found here: http://ygproject.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/youth-score-card-doc.doc

3. ACTIVELY MAINTAIN A YOUTH-FOCUSED WEB PRESENCE COMBINED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES

A youth-focused website can be a good mechanism for reaching young people. It can be particularly beneficial for building a community of young people interested in an organization's activities, soliciting youth input, promoting events, sharing information about opportunities, and providing an avenue for youth advocacy.

EXAMPLE: THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

The Commonwealth Secretariat (CommSec) is a voluntary association of 54 countries that support each other in achieving democracy and development goals. As part of their push for greater youth engagement, CommSec created a youth-focused website that offers a place where, "young people can have a real voice and talk about the things that are really of concern to them (yourcommonwealth.org)." Furthermore, Canada's Commonwealth youth site (mycommonwealth.org) conducted an online survey to gauge youth views on whether or not to boycott the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka because of concerns over human rights violations. The Prime Minister of Canada did decide to boycott the meeting, partly due to this youth input (MYCommonwealth, 2013).

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

- Youth should be involved in the development and maintenance of the site.

- Social media and web activity should be campaign driven.

- Content should be created by youth, if possible.

- Offer the opportunity for youth to genuinely express themselves, for instance through blogging.

- The look and feel must be youth-friendly and familiar.

- Functionality and content are the most important factors.

- Look for ways to highlight youth accomplishments (e.g., awards, artwork, writing).

- Incorporate social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

- Put mechanisms in place so that young people who lack access to the Web or social media can still access the content. This could be done through reaching out to intermediaries (e.g., in-country partners, faith-based organizations, youth groups, or YAC members).

PHOTO CREDIT: DONATELLA LORCH/USAID

RECOMMENDATION 3: YOUTH-FOCUSED WEB PRESENCE AND SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• Helps to build a community of youth interested in an organization • Gives youth a voice in activities • Allows for easy dissemination and promotion of youth-related materials/events • Allows for gathering input from youth on needs	• Creating a genuine user experience for youth • Getting youth to the site • Analyzing user information and input • Keeping content updated can be time intensive • Engaging more marginalized youth	• Funding for development and maintenance • An online moderator or coordinator • Server space and URL

4. DEVELOP A YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (YAC)

YACs are a recommended strategy for soliciting input from youth and directly involving them in decision-making processes (USAID, 2009). These structures are a popular medium for accessing "youth voice" in many youth-serving organizations, including YouthBuild, UN-HABITAT, and Advocates for Youth.

EXAMPLE: STATE DEPARTMENT YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCILS (YAC)

The State Department has implemented YACs affiliated with embassies and consulates worldwide. These councils range in size and formality, from "donuts and dialogue" to elected representatives, a board of directors, and a 5-year plan. One of the main purposes of the YACs is to inform policy discussions related to Embassy programming. The State Department also seeks to be in receptive mode to listen to young people's concerns about US policy and

challenges faced in their countries. Ideally young people involved in YACs will become mentors and leaders in the community. Councils develop their own plans for tackling issues important to them (e.g., employment, education access, women's empowerment). Direct interaction with YACs occurs at the embassy level. An initiative currently in progress, as a result of youth demand, will establish avenues of communication across Councils via a virtual platform. This virtual platform will include discussion boards and toolkits for new YAC members.

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

- Develop a clear plan for how to use the YAC.

- Identify clear goals and expectations for YAC members.

- Establish a formal and transparent process for integrating YAC input into organization decisions and processes.

RECOMMENDATION 4: DEVELOP A YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• A mechanism that can be used to consult with youth on a variety of topics • Potential for youth review of documents, grant proposals, etc. • Gives youth a voice in programming • Gives young people an opportunity to learn from counterparts and engage in cultural exchange	• Avoiding tokenism; ensure youth involvement is intentional and authentic • Getting member-wide support to maximize effectiveness • Structuring and launching recruitment efforts to obtain representation from disadvantaged groups	• Point person to liaise with the YAC • Youth and adult training • Funding for individual YAC initiatives (seed grants, covering expenses)

RECOMMENDATION 5: SUPPORT YOUNG EMPLOYEES AND INTERNS

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• Provides voices of young professionals in policy and programming • Helps add authenticity to youth programming • Provides professional development opportunities for youth • Can bring energy to the office • Develops and retains young talent	• Youth lack of experience and skills • High turnover of young staff (many return to school) – this necessitates the cycle of planning, recruiting, training • Providing young people with meaningful roles and leadership opportunities • Dedicating time to train, support and mentor young staff	• Marketing staff • Coordinating staff • Training and mentoring for new staff/interns • Salary/stipends

5. INCREASE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG EMPLOYEES AND INTERNS

Having young people walking the halls, sharing ideas with their adult colleagues, and providing input on programs can help weave the youth perspective into the fabric of an organization. The key is to identify ways to support, train, mentor, empower and listen to young staff. This strategy has the potential for long-term impact, as it nurtures the development of an organization's future leaders and may increase retention of young talent.

EXAMPLE: ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

Advocates for Youth managers go out of their way to hire young people, usually recent undergraduates and some part-time college students. A representative from Advocates says that it "makes a world of difference to our programming and our policy work to have young people on our staff… It's a very different dynamic to have a young person working with young people rather than an adult." One example of how much the youth perspective can have an impact is by the work of one young man at Advocates. He saw a need for a safe space where LGBT youth could congregate and share experiences and created a website to fill it. The site subsequently became a flagship project for Advocates for Youth (youthresource.org).

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

• Build upon any existing young professionals groups.

• Offer competitive salaries to young employees and pay interns a stipend.

• Internship programs should be created with lower educational requirements (below Master's level) to reach younger and less privileged young people.

• Make an effort to create project teams that represent the target population (e.g., age, gender).

• Ensure that supervisory staff receive training in youth development and are prepared to serve as mentors. This could also include intergenerational communication and listening skills training.

• Ensure mentorship is included in the work objectives of supervisory and more seasoned staff.

• Provide young staff with professional development and leadership opportunities.

• Offer opportunities for young staff to network with each other, as well as mentors and senior leadership.

• Include young staff members on hiring committees and other HR related activities.

• Include young staff on grant-writing and proposal writing teams to ensure young people's perspectives are infused in these processes.

PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

6. SUPPORT YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

Working with or supporting youth-led organizations is another way to boost youth engagement activities. Organizations sometimes offer seed grants to help these organizations grow and effect lasting change in their communities. Partnering with youth-led organizations to design, implement or evaluate a program is also beneficial as close collaboration with young people and leaders from these organizations can facilitate enriching exchanges and learning opportunities for both parties.

EXAMPLE: UN-HABITAT

UN-HABITAT's Urban Youth Fund provides grants of up to $25,000 to youth-led organizations involved in poverty reduction in urban areas. To be eligible for these grants, young people, ages 15-32, must make up a significant part of the management and governing body of the organizations.

The Fund has a steering committee that provides technical oversight and an advisory committee tasked with operationalizing the Fund; each of these bodies includes two members of UN-HABITAT's Youth Advisory Board (UN-HABITAT, 2013).

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

- Encourage youth-led organizations to perform evaluation activities. Evaluations can lead to better programming, attract new donors and partners, and contribute to the field's understanding of the impact of youth-led interventions – however additional support is required.

- Train young people on program administration and financial management when providing seed grants.

- Youth-led organizations receiving funds for the first time may need more technical assistance and financial management training than those that are more advanced and manage multiple accounts and funders.

- Create a guide on working with and supporting youth-led organizations.

- Create a micro grants program, if possible, to allow for small manageable funds that get youth organizations into flexible funding opportunities (e.g., UN-HABITAT Urban Youth Fund).[4]

7. INCREASE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Whether it is project design, implementation, or evaluation, engaging youth in an organization's work can help improve the relevance of any youth programming. There are many steps that will need to be taken when integrating youth in these processes, including recruitment, selection, training, and mentoring of youth volunteers or workers (Sabo Flores, 2008). Youth work must also be monitored to ensure they are in safe situations and representing the program appropriately. These activities require extra time and expense on the front-end, but can provide important returns through the creation of programs that offer services young people need and find useful.

EXAMPLE: USAID'S YES YOUTH CAN! PROJECT

The Yes Youth Can! project, started in 2011 in Kenya, aims to create "peaceful leaders" in the 18-35 age range. To this end, young people organize themselves in to "bunges" or youth parliaments at the local, regional, and national levels. Each bunge has its own elected leadership and constitution. This mechanism allows young Kenyans to express their opinions and take action on issues affecting them and their

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RECOMMENDATION 6: SUPPORT YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• Builds capacity of youth-led organizations • Demonstrates real confidence in young people and creates partnering opportunities • Builds in research and learning opportunities to better understand the relative impact of increasing youth participation	• Managing and monitoring fund disbursal • Inexperienced organizations require a great deal of support • Outreach to organizations with staff from disadvantaged and marginalized groups	• Funding if seed grants are being provided • Staff to oversee provision of funds to youth • Staff to provide technical assistance to youth programs or organizations

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4. For more information on the Urban Youth Fund model: http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/10051_1_594012.pdf

RECOMMENDATION 7: INCREASE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

Benefits	Challenges	Resources Needed
• Creates more effective and responsive programs • Develops capacity and competency of young leaders and staff • Provides innovative thinking/problem solving to projects • Identifies gaps that may be missed by adults	• Young people's lack of skills and experience in various competencies (e.g., program evaluation) • Cultural norms regarding young people as peers or colleagues • Adult distrust	• Adult facilitation • Youth training • Adult training • Greater resources needed for marginalized youth • Stipends

communities. Bunge leaders are working at building strong relationships with local government officials as a means of promoting a youth-focused agenda. USAID's implementing partners offer training, mentorship and skill building activities to the bunges and focus on supporting youth leadership and entrepreneurship. In village level bunges, young people are starting to design and implement their own activities, including small businesses (e.g., fish ponds) and various community services (e.g., building peace groups and collecting garbage). Young people are also promoting a youth focused agenda through advocacy efforts and building strong relationships with government officials. In the My ID, My Life campaign, bunges have been organizing young people in an effort to register Kenyans for ID cards. These cards are required to vote, get a job, and open a bank account. As of mid-2012, almost one million youth were participating in the Yes Youth Can! project (USAID, 2013).

BEST PRACTICE ADVICE

• Roll out youth engagement efforts incrementally (e.g., start with smaller pilot projects at first) in order to allow for more careful monitoring of investments and returns.

• Create roles for youth that allow them to contribute in meaningful ways.

• Make sure young people know what is expected of them. Individualized contracts with youth help define roles and expectations.

• To build capacity and enhance the roles of youth, provide project-specific training, such as key informant interview training for young evaluators or content-specific training (e.g., global sexual and reproductive health trends) for young policy advocates.

• Adult facilitation is key; youth must have some level of ownership and autonomy, but also be given the

preparation and support to succeed. The level of facilitation depends on the skills and experience of the youth.

• Ensure that adults are informed and prepared to work in a meaningful way with youth during each phase of the process.

• Establish an evaluation and feedback loop for youth engagement efforts. This helps create a youth engagement evidence base and also potentially leads to more informed, relevant, and effective approaches to engaging youth.

• Market and make the case for including youth.

CONCLUSION

With the release of USAID's Youth in Development Policy, a great amount of energy and momentum exists around including youth across development programs. Several ways to increase youth participation were outlined in this brief – from supporting youth-led organizations to connecting with youth through youth advisory councils. While all of the different options have merit and have worked in other organizations, **the most important thing is to ensure that the intention behind engaging youth is genuine and clear.**

Those taking a leadership role in increasing youth participation within an organization should have solid goals and objectives, and understand their organization's capacity to implement such an initiative. Resources, including staff time to manage and coordinate efforts are crucial. In addition, young people should be offered meaningful roles and be empowered to take some ownership of any activities with which they are involved. Special caution is also needed with regard to managing young people's expectations of the roles they can play and contributions

they can make to an organization's programs, practices and operations.

Finally, young people should be supported through training, mentorship, and guidance from development experts. Without these things in place youth engagement runs the risk of being tokenistic and creating distrust and dissolution among youth. A truly dedicated youth engagement effort has the potential to improve program effectiveness and relevance, foster innovative ideas, create mutigenerational solutions to development problems, and create the next generation of strong development professionals.

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APPENDIX 1: ORGANIZATIONS REVIEWED

ActionAid*
Advocates for Youth*
Alliance for International Youth Development*
Catholic Relief Services
Commonwealth Secretariat*
DFID*
European Commission
Innovations Center for Community and Youth Development*
IREX
Latin American Youth Center*
MasterCard Foundation
Mercy Corps
Microsoft Corporate Citizenship
National Youth Development Agency, South Africa
Restless Development*
Save the Children, Norway*
Search for Common Ground
Taking IT Global*
UNDP
UN-HABITAT*
United States State Department*
Worldbank
World Vision
YouthBuild*

*Representatives from these organizations were interviewed.

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