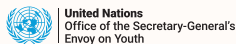


# What works to amplify the rights and voices of youth?

Meta-synthesis of lessons learned from youth evaluations (2015-2020) to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy



**YOUTH2030**  
WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



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# Foreword

Today, the world's youth population is at an all-time high – the largest generation of young people in history. In many countries, young people make up the largest proportion of the population and also face disproportionate challenges in accessing education, health, employment and equal opportunities. As we navigate the COVID-19 crisis, it is clear that these existing inequalities have widened further, and the global impacts of the pandemic will continue to affect the lives of young people for years to come. To keep the promise of 2030, we need to imagine new ways not only to engage and empower young people, but to place them at the forefront of recovery efforts to build back better towards a more resilient, safer and more inclusive world.

Data and evidence are essential tools both in helping us better understand the major challenges and issues that young people face, and in helping us identify the best solutions. Across the United Nations System there is a wealth of knowledge on the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy 2030. Using this evidence base to harvest learning is a valuable opportunity to leverage the existing knowledge on United Nations efforts that support young people across the globe. Through this system-wide exercise, we examine previous work across agencies to distill and reflect on lessons of what worked (and what did not work) in past implementations of Youth2030. It is our hope that this report provides practical and useful learning to inform and guide future interventions with and for youth to help build more sustainable, safer and inclusive world.

As a final note, we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support and contributions of the following organizations that made this system-wide exercise possible: EvalYouth, FAO, ILO, IOM, OSGEY, DPPA/PBSO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNIDO. We also express particular appreciation to the co-chairs of this exercise, Karen Cadondon (UNFPA) and Kathleen Letshabo (UNICEF) for overseeing the study and the finalization of the present report. Special thanks to the research consultant team that conducted the meta-synthesis study: Adriane Martin Hibler, Florence Secula, and Yemurai Nyoni.



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Annex 1: Documents reviewed

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# INTRODUCTION



## Youth strategy

The United Nations Youth Strategy 2030 is a system-wide framework for how the United Nations (UN) should programme for, with, and alongside youth in accordance with its three founding pillars - peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.<sup>1</sup> Launched in September 2018 with a taskforce headed by the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the strategy seeks to provide guidance to ensure that UN programming is holistic in its work with youth, recognizing the intersectional and context-specific needs of young people. It also seeks to foster more strategic and effective inter-agency coordination to ensure more collaborative and coherent intervention strategies that align with national and local priorities and needs.

***"A world in which the human rights of every young person are realized; that ensures every young person is empowered to achieve their full potential; and that recognizes young people's agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change."***

*UN Youth Strategy 2030*

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<sup>1</sup> UN Youth Strategy 2030, 2018: 5.

The strategy's purpose, reflected in its vision, is grounded in a human rights-based and participatory approach to UN programming for youth. It recognizes that the most meaningful and transformative programming for youth is one that works for and with young people. In light of changing global demographics, the strategy also recognizes the value of young people for their local knowledge, advanced skills base, and potential for innovation, as well as for the future of peacekeeping and international development. In this spirit, it acknowledges the urgent need to amplify youth voices and empower young people not only as beneficiaries, but also as important development actors in their own right. To this end, UN agencies have made commitments to implement the five priority areas<sup>2</sup> of the strategy specific to their particular mandates and thematic areas of intervention.

With the goals of being a knowledge and innovation pioneer, and a credible source of expertise on youth development and engagement, the strategy also seeks to build an evidence base of good practice and lessons learned from the past operationalisation of youth-targeted programmes across different geographical areas and changing intervention contexts.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the strategy affirms that promoting evidence-based interventions will help establish effective accountability mechanisms, promote cross-institutional reporting, and build trust and strengthen partnerships among the UN, donors, and both national and local partners.

## **| Meta-synthesis of lessons learned**

The purpose of the meta-synthesis is to generate evidenced-based learning on what works, what does not work, for whom, under what circumstances and why, with the aim of informing the future implementation of priority one and priority four of the UN Youth Strategy.<sup>4</sup> The exercise also aims to contribute, more broadly, to the existing body of knowledge on advancing the engagement, participation and advocacy of youth as well as youth and human rights. The temporal scope of the meta-synthesis will cover 2015 to 2020, accounting for the progress made thus far since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The meta-synthesis is not a mere aggregation of individual evaluation reports, rather the exercise serves to extract and document shared lessons across UN agencies. In this, the meta-synthesis facilitates a better reflection of what works and does not work in the current implementation of the strategy, which can then inform the design of future interventions towards advancing the strategy, and more broadly, achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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2 The UN Youth Strategy has 5 priority areas. 1: Engagement, Participation and Advocacy - Amplify youth voices for the promotion of a peaceful, just and sustainable world. 2: Informed and Healthy Foundations - Support young people's greater access to quality education and health services. 3: Economic Empowerment through Decent Work - Support young people's greater access to decent work and productive employment. 4: Youth and Human Rights - Protect and promote the rights of young people and support their civic and political engagement. 5: Peace and Resilience Building - Support young people as catalysts for Peace and Security, and Humanitarian Action.

3 UN Youth Strategy 2030, 2018: 9.

4 UN Youth Strategy 2030, p 11: Documentation of new evidence is critical to inform future "scalable and innovative solutions and alliances that translate into positive outcomes for all".







# 2 METHODOLOGY

## I Preliminary scoping

The initial phase of the meta-synthesis consisted of a preliminary scoping exercise to determine the breadth and depth of evidence related to the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy 2030, through the proxy of programming for youth and young people in the last five years (2015-2020).

The initial scoping included a comprehensive literature review across UN evidence databases, which rendered over 5000 documents relevant to all five priority areas of the youth strategy. This was then distilled down to approximately 2000 relevant documents through a rapid relevancy assessment of paper titles and abstracts.

Based on the available programmatic evidence, and their cross-cutting nature, priority one on the engagement, participation and advocacy of youth, and priority four on youth and human rights were selected as the focus of the meta-synthesis.<sup>5</sup>

## I Evaluation selection

Inclusion/exclusion criteria were used to screen and select evaluations.<sup>6</sup> The initial screening identified evaluation reports of potential relevance for further analysis. The evaluation reports underwent a final phase of exclusion screening to ensure that they focused on priority one and priority four of the strategy.<sup>7</sup> In total, 151 evaluation reports were selected for inclusion in this exercise.

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5 The criteria included: the priority area is highlighted in the Youth Strategy; the priority area is relevant to the achievement of a youth SDG (or WPAY) indicator; there is sufficient evaluative evidence of sufficient quality on which to do a review, ideally UN evaluations that have been validated; and there is not already significant evidence synthesis of what works on the priority area issue in the past five years.

6 Inclusion criteria included: a UN evaluation; mixed methods (includes quantitative and qualitative data); in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese; published within the last five years in peer reviewed or grey literature; and externally conducted and assessed for quality. Exclusion criteria included cohort cross-sectional, observational, and qualitative reviews or case studies that are not part of a broader evaluative study as defined above.

7 This initial search and review were undertaken prior to the meta-synthesis' refocus around priorities one and four of the UN Youth Strategy, therefore the topics of youth participation and youth human rights do not appear as specific search criteria. Further, reports were excluded that did not refer to youth participation and/or youth rights in programming. Records with no accompanying PDFs were also excluded (10). Entries published prior to 2015, or duplicates, or non-evaluative reports (guidance, lessons learned) which were accidentally included were excluded at this stage. There were no language restrictions (evaluations included French, Spanish and Portuguese language entries).

## **Data extraction**

In the inception phase, research questions were refined in the methodological note. Using these questions as a guide, data points of interest were extracted from the evaluation reports using a data extraction matrix specifically designed for this meta-synthesis.

### **Research questions**

- 1** What types of initiatives have been taken to address the priorities of the youth strategy?
- 2** Which segments of the youth populations are targeted by these initiatives, e.g. gender, disability, refugee, ethnicity, rurality or socioeconomic status?
- 3** What are the key contextual factors that drive the effective implementation of these youth initiatives? What are the key challenges?
- 4** Is there evidence of success, good practices and/or lessons learned in the implementation of priorities of the youth strategy? Do any of the initiatives have potential for scaling up or replication?
- 5** To what extent did initiatives engage with local governments, private sectors and the civil society, or even schools and youth organisations? Did the partnership with these players or lack thereof contribute to or affect the quality of programming?
- 6** What do these initiatives tell us about coordination and collaboration among agencies, including at the governments level? How is this done and at what levels (e.g. global, regional, national, subnational)?
- 7** How can these lessons learned be adapted or repurposed to engage youth in the current context of COVID-19?



## I Synthesis

Evaluations were grouped in thematic topic subsets which noted mentions of success and challenges in youth programming related to human rights and participation. Shared lessons were then identified and classified by theme, employing the OECD/DAC definition of a lesson learned.

### OECD/DAC definition of a lesson learned<sup>8</sup>

*“Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact.”*

The preliminary set of lessons were then presented to, and validated by, the members of the reference group for this exercise. This group includes both evaluation and technical experts from UN agencies directly involved in the implementation of priority one and priority four of the UN Strategy.

The final set of lessons learned are presented by theme in the following section in no particular order or relevance.

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8

OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, 2002: 26.





# 3 LESSONS LEARNED

## Snapshot of lessons learned

### Enabling key actors

1. Interventions that deliver human rights education to young people are more successful if they also promote youth human rights among duty bearers.

2. UN programmes that partner with key community actors are more sustainable, creating an enabling environment that promotes and protects the rights of young people.

### Accountability

3. Accountability and recourse mechanisms are critical to support the implementation of laws, policies and regulations in favour of youth rights.

4. Engaging youth in data collection and knowledge generation supports accountability and can contribute to youth empowerment.

### Engaging youth in multiple capacities

5. Working with youth in multiple capacities, as beneficiaries, advisors, partners and leaders, empowers young people by allowing them to engage in more transformative activities.

6. Engaging youth as strategic or implementing partners, who are adequately resourced and compensated for their efforts, can support youth movement building and result in sustained youth participation outcomes.

### Representation and inclusion

7. Youth consultations that are targeted and have built-in feedback loops allow for more meaningful and diverse participation of youth, including those from marginalized and vulnerable groups.

8. Targeted strategies and partnerships with local youth networks and organizations can enhance the inclusion of hard-to-reach youth.

## Enabling key actors

**Lesson 1** Interventions that deliver human rights education to young people are more successful if they also promote youth human rights among duty bearers.

In some contexts, the individual rights of adolescents and youth are not fully understood or appreciated, especially when they are related to issues of sexuality, bodily integrity, and financial autonomy. As a starting point, many UN interventions work directly with rights holders to enhance their knowledge of youth human rights. Such programmes place emphasis on delivering human rights education, training, or capacity building to young people, as well as increasing awareness and advocacy for their rights.

One common approach that UN agencies have used to educate young people about their rights is through schools or youth centres. Good examples of this include the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Life Skills Education (LSE) interventions<sup>9</sup> that run as in-school programmes, placing sexuality education within a human rights frame. In addition, these programmes make efforts to reach out-of-school youth through safe spaces, mentorship programmes, and other club like settings.

Several UN agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women) have used, and continue to use, peer education and mentoring to increase knowledge and awareness of the human rights of young people. In the evaluations reviewed, it was reported that through the targeted training of youth advocates/leaders on their rights, the knowledge was effectively disseminated not just to their peers, but to the duty bearers in their community as well. It was observed that the extension of shared knowledge helped in sustaining the promotion of youth rights in those communities.

As many evaluations noted, the human rights education programmes mostly targeted youth beneficiaries, and often failed to engage duty bearers at the community, institutional, or policy levels. There were, however, some interventions<sup>10</sup> that enhanced the human rights education not just of young people, but of institutional and policy actors in their communities. In these instances, it was found that the increased knowledge of youth rights among adolescents and youth was better sustained if the capacity of the duty bearers in their immediate environment was also strengthened.

### Decent jobs for Morocco's young people

The Youth@Work in Morocco project works with youth to develop entrepreneurial skills, and, on the supply side, to facilitate job creation. The ILO programme is holistic in orientation, seeking to build skills and provide training in entrepreneurship for young people using a human rights-based approach to achieve decent work.

Further, the inclusion of human rights is framed within a gender equality/non-discrimination approach regarding young women's access to training and the labour market, and reaching marginalized and vulnerable youth (e.g. those not in education, employment or training [NEET]). The human rights-based entrepreneurship training engages a diverse range of young people and positions them to secure a job after completing the programme through exposure to the private sector. Alongside this, the programme works with future employers to promote the right for decent, non-exploitative work for young people and ensure that the jobs they create respect young people as rights holders.

Source: ILO

<sup>9</sup> The curriculum is often modelled on the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: evidence informed approach. [https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/ITGSE\\_en.pdf](https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/ITGSE_en.pdf). Agencies who have such interventions include but are not limited to: UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA UNICEF, UN Women, WHO.

<sup>10</sup> UN agencies that implemented interventions, include but not limited to: ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women.



## **Lesson 2** UN programmes that partner with key community actors are more sustainable, creating an enabling environment that promotes and protects the rights of young people.

An essential component of youth programming in more culturally conservative societies is shifting the community norms around youth rights. These interventions frequently seek to mitigate the harmful effects that often result from inequitable social, cultural and gender norms. In these contexts, youth advocates/champions are important enablers for transformative change in their communities. Across the evaluations reviewed, UN interventions (ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women) that work with youth advocates/champions, while also engaging the young person's enabling environment, (which may include their family members, peers, youth organizations and networks, school, health providers, and policymakers) were often more successful. In particular, interventions that partner with community-based organizations were seen to be most effective.

UN joint programmes (Spotlight Initiative, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women) on child marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence offer a good intervention model for engaging the key community actors to effect transformative change. While these programmes have components that support adolescent girls and young women, they also engage community service providers (e.g. teachers, health providers, police, social workers, government authorities, politicians) through capacity-building and awareness-raising activities. In doing so, these interventions also serve to hold these community members accountable for the protection of the most vulnerable in their communities. Moreover, these interventions often work in partnership with youth-led and youth-serving non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/civil society organizations (CSOs), serving vulnerable communities (HIV+, LGBTI, rural, young mothers) and non-traditional partners (male, youth, religious and traditional groups). The evaluations reviewed highlighted the effectiveness of partnering with different actors within a community, enabling transformative shifts in community norms around youth rights.

### **Arab States Youth Leadership Programme**

The Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) has built a dynamic network of young people in the Arab region, employing design thinking and tools of innovation for sustainable development impact. The mission is to invest in young women and men across the region to unleash their potential as social innovators, leaders, thinkers and to help them become a powerful force for change in their communities, countries and the region at large.

The YLP is a component of UNDP's broader, holistic support for youth empowerment and engagement in Arab states. The YLP started as part of the Mosharaka programme, a gender project, closed in 2018, which contributed to gender equality and developed the capacity of youth to become leaders capable of disseminating knowledge on development issues in their communities.

The YLP was a collaborative effort between UNDP, OSGEY and UN Women, among other national partners, and centred on youth movement building and community engagement to create an enabling environment for youth rights and participation at the community level.

*Source: UNDP*

## Accountability

### Lesson 3 Accountability and recourse mechanisms are critical to support the implementation of laws, policies and regulations in favour of youth rights.

All UN agencies work, to some degree, with national governments as partners to establish a legal and policy framework promoting specific areas of rights (e.g. decent jobs, universal access to health care, quality education, democratization, or civic engagement). One UN programme (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women) has worked with ministries of health to protect youth, particularly adolescent girls and young women, from discrimination through changes in law, policy and administrative procedures. Policy level strategies to fulfil human rights include law and policy interventions to end discriminatory practices (e.g. age barriers in access to contraceptives and health services; parent or spousal consent laws; learner discrimination related to pregnancy, language, disability) and to open up access to resources (e.g. CSE or LSE, health services) and opportunities (e.g. education or employment in specific sectors) for young people, in particular adolescent girls and young women. Such upstream work, when well implemented, can reinforce and sustain progress on youth human rights at country, regional and global levels.

To create the necessary safeguards for adolescents and youth, many social protection programmes (OSGEY, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women) rely heavily on establishing legal protections with a potential for recourse, supported by policy, norms and standards. Across the evaluations reviewed, it was evident that the legal and policy protections for youth human rights were most effective when accountability mechanisms were established, such as legal protections that can be used in a court of law or professional standards that can be monitored for licensing. While there has been much effort by UN agencies – through law and policy changes – to advocate for government protection of youth rights, they stop short of litigation or enforcement of youth rights through the law.

#### Advancing child-centred public policy in Brazil

In Brazil, UNICEF adopted a programming approach to increase the prevalence of child-centred, rights-based public policies through institutionalized and contextualized civic engagement programmes that focus on the most vulnerable adolescents and actively involve them in the development and legislation of policies.

This intervention showed that formal entry points, laws, and policies for adolescent engagement in governance are valuable, but insufficient on their own, when it comes to ensuring that the perspectives of adolescents are considered in decisions that secure their rights to provision, protection, and participation. Among the strategies that UNICEF Brazil found to be critical to success were: creating accountable, formalized governance systems; building on existing community relationships; prioritizing inclusion; and listening to adolescents through formal and informal channels.

The programme established that child-centred policies are stronger when those who can benefit most from decisions not only have a seat at the table, but an equal and influential voice in the final legislation.

Source: UNICEF

#### **Lesson 4** Engaging youth in data collection and knowledge generation supports accountability and can contribute to youth empowerment.

The collection of data in programming and policy is critical to advance the youth agenda. Robust evidence is particularly important for understanding the status of youth at the country level and thus helps to inform decisions about national priorities in relation to youth rights and development.

Several UN agencies (UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNICEF, OHCHR) have progressively supported the data collection, monitoring and reporting on youth human rights through shadow reports and the Voluntary National Reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, there is an increasing number of youth engaged in leading and/or supporting these activities. Young people participate in data collection and analysis with regards to the barriers to their sexual and reproductive rights (UNFPA, UN Women), and in relation to other youth rights such as the right to decent work (ILO), peace and security (UNIDO), and the impact of natural disasters on youth (UNDP).

In many ways, youth engagement in supporting data collection on issues that pertain to their rights serves as both a knowledge generation activity and an empowerment activity. Youth are able to enhance their agency, generate and validate knowledge, and ultimately, hold duty-bearers accountable for the protection and fulfilment of youth rights. In this view, youth engagement in data collection adds power to the evidence. Often the collected data is used to support legislative and policy actions that leads to greater recognition and protection of youth rights. Through more participatory ways of generating and collecting data on the specific needs and conditions of youth, young people, and in particular, youth organizations have become more invested in finding youth-led solutions to the specific challenges they face.

##### **Youth participation in evidence generation, dissemination and use in Nepal**

The youth-led NGO Restless Development entered into partnership with UNFPA to support the collection and development of the report “Nepali Youth in Figures”, which established a youth database. It introduced the Youth Score Card, which is regarded as an effective mechanism for assessing the UNCT’s programme from a youth perspective as well as an effective advocacy tool.

In the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, UNFPA trained adolescent and youth volunteers as peer educators and enumerators in the context of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), funded by the World Bank and UNDP.

Collaboration with youth-led NGOs and the Ministry of Youth and Sports also facilitated the participation of youth in central-level policy making and planning in priority districts. A challenge, however, was to ensure women had a voice in the district development processes through youth network members.

*Source: UNFPA*

## **Engaging youth in multiple capacities**

#### **Lesson 5** Working with youth in multiple capacities, as beneficiaries, advisors, partners and leaders, empowers young people by allowing them to engage in more transformative activities.

Despite the wide recognition by the UN<sup>11</sup> of the imperative to work with youth as advisors, partners and leaders, UN-led interventions still predominantly engage youth as beneficiaries. In the majority of the

11 Notably, priority one of the UN Youth Strategy 2030.

evaluations reviewed, youth were beneficiaries, recipients or end-users of the youth-focused interventions. While beneficiary status may be perceived as representing a lower level of engagement, it is not necessarily disempowering. Reports indicate that youth receiving well-tailored support based on their needs improve their life circumstances and play a meaningful role in their communities. However, there are other forms of participation (alongside being the beneficiary) in programming that can offer youth more opportunities to engage in potentially transformative activities such as advocacy and policy influencing.

Some sectors, such as youth economic empowerment, are more likely to engage youth only as beneficiaries, whereas sectors such as health or civic participation more often engage with youth in different capacities simultaneously. For example, youth programming focused on employment (e.g. FAO, ILO, UNDP) generally aims to increase youth employability through approaches that treat youth as the direct beneficiary of individual training and skills-building, access to financial services, etc. On the other hand, there are sectors, such as health, education, civic participation, or peacebuilding (e.g. UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF) that often engage with youth and youth CSOs in different capacities simultaneously – as beneficiaries of institutional services (health, education), as advocates and implementing partners in communities, as national and global level advocates of youth human rights, and as advisors in global panels or forums.

#### Engaging youth in multiple capacities in Moldova

The UNFPA Moldova country programme was successful in engaging youth in multiple capacities – as beneficiaries, implementation partners, advisors and advocates.

The programme prioritized adolescents and youth in national development policies, particularly in increasing the access to sexuality information and health services, and in the identification of gaps in data to track youth development. In addition, the programme engaged the NGO Network of Peer-to-Peer Educators (Y-PEER) as an implementing partner and significant progress was made in terms of youth peer-to-peer activities in both quality and quantity (coverage). In 2014, about 7,400 young people from different districts and localities benefitted from activities delivered by Y-PEER, of which 1,900 were direct beneficiaries and 5,500 indirect beneficiaries. In addition, young people were engaged as advisors in five public discussions where 36 national experts and around 200 adolescents and youth discussed issues relevant to youth. This engagement highlighted the potential for youth participation and their proactive involvement in policymaking. Lastly, UNFPA supported 11 youth NGOs to take part in the Regional Public Campaign “Youth Voice” to strengthen the participation and amplify the voice of young people in the post-2015 development agenda.

Youth engagement in these multiple capacities built momentum that supported UNFPA efforts to achieve new youth policy development with the adoption of the National Youth Development Strategy 2020.

Source: UNFPA

### **Lesson 6 Engaging youth as strategic or implementing partners, that are adequately resourced and compensated for their efforts, can support youth movement building and result in sustained youth participation outcomes.**

Sustainable programming with youth requires long-term power and responsibility sharing between youth and adults in decision-making roles. This can be achieved through partnering with young people in the implementation of youth programming across agencies. Without the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes, there is no sharing of power or ownership by youth.

In the evaluations reviewed, the collaboration of youth-led CSOs with UN agencies has taken different forms with varied outcomes. In some instances, the partnerships with the UN were based on specific project needs, with limited instruments of collaboration. In other cases, particularly in health, education or

civic participation programming, UN agencies intentionally planned for engaging youth CSOs by elevating their role to strategic or implementing partners. Strategies were also put in place to sustain the youth CSOs beyond the duration of the partnerships.

As many evaluations noted, youth participation is really only possible over the longer term if the obstacles they face can also be mitigated. Youth participation often relies on volunteer youth who devote their time and expertise without accounting for their material needs and those of their families. In these cases, the provision of fair compensation would help to support sustaining any outcomes that were achieved beyond the completion of UN interventions. In addition, high levels of informality were also noted as a challenge. Specifically, many youth CSOs are not formally registered or do not have a bank account, which limited the modalities of contractual partnerships with the UN.

### Support to peacebuilding in Guinea

The aim of this DPPA/PBSO intervention implemented by Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organization, is to strengthen the leadership and impact of youth in conflict prevention in Guinea through the Youth 360 approach.

This methodology, created by Search for Common Ground, supports the capacity and leadership of young people by providing them with access to financial, human and technical resources that enable formal and informal youth groups to take the lead in local peacebuilding initiatives. This particular project offers training, coaching, technical support and seed funding to youth groups, both informal and formal, empowering them to develop their own peacebuilding projects in their local contexts.

To date, 24 collaborative youth projects have been chosen to contribute to the peacebuilding of their communities. The 24 selected initiatives will benefit from investment in their projects, coaching to support the implementation, and technical support with impact assessments and advocacy activities.

*Source: DPPA/PBSO*

## Representation and inclusion

**Lesson 7** Youth consultations that are targeted and have built-in feedback loops allow for more meaningful and diverse participation of youth, including those from marginalized and vulnerable groups.

In youth consultations, the diversity of youth perspectives is often limited. Evidence shows that young people participating in these policy consultations are often not representative of the youth diversity in their communities. In some cases, the selection of youth representatives can be at the discretion of national partners. Often, the majority of youth participating in youth consultations have prior knowledge or experience of development work and/or access to opportunities to participate. As a result, youth consultations are often not robust enough to catalyze transformative change, but they can still strongly support youth voices.

Across the evaluations reviewed, it was noted that the participation of marginalized and vulnerable youth groups in youth consultations requires intentional targeting and accommodation. This could include providing additional support for caretakers to facilitate the involvement of youth with disabilities; considering challenges that youth migrants, refugees and other mobile populations have in the humanitarian context; or addressing social or normative barriers that inhibit the participation of adolescent girls and young women.

Moreover, it was found that youth consultations appeared to be mostly one-way interactions, missing opportunities for meaningful youth engagement. Evaluations often describe the value of consultation mechanisms from the perspective of the adult/end-user of the results. Consultation mechanisms are described as functional and of value if they generate rapid and usable inputs for adults/decision-makers. There is very limited information about the feedback to the youth themselves, both on the outcome of the consultation and its use in decision-making. As a result, youth consultations can seem tokenistic and limited as an effective platform to amplify the voice of young people.

#### **Empowering youth as agents for peace and social cohesion in the Solomon Islands**

In the Solomon Islands, DPPA/PBSO supported the establishment of 20 youth caucuses in four targeted provinces and 111 previously conflicted communities. This network has proven critical in relaying the concerns of isolated communities in rural zones and raising red flags concerning potential grievances at times when they were beyond the reach of the authorities and/or development partners.

The caucuses also engaged their communities in response to COVID-19 and served as early warning mechanisms for potential grievances. The establishment of youth caucuses in North Malaita and the Western coast has allowed previously excluded youth to raise their concerns and to engage in constructive dialogue. This development is considered historic and has become an effective catalyst in overcoming political grievances arising from ethnic tensions.

*Source: DPPA/PBSO*

#### **Lesson 8 Targeted strategies and partnerships with local youth networks and organizations can enhance the inclusion of hard-to-reach youth.**

Across the evaluations reviewed, the majority of youth participation interventions aimed at engaging a diverse range of youth, with some intentional targeting of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Yet, the inclusion of hard-to-reach youth (e.g. indigenous young people, ethnic minorities, youth with disabilities) was uneven across agencies, varying across sectors and country contexts. Often participation interventions involve known, mainstream youth networks (e.g. Y-PEER network), or more educated, organized youth activists, overlooking the most vulnerable and marginalized groups among young people.

Some evaluations highlighted that equity-based approaches and intentional targeted strategies were successful in engaging hard-to-reach youth. Additionally, other evaluations reported that forging new partnerships with local stakeholders (e.g. local clubs for adolescents and young people) was also effective in reaching more marginalized and vulnerable groups of youth.

A good model for this includes Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health programmes (UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF) that support the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups, including specific sub-populations such as very young adolescents (10-14), people with disabilities, LGBTI, people living with HIV or ethnic minorities. These interventions undertook initial assessments to identify and target specific youth groups and then tailored the programme design to their specific needs and priorities (e.g. specific programming for adolescent girls and young women).

#### **Support to strengthen LGBTI CSOs in Vietnam**

UNDP has supported the development and implementation of the ViLEAD (Vietnamese LGBT Leadership Development Program) capacity development model that targets support for LGBTI CSOs in Vietnam. The programme builds the knowledge and capacity of the CSOs to enable them to advocate for legislative and policy change on LGBTI issues.

The programme works through two selected youth-serving CSOs to do peer outreach to the more vulnerable LGBTI youth in their communities. The intervention was successful in reaching, monitoring and verifying marginalized and vulnerable youth despite socio-political barriers to access and stigmatization. Moreover, the training programme, in conjunction with broader technical assistance and funding to LGBTI youth groups, reportedly influenced policymakers' attitudes towards their specific challenges and vulnerabilities.

As a result, legislative progress has been achieved on the prohibition of LGBTI-harming practices. The programme was considered highly effective and appropriate for the specific needs of marginalized and different LGBTI groups, as well as more mainstream groups. Over 2,500 people have been reached through ViLEAD activities, including community members, parents, educators, students and members of the Youth Union.

*Source: UNDP*







# 4 USING EVIDENCE: MOVING FORWARD

By building on an existing knowledge base from the past implementation of youth focused programmes, this report serves to help identify shared lessons learned to enhance the engagement, participation and advocacy of young people as well as promote and protect youth human rights. As a system-wide exercise, the meta-synthesis harnesses evaluative evidence across a multitude of agencies, different geographical areas, and changing intervention contexts. The lessons presented here are reflections of what works and doesn't work in the UN response to the needs of youth, and its ways of working with governments and young people to realize the SDGs.

The meta-synthesis study also underscores the commitment of the UN system to implement interventions for, and with, youth through various approaches and strategies. In addition, this exercise has shown that UN youth programming is increasing in diverse and sometimes innovative ways to ensure the meaningful participation of young people as well as to fully realize youth human rights. It remains to be seen that UN youth interventions that are holistic, multi-sectoral and willing to truly partner with young people are more successful and sustainable.

To this point, there is an imperative for a more inclusive and meaningful engagement of young people in the data collection, monitoring and reporting of development programming. Evaluation, for example, can provide an opportunity to amplify youth voice and agency in development programming and, in particular, interventions that are designed for young people. Engaging youth in this way allows them to contribute to the development process as strategic partners and, moreover, recognizes young people as leaders, innovators and change-makers who will be key to building a more sustainable and equitable future.

As we look to the future implementation of UN Youth Strategy, there will be opportunities to undertake similar studies on its other priorities for continued learning and knowledge sharing. Such system-wide exercises that take stock of the successes and challenges of past implementation can be pivotal learning points to inform and shape collective action and future strategies to accelerate progress on the Youth 2030 Agenda.



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