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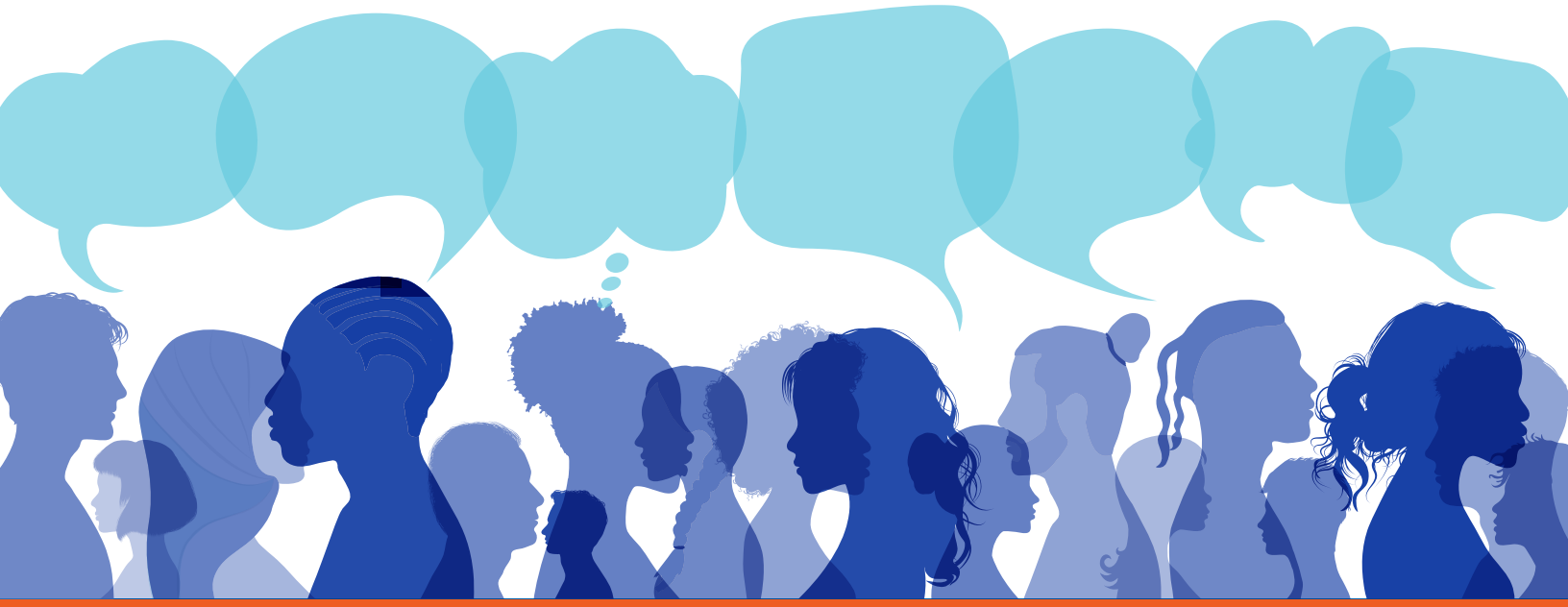

YOUTH VOICES IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT:

A roadmap for promoting meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs

FEBRUARY 2021

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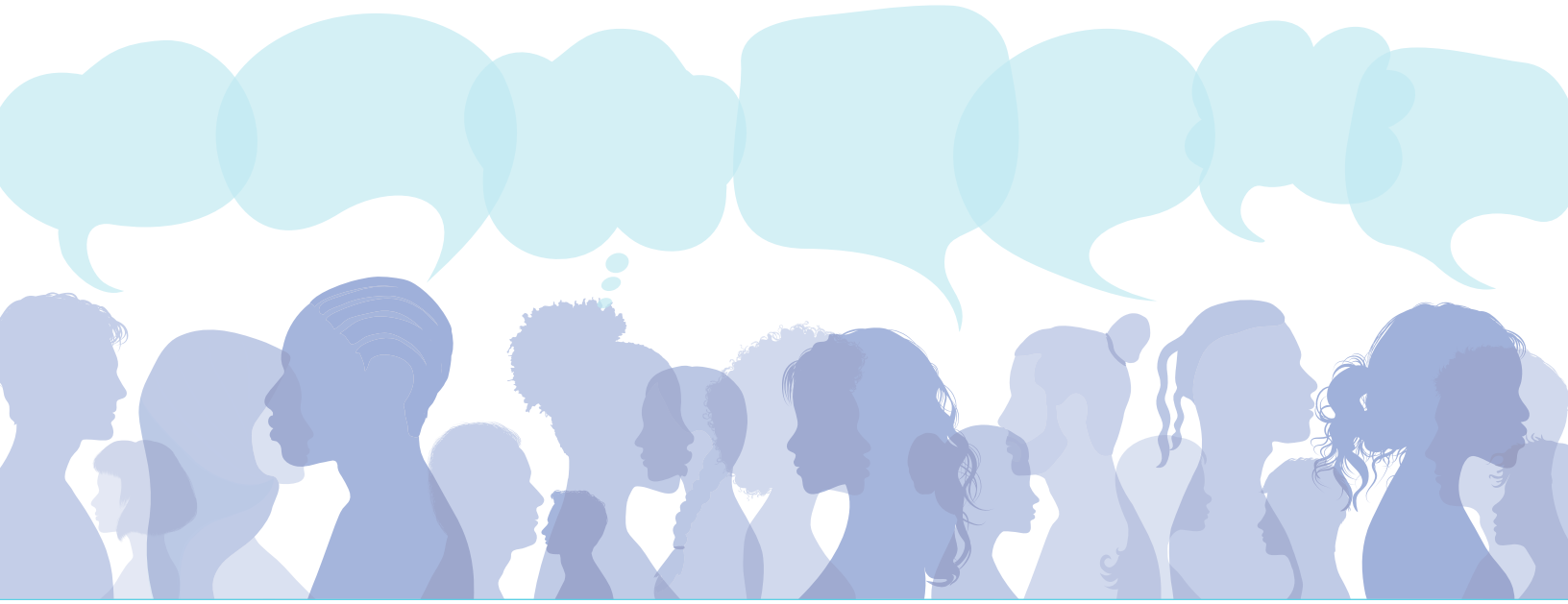

Acknowledgments

As an organization that advances equality, especially for girls and young women, we value partnerships and the impact they can have. We are grateful to the individuals and organizations whose invaluable support and guidance ensured the publication of this paper.

Specifically, we express our appreciation to:

- **The Youth Employment Funders Group** for participating in a cocreation process throughout the development of this document and for ensuring that funders and, most especially, young people have their voices heard.
- **The Project Advisory Group and Youth Advisory Panel**, whose understanding and guidance, in addition to their mobilization support, allowed this report to be delivered with confidence. These groups comprise the following organizations:
  - **Project Advisory Group:** Citi Foundation; Mastercard Foundation; United States Agency for International Development (USAID); International Labour Organization (ILO); the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva; Plan International USA and the Youth Advisory Panel.
  - **Youth Advisory Panel:** AIESEC International; United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth; Education For Employment (EFE); Young Americas Business Trust; Young Professionals for Agricultural Development Africa; Rural Youth Europe; Youth Lead; National Association for Friendship Centres; Asian Development Bank Youth for Asia and Special Olympics Asia Pacific.
- **The various individuals and organizations** that took the time to participate and provide their insights in the key informant interviews, focus group discussions, roundtable discussion, follow-up meetings, validation webinars and the youth survey.

The Plan International Youth Voices for Youth Employment Project Team

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The **Citi Foundation** works to promote economic progress and improve the lives of people in low-income communities around the world. We invest in efforts that increase financial inclusion, catalyze job opportunities for youth and reimagine approaches to building economically vibrant communities. The Citi Foundation's "More than Philanthropy" approach leverages the enormous expertise of Citi and its people to fulfill our mission and drive thought leadership and innovation.

The **Youth Employment Funders Group** (YEFG) is a network of over 20 multilateral organizations and international funders working together to generate and share more and better evidence-based knowledge on what works in the field of youth employment.

This paper is the result of the analysis carried out by Plan International and does not purport to represent the views or the official opinion of any individual organization that participated in the research and contributed their time, experience and insights.

User's Guide to the Roadmap

What is the purpose of this roadmap?

This document has been developed to guide and equip funders and stakeholders with tools and information to support the integration of meaningful youth engagement into youth employment programming and strategies. To do so, the paper outlines why meaningful youth engagement is important, what meaningful youth engagement is and how it could be embedded across various stages of the program life cycle, as well as within a funder's strategy and culture.

Bearing in mind that funders are at different stages of their journeys, the heterogeneity of young people and the wide range of youth employment program interventions, the roadmap's recommendations are both immediately actionable and aspirational.

How is the roadmap structured?

The roadmap is divided into several interconnected sections:

— An **Introduction** section, which frames the discussion in subsequent sections.

— The **Research Methodology & Summary of Findings** section, which outlines the methodology that directed our approach and a summary of data collection findings.

— The **Defining Meaningful Youth Engagement in Youth Employment Programs** section, which proposes a definition for meaningful youth engagement and presents a framework to operationalize this concept in youth employment programs.

— **A Roadmap to Meaningful Youth Engagement in Action** section, which builds on the framework by providing entry points for mainstreaming meaningful youth engagement in programs – these come in the form of milestones and action steps per program life-cycle stage and into organizational strategies.

Throughout the paper, there are callouts, case studies and quotes. The paper also provides detailed supplementary reading via annexes, which include a case for meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs, a detailed methodology, literature review findings and qualitative and quantitative data summaries, among others. There is also an excel database available that contains the data used to inform the research.

How to use this roadmap?

The roadmap provides practical guidance and tools to assist a wide range of audiences to develop strategies on how the integration of meaningful youth engagement can strengthen their organizations, program implementation and participation. Below is a table outlining key areas of focus and take-aways for four primary target groups: funders, implementers, private sector partners and youth.

IF YOU ARE A…	FOCUS ON…	YOU WILL FIND…
Funder	Defining Meaningful Youth Engagement in Youth Employment Programs	A description and framework to guide and operationalize meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs.
	Mainstreaming Meaningful Youth Engagement into the Program Life Cycle	Step-by-step approaches and examples on how to integrate the meaningful youth engagement pillars into the project life cycle, beginning from project conception and design through to implementation and impact reporting.
	Meaningful Youth Engagement into Organizational Strategies	Recommendations for promoting meaningful youth engagement within your institution/organization.
Implementer	Mainstreaming Meaningful Youth Engagement into the Program Life Cycle	Step-by-step approaches and examples on how to integrate the meaningful youth engagement pillars into your project life cycle, beginning from project conception and design through to implementation and impact reporting.
Private Sector Partner	Framework for Operationalizing Meaningful Youth Engagement	Information on the five pillars that underpin the integration of meaningful youth engagement, accompanied by outcomes and high-level indicators to measure progress.
Youth	Defining Meaningful Youth Engagement in Youth Employment Programs	A description and framework for meaningful youth engagement to help you determine what to expect as a partner and participant, and how to hold adult counterparts accountable to their commitments to meaningful youth engagement.

Executive Summary

The Untapped Potential of Meaningful Youth Engagement

Strengthening the practice of meaningful youth engagement, including in youth employment programs, reflects a growing acknowledgement of young people's role and need to be engaged in decisions affecting their lives. While still understudied, there is increasing awareness among funders of youth engagement's added value to programs, particularly in increasing a program's responsiveness and quality, as well as longer-term benefits resulting from the engagement of young people in various stages of the program life cycle.

A common understanding of "what" meaningful youth engagement is, and "how" funders can effectively integrate meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs, remains a major knowledge gap, however. There are only limited good practices in the existing literature that focus on the intersection of youth engagement and youth employment. As a result, funders contend with conceptual and practical difficulties in engaging young people in their programs and strategies.

This roadmap identifies the "who," "why," "when" and, most importantly, "how" when it comes to involving young people as partners in youth employment programming. It has been developed to support funders and practitioners in their efforts to embed youth voices and rights into their programming by considering two key research questions:

- What are the key phases of youth engagement in the planning, governance, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of youth employment programs?
- What concrete steps can youth employment funders take to strengthen their own youth engagement strategies?

To answer these questions, this roadmap considered input from a literature review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, a roundtable discussion, validation webinars and a youth survey.

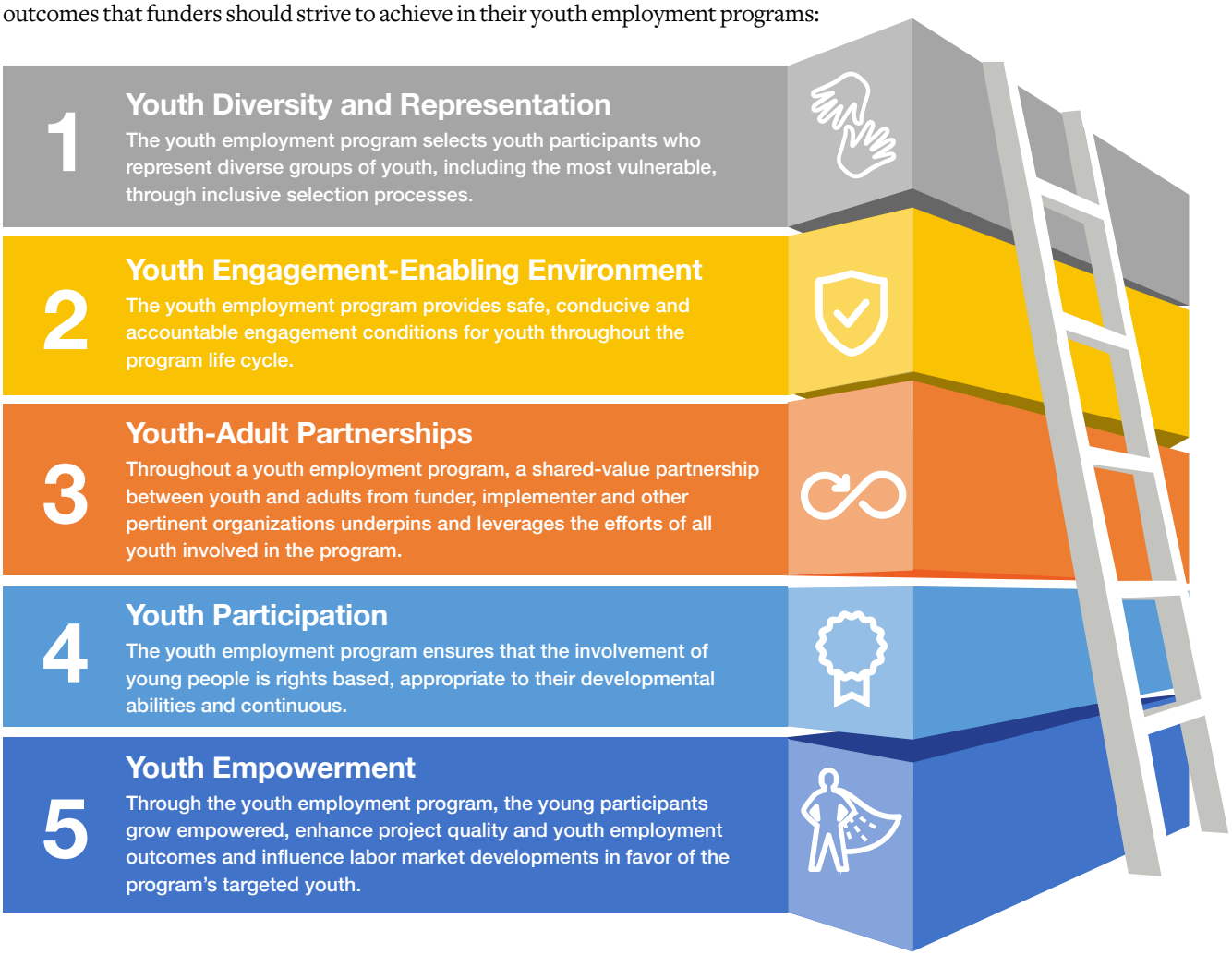
What is Meaningful Youth Engagement?

In reviewing the literature, recurring themes that characterize meaningful youth engagement were identified. Insights from interviews and discussions with funders, implementers and youth further validated these concepts. Based on our analysis of the data from these sources, meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs occur when:

> Under **enabling conditions**, **youth representatives** actively **participate** throughout the program life cycle and enter into youth-adult **partnerships that empower youth** and may contribute to positive and long-lasting labor market outcomes.

At the heart of this definition are young people (15-30 years old), in all their diversity and including the most vulnerable. It implies that young people who are part of these programs are the driving force of youth employment programs, albeit in varying ways, rather than merely passive beneficiaries. Moreover, the definition applies to any youth employment program focused on improving youth employment outcomes, regardless of program size, budget, implementation arrangements, scale or the nature of its interventions.

To operationalize the definition, a framework for meaningful youth engagement has been developed. The figure below visualizes the framework and shows five mutually reinforcing pillars that describe the outcomes that funders should strive to achieve in their youth employment programs:

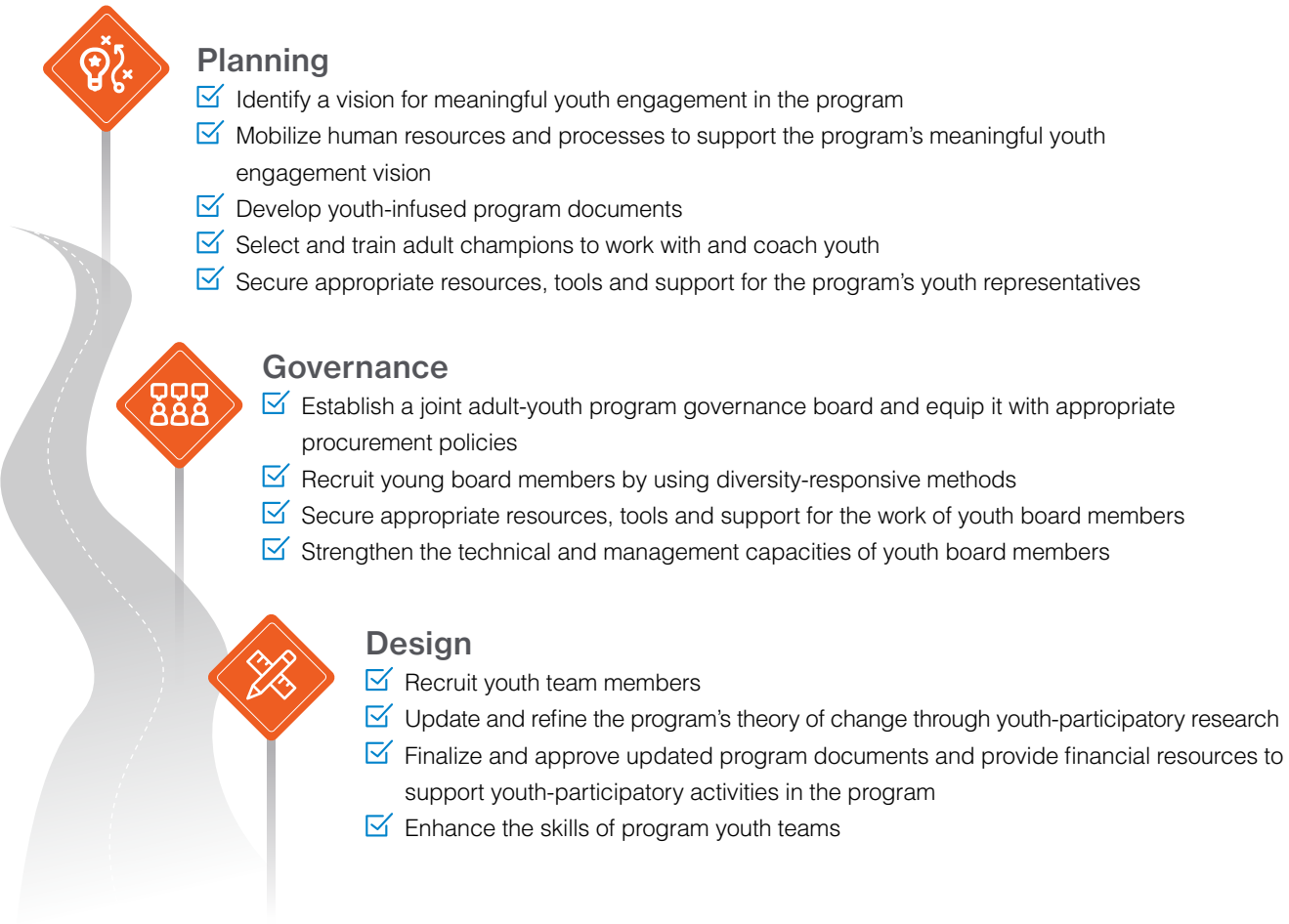


The proposed framework aims to address challenges that may hinder youth engagement. Some of these challenges include organizational constraints, which often result in missed opportunities to engaging youth meaningfully in youth employment programs; overcoming perceived biases and trust issues with youth; and dealing with young people's multiple layers of vulnerabilities and contexts.

Working with young people in shared-value partnerships throughout the life cycle of a youth employment program, and providing them with a place where they are valued and heard, irrespective of their backgrounds, are both critical for addressing the negative opinions of youth held by adults and the practice of tokenism in programs. Such partnerships should also go hand-in-hand with positive discourses and behaviors; the active participation of youth in evidence-based research and decision-making; far-reaching and diverse youth staff recruitment strategies in programs; and the involvement of youth leaders, peer trainers and mentors close to the youth grassroots in youth employment programs.

Guidance for Meaningful Youth Engagement in Youth Employment Programs

This roadmap recommends priority areas for funders when embedding youth engagement into their institutional strategies and youth employment programs. Recognizing that funders and practitioners may be at different stages in the youth employment program life cycle, this roadmap offers step-by-step guidance across each key program stage for achieving meaningful youth engagement.



Planning

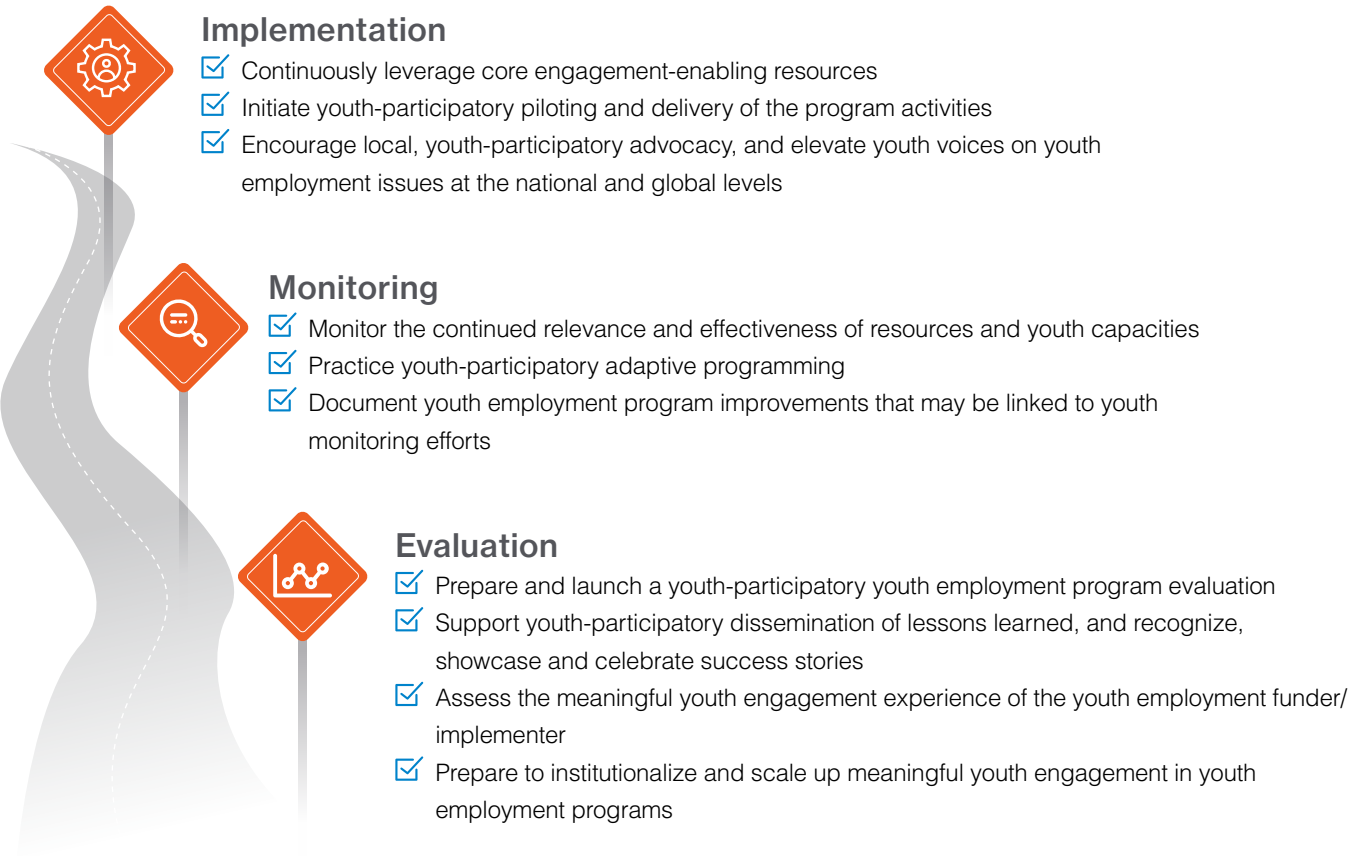
- ☑ Identify a vision for meaningful youth engagement in the program
- ☑ Mobilize human resources and processes to support the program's meaningful youth engagement vision
- ☑ Develop youth-infused program documents
- ☑ Select and train adult champions to work with and coach youth
- ☑ Secure appropriate resources, tools and support for the program's youth representatives

Governance

- ☑ Establish a joint adult-youth program governance board and equip it with appropriate procurement policies
- ☑ Recruit young board members by using diversity-responsive methods
- ☑ Secure appropriate resources, tools and support for the work of youth board members
- ☑ Strengthen the technical and management capacities of youth board members

Design

- ☑ Recruit youth team members
- ☑ Update and refine the program's theory of change through youth-participatory research
- ☑ Finalize and approve updated program documents and provide financial resources to support youth-participatory activities in the program
- ☑ Enhance the skills of program youth teams



Implementation

- Continuously leverage core engagement-enabling resources
- Initiate youth-participatory piloting and delivery of the program activities
- Encourage local, youth-participatory advocacy, and elevate youth voices on youth employment issues at the national and global levels

Monitoring

- Monitor the continued relevance and effectiveness of resources and youth capacities
- Practice youth-participatory adaptive programming
- Document youth employment program improvements that may be linked to youth monitoring efforts

Evaluation

- Prepare and launch a youth-participatory youth employment program evaluation
- Support youth-participatory dissemination of lessons learned, and recognize, showcase and celebrate success stories
- Assess the meaningful youth engagement experience of the youth employment funder/implementer
- Prepare to institutionalize and scale up meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs

The roadmap culminates with recommendations to help funders mainstream meaningful youth engagement into organizational strategies.

Overview of Key Terms

Funders: Institutions that directly deliver their own funding to youth employment programs, or that channel funding from other organizations into youth employment projects. They include bilateral organizations, multilateral institutions, philanthropic foundations, trusts, private businesses, charities and global funds.

Program/project life cycle: The stages of development of a program or project. They usually include: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The roadmap also considers two additional stages: planning and governance.

Young people: Individuals 15-30 years old, as informed by the U.N. Youth Strategy (15-24),in addition to the upper age limit of youth participants in this study. [1]

Youth employment program: Any initiative that aims to achieve positive changes in youth employment outcomes, regardless of scale; approaches; budget; or implementation. Supply-side youth employment programs typically include skills-development and training interventions, while demand-side youth employment programs typically include job-creation and business enabling-environment interventions.

Youth empowerment: Young people achieving greater agency, personal growth and social impact. Through participatory engagement, youth acquire core skills that will improve their own position in the labor market. Self-empowerment through personal growth and development, in turn, leads to increased youth capacity to (i) improve program quality and youth-responsiveness, accelerating the program's youth employment outcomes (community change); and (ii) co-initiate with other influential stakeholders around necessary labor market changes to support greater youth inclusiveness (systems change).

Introduction

"Nothing about them without them" is a saying often echoed in meaningful youth engagement approaches.[2] Though there is growing acknowledgment of the importance of young people's role and their engagement in decisions affecting their lives, there is scant formal research to support the investments of time and resources in engaging youth; and there are many, often contradictory models and best practices on how to meaningfully engage youth.

A theoretical barrier to strengthening this practice is the lack of consensus around what constitutes meaningful youth engagement. Specific practical challenges to strengthening this practice also persist. These include limitations due to geography, access and time constraints, funding and project barriers, negative perceptions about young people, tokenism, complexities of youth heterogeneity and issues of fair youth representation. This suggests that working with youth effectively and meaningfully requires efforts both at the programmatic level and within relevant institutions.

Building on the existing knowledge of challenges and opportunities in the youth employment space, this roadmap provides concrete guidance on how to integrate meaningful youth engagement into six essential points of a project life cycle, with a focus on who, how, when and why. Meaningful youth engagement in this roadmap harnesses key Positive Youth Development concepts (assets, agency, enabling environment, contribution) and focuses on their application within the specific youth employment context.

The roadmap is anchored by two fundamental research questions:

- What are the key phases of youth engagement in the planning, governance, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of youth employment programs?
- Which concrete steps can youth employment funders take to strengthen their own youth engagement strategies?

In international reports, young people are referred to as "agents of change, citizens and leaders, participants and activists, nations' most important assets, the best hope and promise we have for our collective future development and prosperity."[3] The adoption of Agenda 21, a landmark global action plan for sustainable development, puts young people front and center in the achievement of sustainable development, noting that youth participation "in all relevant levels of decision-making process" is critical not only to "their own lives but to their future."[4] This is echoed in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, where young people are seen to have roles in "translating the 2030 Agenda into local, national and regional policy," "holding governments accountable" and in "implementation, monitoring and review of the Agenda."[5]

Check out ANNEX A, which provides more information about the case for youth engagement drawn from the literature.

Research Methodology & Summary of Findings

Methodology

Through a mixed-methods approach, this study investigated and designed a conceptual framework for meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs. Data collection activities centered around a literature review, which covered recent peer-reviewed journal articles; institutional documents; toolkits and case studies from youth employment practitioners; and rigorous evaluation reports where available. In particular, the literature review provided the conceptual foundation for the roadmap's framework for youth engagement and guided subsequent consultations with key stakeholders to fill in the gaps.[6] See ANNEX B for a summary of the literature review findings.

To complement the literature review, primary data collection activities included 35 key informant interviews; eight youth focus group discussions; a roundtable discussion with funders, implementers and youth; validation webinars; and a global survey of 284 young people. The data collection activities for the roadmap used a convergent mixed methods strategy appropriate for exploratory studies focused on concepts — such as meaningful youth employment — that involve little empirical evidence.[7]

Given the nature and context of the topic, qualitative data was prioritized to amplify the voices of the youth and adult respondents, thereby allowing for a more thorough investigation of relevant themes emerging from the key informant interviews and youth focus group discussions.[8] An inductive content analysis approach was used to analyze the data from these activities. Such an approach helps explore theories with only sparse documentation.

The responses from the interviews and youth focus groups were collected in notes and transcripts and analyzed using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti). Open coding was followed by a broad categorization of emerging code categories that guided the analysis and synthesis of findings. The analysis and synthesis were then used to develop the roadmap's meaningful youth engagement framework. Quantitative data from the youth survey was analyzed separately, and was used to complement the findings from the qualitative data (this is an appropriate and common triangulation strategy for mixed-methods research).[9]

As a core part of this paper's development, a Youth Advisory Panel consisting of representatives of several youth organizations and networks provided significant inputs regarding the design, preparation and implementation of data collection and analysis.[10] Through the panel, the study was able to engage young people from diverse backgrounds and regions of the world.

For details on the methodology, research activities and limitations of this paper, please refer to ANNEX C.

Summary of Findings

This section provides a summary of findings analyzed from coded text data from 35 key informant interviews (i.e., 15 funders, 10 implementers and 10 youth) and eight youth focus group discussions, as well as descriptive results from a global survey of 284 youth. The triangulation of data among the three methods informs the understanding of meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs and illustrates the concerns and suggestions from funders and implementers, as well as youth (18-30 years old). More specifically, it outlines 1) barriers and constraints, 2) emerging responses and 3) the value of meaningful youth engagement, identified by respondents.

A. Barriers and constraints

The analyzed data suggest three barriers and constraints that may hinder meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs.

1 **Lack of organizational readiness to promote meaningful youth engagement.**

A significant proportion of funders (90%), implementers (87%) and youth (80% of key informant interviews, 63% of youth focus groups) discussed how funders and implementers' organizational constraints could impede even the most well-meaning intentions to engage and sustain the involvement of young people in programs.

Organizational readiness also related to the alignment of meaningful youth engagement with the priorities and administrative procedures of funders and implementers. Among key informant interviews, 80% of implementers and 73% of funders noted how challenges arose when there was a lack of alignment, and how this constrained efforts to engage young people. They expressed that promoting meaningful youth engagement required strong donor support and investments, which could be challenging due to limited resources, time and competing funding priorities. Implementers further pointed out that while there were opportunities to strengthen youth engagement and move away from tokenistic and narrow participatory practices, designing such features required financial resources and engagement-specific expertise to successfully implement, which might not be readily available. This challenge was further compounded by capacity constraints to reach out to young people, especially those from rural settings or youth with disabilities.

Fewer youth key informant interviews (30%) and focus group discussions (38%) raised this issue compared to funders and implementers. This could be due to youth's limited experience working within bureaucratic environments, or lack of knowledge and awareness that they could work with adults to access needed support mechanisms. Challenges in dealing with administrative procedures were also brought up, especially by 50% of youth and 40% of funder key informant interviews. Funders shared how creating spaces for dialogue and shared leadership with young people was a complicated task and opined that given the challenges in dealing with complex institutional bureaucracies, young people might be more meaningfully engaged when project parameters have been set.

While not asked directly about difficulties related to administrative procedures, some participants in the youth focus groups shed light on the struggles they experienced, which directly related to funders and implementers' constraints. Female-only focus groups based in Eastern Europe and

East and West Africa shared how not having the resources to access youth engagement opportunities made it difficult for them to decide and actively participate in programs.

Youth survey responses provided additional insight, and further suggest the relevance of aligning meaningful youth engagement with funders' and implementers' priorities and administrative procedures. When asked about the meaningful youth engagement-enabling support that youth needed, the responses included examples that entailed resources from funders and implementers. The responses included: capacity-building programs (88%); networking opportunities (77%); research and data (70%); equipment and other resources, such as laptops and mobile phones (68%); and financial compensation (63%).

These findings indicate the importance of organizational readiness to engage in meaningful youth engagement. While funders and implementers may have the willingness to engage youth in intergenerational partnerships within youth employment programs, constraints related to resources, priorities and capacities need attention.

2 **Perceived biases and issues of trust.**

Funders, implementers and youth raised the issue of perceived biases against youth engagement and how this led to difficulties in working with adult partners.

Specifically, 50% of youth focus groups expressed how biases against youth partners sometimes led to conflict, misunderstandings and a general feeling that their contributions were not valued. Male and female focus group discussions equally brought this up, but female focus groups also flagged issues of adults not trusting young women and difficulties overcoming gender biases. The issues of prejudice, trust and gender bias were brought up by regional focus groups, specifically the two cross-regional focus groups, as well as Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Youth were not alone in acknowledging such barriers. In particular, 60% of funders and 47% of implementers raised that biases against youth were a challenge to intergenerational partnerships. Implementers focused on the need for adults to manage biases that created difficulties in intergenerational relationships, while funders highlighted that trusting youth and treating them as partners facilitates positive intergenerational relationships.

These findings suggest that adults' initial biases against youth partners could be dispelled through continued dialogue and collaboration with youth, which demonstrate recognition of young people's contributions and signify that they are being perceived as co-partners.

3 **Socioeconomic, safety and security barriers to access engagement opportunities.**

Nearly all youth key informants (90%) acknowledged that young people presented multiple layers of vulnerabilities, which include various forms of social, economic, political and cultural factors that influence their experiences. Funders (67%) and implementers (70%) largely supported this assertion. Implementers and funders both revealed difficulties in addressing the vulnerabilities faced by vulnerable girls and young women, youth with disabilities and other youth groups.

Youth key informant interviews also raised how these multiple layers presented challenges to engagement as well as to youth aspirations on jobs and livelihoods. This was echoed by 50% of youth focus groups. Focus groups with youth with disabilities shared how factors, ranging from accessibility of program venues, communication with both adults and youth and taking on roles within teams, could impede participation. All the female youth focus

groups mentioned that individual participation was sometimes constrained due to socio-cultural considerations, such as females interacting with male youth, concern for their safety and taking time away from familial obligations. Similarly, most youth survey respondents (85%) considered personal safety an important consideration when deciding whether to join a program or not.

These findings suggest that young people presented multiple layers of vulnerabilities and contexts, and as such, meaningful youth engagement interventions need to consider how differentiated experiences can impact the access and needs of youth involved.

B. Emerging Responses

Funders, implementers and youth were asked to discuss ways to better integrate young people's voices and increase their meaningful engagement as active actors in youth employment programs. Seven thematic recommendations were identified from the analysis and comparison of the data from the interviews, focus groups and survey.

1 **Guide youth-adult partnerships with collaboration and co-creation principles.**

Co-leadership and co-decision-making in intergenerational partnerships were mostly discussed by youth (100% of youth key informant interviews and youth focus group discussions), followed by funders (90%) and implementers (80%) in key informant interviews.

Funder and implementer informants affirmed that intergenerational partnerships served as an important dimension to enable more meaningful youth engagement. Further, the majority of implementers noted that mentoring and coaching young people could facilitate positive intergenerational relationships, while funders discussed how it was crucial to understand the passion and aspirations of young people.

Youth focus group participants, especially those in female focus groups, felt they should be viewed as partners who were valued and heard.[11] Focus group members in Eastern Europe and Latin America discussed this at length, focusing on the importance of intergenerational communication and understanding to make youth's engagement more meaningful.

Youth survey findings concurred, with a majority of responses (88%) agreeing that youth employment programs should provide opportunities for young people to work with adults as partners. In particular, the youth survey pointed to a level of success in overcoming barriers to intergenerational partnerships. Responses indicated there was mutual trust (81%), reciprocity (76%) and a level of shared understanding (83%) between youth and adult partners in the programs that respondents had participated in before. Overall, 69% of survey responses agreed that youth were able to convince adult decision-makers of the importance of their role and contributions in addressing employment issues.

Suggestions gleaned on fostering co-creative and collaborative youth-adult partnerships from the funder and implementer key informant interviews emphasized viewing youth as program partners and equals; recognizing and supporting youth to demonstrate their skills, values, contributions

and assets; and avoiding instances when program staff do not listen to or understand youth. Youth focus groups and key informant interviews had similar recommendations, and added providing mentorship, as well as highlighting the importance of communication and understanding.

2 **Engage youth continuously throughout the program.**

Nearly all funders, implementers and youth discussed the importance of engaging young people throughout the youth employment program life cycle. This recommendation was brought up by funders (93%), implementers (90%) and youth (90% of youth key informant interviews, 88% youth focus group discussions). The youth survey concurred, with respondents agreeing that young people should be involved in various program stages: planning (86%), design (85%), implementation (87%), monitoring and evaluation (85%) and decision-making or governance (82%).

Among funders and implementers, there was a general perception that the earlier youth engagement happened in a program lifecycle, the higher its impact on program quality. Slightly more implementers (60% compared to 53% of funders) discussed the need to consult young people at the onset of the program. This was complemented by 60% of funders who raised the need to involve youth in decision-making processes.

Youth shared different perspectives, with 70% of youth key informant interviews discussing the importance of expanding the roles and responsibilities of youth partners. Similarly, half of youth focus groups supported this notion. The focus group for Middle East and North Africa regions also gave recommendations for engaging young people in different (and even beyond) the program stages, such as involving youth as program staff in the preparatory and governance stages, and as trainers and mentors post-program for future participants.

3 **Enable youth views to influence program direction.**

Funders, implementers and youth discussed the importance of ensuring that intergenerational partnerships influence the youth employment program's strategy. This was discussed by most implementers (90%) and funders (87%), as well as by youth (75% youth focus groups, 70% youth key informant interviews). Similarly, youth survey respondents (87%) believe that youth employment programs should allow for young people's participation in decision-making within the organization, especially those that affect them.

The emphasis on young people's influence on the program direction highlights the importance of youth-adult partnerships that act on youth inputs and avoid tokenistic mechanisms – issues that more implementers and funders brought up compared to youth. More than half of implementers (60%) and funders (52%) considered it important to act on youth inputs compared to youth, where only 50% of focus groups and none of the youth key informant interviews discussed it at all. Nearly half of the key interviews with funders (46%) and implementers (44%) also noted that engaging youth should not be tokenistic. In contrast, only 20% of youth key informant interviews and only one youth focus group discussion brought up tokenism when answering questions related to youth-adult partnerships.

This finding suggests either young people had limited experience in intergenerational partnerships within youth employment programs, especially in stages that involved co-leadership and co-

decision-making, or that other issues were considered to be more important to those who were interviewed and engaged in focus group discussions.

4 **Expand and support roles for youth to strengthen youth capacities.**

Youth taking roles that contribute to the program and that align with the developmental abilities of young people was raised by all stakeholders. This was unanimously brought up in 100% of youth key informant interviews and youth focus group discussions and nearly all implementers (90%) and funders (80%). Although funders and implementers brought up the possibility of youth becoming program staff members, implementers provided more concrete examples of appropriate roles and responsibilities for youth partners including youth-researchers, trainers and role models to other youth.

Ensuring these expanded roles align with developmental capabilities of youth was flagged as important by youth focus group participants with disabilities. The group shared how they sometimes found that tasks were too difficult for them to deliver and highlighted why opportunities to strengthen youth capacity to contribute is valuable. The youth survey supports these findings. Among respondents with prior youth employment program experience, 80% of young people said they received sufficient support from adults to help them fulfill their responsibilities in the program. Examples of this support included capacity building (82%), networking opportunities (62%) and access to research and data to strengthen youth initiatives (53%).

The issue of strengthening capacities of young people to fulfill these roles was also brought up by implementers (50%) and funders (40%) yet received less attention from youth focus groups (12.5%) and youth key informant interviews (10%). This could be due to youth focus group participants and interview informants' limited exposure to a wider range of program roles and the corresponding capacities and responsibilities that these entailed.

5 **Foster a youth engagement-enabling environment.**

All implementers and youth from interviews and focus groups, and nearly all funders (93%), talked about how sustaining youth engagement required broader institutional support from funders. Both funders and implementers discussed the importance of giving youth an opportunity to share their voices. In addition, specific suggestions from funders included implementing youth engagement specific capacity-building programs and mobilizing resources to enable youth partners' engagement. Implementers on the other hand suggested the creation of youth councils or advisory boards to guide the program as well as mobilizing context-specific resources for disadvantaged youth.

Youth provided alternative suggestions. Focus groups with youth with disabilities notably raised the need for a mentor or coach, disability-friendly working methods and context-specific capacity building. Furthermore, all female youth focus groups (100%) raised that the environment must be "youth-friendly" and include real opportunities to contribute, resources (e.g., allowance) and space to make mistakes.

6 **Create opportunities for youth to provide program feedback.**
Funders (73%), implementers (80%) and youth (80% of youth key informant interviews, 63% of youth focus groups), discussed how regular feedback loops presented critical opportunities for young people to constructively and continuously influence (through testing and iterating) the youth employment program's strategy. In particular, female youth focus groups (67%) discussed the importance of concrete feedback and accountability mechanisms as well the transparent reporting of results. A significant amount of youth survey respondents (89%) believed that this would lead to an improvement in the quality of youth employment programs.

7 **Selection of diverse representative youth (individuals or group) for the program matters.**
The importance of selecting representative youth to participate in intergenerational partnerships was brought up by all funder and implementer informants, and 70% of youth key informants. While the dangers of selecting non-diverse representatives was not directly asked in the interviews, most implementers (70%) actually raised how the selection of non-representative youth could lead to perceived legitimacy and trust issues, as well as heightened competition among youth involved. Implementers also saw representation as a key step in ensuring that program governance structures and activities were inclusive and that failing to do so could lead to program engagement by elitist youth to the detriment of more disadvantaged young people. Fewer funders (33%) and youth (10%) informants brought this up in their interviews.

All youth focus groups concurred with key informant interviews on the importance of representative youth. Focus groups, particularly groups with young people with disabilities and youth from Asia Pacific, also raised the issue of providing additional support mechanisms tailored to their contexts and needs. Some focus group participants, particularly in East and West Africa, spoke of their negative experiences with representatives who did not reflect their needs, contexts and backgrounds, and emphasized the importance of interacting with program-targeted youth.

Youth survey findings also support this point: 86% of the respondents agreed that youth employment programs should respond to the community's local realities and 82% said that youth participating in programs should come from diverse backgrounds.

Eight focus group discussions were conducted between July and August 2020 across major geographic regions in the world. These discussions were held with youth participants from North America and Western Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa, East and West Africa, and Asia Pacific.

All youth focus groups, except for East and West Africa, mostly discussed the challenge of dealing with young people's multiple layers of vulnerability. Vulnerability was understood to refer to a wide range of factors, which notably includes social, economic, political and cultural factors that shape young people's environment, opportunities and roles in their contexts. In the East and West Africa focus group, the need to be given space to contribute, lack of resources to enable engagement and the need to deal with young people's multiple layers of vulnerability were raised the most.

In terms of emerging responses to promoting meaningful youth engagement, the Asia Pacific, Middle East and North Africa focus groups discussed gaining broad organizational support. The Latin America and Eastern Europe groups focused more on youth-adult partnerships that were guided by principles of collaboration and co-creation. The East and West Africa focus group emphasized selecting representative youth.

C. Value of meaningful youth engagement

Funders, implementers and youth in the research recognized that meaningful youth engagement contributes to improved labor market outcomes for young people. Youth engagement opportunities were seen as important, particularly by 80% of both funders and implementers in key informant interviews, to help young people transition seamlessly into the World of Work (WoW), especially through the acquisition of soft skills.[12] This finding was echoed by all youth key informant interviews and youth focus groups.

At the same time, youth focus groups (88%) and key interviews with youth (80%) included discussion of how young people needed to be given the space to grow and develop. Fewer funders (27%) and implementers (40%) brought this up in their key interviews, and instead noted how engaged youth could access post-program economic opportunities as a result of their involvement in the program. Some examples of this include being engaged as alumni to speak to new program trainees, serving as volunteers at different stages of new programs, or being employed as program staff.

Youth survey respondents with previous youth employment program experience noted they had acquired soft skills (90%), confidence (85%), networks (82%), knowledge about youth rights (80%), job-relevant skills (80%) and entrepreneurial skills (73%).

Youth engagement was also seen to have a multiplier effect, whereby youth engagement in initial programs and interventions could translate to economic and engagement opportunities beyond the program. This was discussed mostly by youth and implementer key informant interviews (90%), followed by youth focus groups (88%) and funder key informant interviews (87%). Regional focus groups – especially youth focus groups for the Middle East and North Africa – elaborated how youth could become change agents in their communities and advocates for the program, as well as share knowledge with practitioners as a result of their engagement in programs.

Interviews with funders (87%), implementers (90%) and youth (90%), as well as youth focus group discussions (87.5%), expressed that successful youth engagement increased the demand for youth inputs and resources beyond the labor market context. For example, youth may take on official roles with governments, or with funder and implementer organizations to advise, replicate or lead follow-up youth employment initiatives. This aspect was particularly important for focus group participants from Latin America who expressed the importance of some form of post-program follow-through that continued to contribute to their communities. Similarly, 84% of youth survey responses believed that young people should continue engaging in youth employment activities after their programs ended.

The findings above draw mostly from the proportion of unique data occurrences found in 13 themes of data, which were identified from 102 code categories. ANNEX D presents the 13 themes vis-a-vis the total and unique occurrences of the data in the focus group discussions and key informant interviews with funders, implementers and youth. The annex also presents a summary of the survey findings and how these relate to the same themes.

Defining Meaningful Youth Engagement in Youth Employment Programs

To support the consistent understanding and application of youth engagement, the paper proposes a definition of meaningful youth engagement that builds on key themes from the literature review and that has been further validated by insights from key informant interviews and discussions with funders, implementers and young people to inform the roadmap.

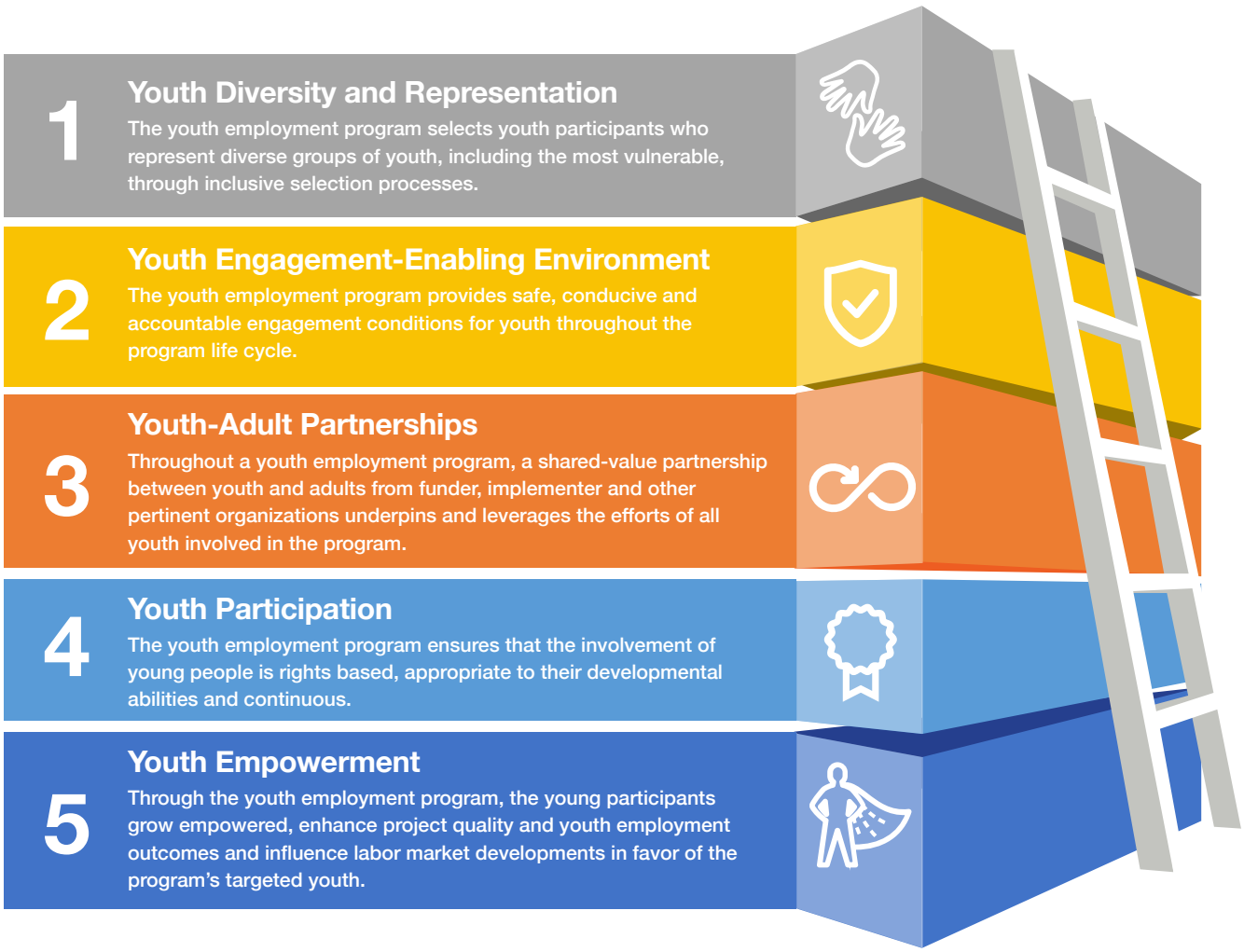
Our analysis shows that meaningful youth engagement exhibits the concepts of diversity and representation, participation, youth-adult partnerships and multifaceted empowerment, and is supported by the presence of enabling conditions. Therefore, in this roadmap, the engagement of young people is meaningful when:

> Under **enabling conditions**, **youth representatives** actively participate throughout the program life cycle and enter into youth-adult **partnerships** that **empower youth** and may contribute to positive and long-lasting labor market outcomes.

The definition focuses on young people aged 15-30 years from all backgrounds, who are involved in any type of youth employment program, whether it is a large- or small-scale initiative, or a supply-side or demand-driven intervention.[13]

A Framework for Operationalizing Meaningful Youth Engagement

The definition features five interconnected pillars that guide the integration of meaningful youth engagement into employment programs. Accompanying each pillar are illustrative results and sample indicators to assist in program monitoring and evaluation efforts.



1 Youth Diversity and Representation

Fair, inclusive and context-specific youth representation is essential for a meaningful engagement process and for overall program cohesion. This kind of representation promotes unity among all young people involved in the programs. The selection of youth representatives was considered by all youth focus groups, as well as funder and implementer respondents in key informant interviews, to be important.

"Working with a peer is more comfortable because a peer will have more tolerance towards me making mistakes."

YOUNG IMMIGRANT WOMAN, NORTH AMERICA

KEY CRITERIA

— **Fairness**: The youth employment program structures and roles (e.g., oversight, management, delivery) are equitably distributed across youth participants.

— **Inclusion**: The complex heterogeneity of the program youth population target (e.g., gender, age, dis/ability, ethnicity) is reflected in the pool of youth engaging in the youth employment program.

— **Context-specificity**: The specific circumstances of the program youth population target (e.g., education, employment, income, location, refugee or migration status) are reflected in the pool of youth driving the youth employment program.

SAMPLE HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS

— Proportion of youth among the participants in the youth employment program, disaggregated by age and gender, who are: young women, young people with disabilities, youth who identify as ethnic minority or migrant, openly LGBTQIA+, youth from rural/remote areas, low-income youth, young people who have a secondary/tertiary education, youth who have received formal or nonformal education or training, and youth who are not students in academic or training programs or who are unemployed

— Percentage of youth recruited through diverse methods as defined by the program

— Percentage of participants in youth employment programs (including intended beneficiaries) who report that the selection of youth for the program reflected the program's youth-related target(s)

OUTCOME

The youth employment program selects youth participants who represent diverse groups of youth, including the most vulnerable, through inclusive selection processes.

CASE STUDY NO. 1:

Youth Training of Trainers for Increased Digital Inclusion Among Young Refugees in Kenya

Connected Education, a joint project of Microsoft Philanthropies and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), is an example of a program that engages the intended youth as key members of the program team. Focusing on enhancing digital literacy in the Kakuma refugee camp, in Kenya, the project follows a youth peer-training approach that was designed by both organizations in close collaboration with one of the most marginalized youth communities: the young refugees themselves. Under this program, 25,000 young refugees, half of them young women, are being trained in digital skills through the 40 trainers who received advanced courses to be able to train other youth, in turn. It is expected that these young "master trainers" will have a clear impact on the outcomes of the project, which is even more critical today given the emergence and developments of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

2 Youth Engagement-Enabling Environment

Environments matter – especially in enabling various forms of engagement to emerge. The literature, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), shares how these environments should be safe, accountable and supported by certain factors, such as youth-safeguarding policies and mechanisms; gender- and disability-responsive safe spaces; youth-friendly working methods; sustained, youth-centered resources; and a credible audience (see ANNEX B for more details).[14]

The findings from key informant interviews, youth focus groups and youth survey in relation to the need for broad organizational/institutional support suggest the importance of conducive enviroments for meaningful youth engagement. When discussing challenges related to sustaining meaningful youth engagement, 50% of youth and 40% of funder respondents highlighted constraints brought by dealing with administrative procedures.

"They [funders] have to make it a friendly environment for youth, they have to start creating training opportunities for youth and there should also be extra opportunities that can make [youth] grow outside their job or the organization they are working with."

YOUNG WOMAN, EASTERN AFRICA

KEY CRITERIA

- **Safe**: Program engagement conditions are underpinned by a basic commitment to ensuring that young people engaging in the program are protected and are active in promoting their own safety, and that the program reflects their best interests.
- **Conducive**: The program environment provides youth with program gender- and disability-responsive safe spaces; youth-friendly working methods; and sustained, youth-centered resources.
- **Accountable**: The program environment gives young people engaging in the program a credible audience that ensures their voices are heard without judgement and that provides feedback on how their views are leveraged in the program.

SAMPLE HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS

- Existence of youth-safeguarding policies and accountability mechanisms within the program
- Number of inclusive WoW-relevant safe spaces for the youth program participants, both virtual and physical (e.g., after-school programs, weekend and evening youth training programs; schools, remedial-education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) centers; universities and alumni associations; savings groups; business incubators; youth unions; job centers)
- Percentage of youth who report that the methods used in the youth employment intervention were inclusive and youth friendly
- Budget allocation for continued age-, gender- and disability-responsive engagement capacity building for youth participants
- Budget allocation for the financial remuneration of, or financial assistance to, the program's youth participants in the form of salaries, compensation and/or stipends (depending on their roles)
- Percentage of youth who report that their concerns were heard and acted on by influential labor market stakeholders, such as labor ministry officials, parliamentary youth committee members, representatives of employer and worker associations and leaders of educational or financial institutions

OUTCOME

The youth employment program provides safe, conducive and accountable engagement conditions for youth throughout the program life cycle.

CASE STUDY NO. 2:

Restless Development's and Plan International's Ways Toward Youth Participatory Creative Feedback Mechanisms

Restless Development encourages young people to share their experiences in programs via a "mobile journalist" approach, through which youth can capture and openly communicate their own content and findings. Similarly, Plan International has worked with corporate partners, including the Thomson Reuters Foundation and Canon, to develop a "youth report" model, which seeks to empower young women and men to advocate on issues of their choosing using media methods that are familiar and accessible. Both initiatives show how implementers have helped young people to communicate to and be heard by labor market stakeholders.

3 Youth-Adult Partnerships

The literature, specifically Zeldin, Christens and Powers (2012), argues that meaningful youth engagement should be anchored in genuine, shared-value partnerships between young people and adults. These, in turn, should be based on shared values and mutual respect. In this roadmap, shared-value partnerships between youth and adults hinge upon concepts of shared value creation, equal value, shared work and common norms as critical.[15] In the research, all youth key informant interviews and youth focus groups underscored the importance of co-leadership and co-decision-making in promoting meaningful youth-adult partnerships. Implementer (90%) and funder (80%) key informant interviews concurred. In youth focus groups, participants shared the struggles to be seen as valuable partners in decision-making and about engagements that are perceived as tokenistic or ad hoc. Furthermore, 85% of youth survey responses agreed that trust and reciprocity were critical aspects of their partnerships with adults.

KEY CRITERIA

— **Shared value creation**: Intergenerational partnerships between adults and youth maximize value creation and provide net benefits for both parties, such as increased political and social capital; the authority to set new norms and standards; greater innovation, scalability and sustainability potential; strengthened capacity to delivery desired youth employment outcomes; and stronger collaboration.[16]

— **Equality**: Collaboration between young people and adults result in a transfer of expertise to the youth that "triggers complementarity between old and new generations."[17] At the same time, young people are seen as "valued stakeholders" and "valued contributors" and are engaged for what they can "uniquely provide" and as "resources to be developed."[18]

— **Joint work**: This refers to having common objectives, shared decision-making authority, joint ownership, joint responsibility for outcomes, co-learning and a two-way learning mindset – as opposed to tokenistic and prescriptive relationships.[19] "It is under the[se] conditions of shared work … that youth become motivated to be involved."[20]

— **Common norms**: Authentic partnerships between adults and young people rely on trust, acceptance, respect, mutuality and reciprocity.[21] Under this normative joint framework, the right to disagree with one another – and to act independently from others when values do not align – is strongly reaffirmed in a true partnership of equals.[22]

SAMPLE HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS

— Establishment of a shared decision-making structure for the program with representatives of the young program participants and program funders (e.g., joint program executive board)

— Percentage of young people from the decision-making structure who report feeling valued by the adult board members for what they have brought to the program (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis]ability)

— Proportion of youth who report sharing work, authority and ownership with adult board members throughout the youth employment intervention (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis] ability); or the proportion of youth who report creating a mutual work and learning agenda with the adult board members

— Proportion of young people and adults who report mutual feelings of trust throughout their program partnership (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis]ability for youth)

— Proportion of funder organizations that believe they had a greater strategic impact on youth employment or improved their ability to deliver on their youth employment mandate due to their joint work with youth program leaders

— Proportion of young people in the program who believe they gained a net benefit from the partnership between adult and youth leaders at each project stage (e.g., collective learning and capability; networking, connecting and catalyzing action; weight of action; scale; social/political capital; the authority to create new norms/standards for youth employment)

OUTCOME

Throughout a youth employment program, a shared-value partnership between youth and adults from funder, implementer and other pertinent organizations underpins and leverages the efforts of all youth involved in the program.

4 Youth Participation

UNICEF (2018), in particular, acknowledges the "urgent need to move away from [participatory] approaches that merely consult young people as beneficiaries, towards engagement approaches that recognize young people are actors."[23] During the research, more than half of implementers (60%) and funders (53%) acknowledged the need to consult young people at the onset of the program. They also brought up the importance of involving youth in decision-making processes. Moreover, nearly all funders (93%), implementers (90%) and youth (90% of youth key informant interviews, 88% of youth focus group discussions) discussed the significance of engaging youth throughout the program life cycle. To some funders and implementers, earlier engagement could potentially impact program quality.

At the same time, 70% of youth key informants felt it was necessary to expand the roles that young people played in such programs. This was echoed by youth survey respondents, who believed youth should be involved in the following program stages: planning (86%), design (85%), implementation (87%), monitoring and evaluation (85%) and decision-making or governance (82%). The research participants also emphasized how youth roles in the program should align with the developmental abilities of the young people involved. This was discussed by all youth key informant interviews and focus groups, as well as nearly all implementers (90%) and funders (80%).

"Young people are usually receiving what others prepared… It is mainly adults who are designing the whole process and then implementing and evaluating it... If [programs] were created in a way that benefits from young people's [knowledge], programs [would] be [shaped] to attract young people."

YOUNG WOMAN IN A RURAL SETTING, EASTERN EUROPE

KEY CRITERIA

— **Rights-based**: Rights-based approaches to development put a particularly strong emphasis on the right of citizens, including young people, to participate as a prerequisite for claiming other rights, including social and economic rights.[24]

— **Age/developmentally appropriate**: Participation also benefits from being age-appropriate and adapted to the changing developmental needs of youth (or level of maturity and independence).[25]

— **Continuous**: Genuine youth participation spans the full spectrum of a particular project interventions, which "cover all aspects of the decision" and "all stages of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs, policies and investment of resources – from start to finish."[26] Therefore, to support the objective of meaningful engagement, youth participation should be continuous throughout the program lifetime.[27]

SAMPLE HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS

— Percentage of young people in the youth employment program who report being able to participate throughout the program life cycle at a level suitable to their age, developmental needs, level of maturity and independence[28]

— Percentage of young people from the youth employment program who report playing an active role in the program (i) continuously, i.e., across the full project life cycle, involving design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis]ability); or (ii) in a minimum of three project life-cycle stages (disaggregated by age, gender and [dis]ability)

— Number of young people in the program who report progressively raising their level of initiative or gradually engaging in more processes throughout the youth employment program life cycle (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis]ability)

OUTCOME

The youth employment program ensures that the involvement of young people is rights based, appropriate to their developmental abilities, and continuous.

If participation can be purely informative at the start of a project, it could also move on to becoming consultative, collaborative and empowering.[29] The main difference among the degrees of participation is in the way participation happens – whether the underlying participation approaches are top-down (e.g., media-based communication with policymakers) or bottom-up (e.g., youth-participatory consultations and other youth-initiated action).[30]

CASE STUDY NO. 3:

Youth Co:Lab

Co-created in 2017 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Citi Foundation, Youth Co:Lab aims to establish a common agenda for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to empower and invest in youth, so that they can accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship. By developing 21st century skills, catalyzing and sustaining youth-led startups and social enterprises, Youth Co:Lab is positioning young people front and center in order to solve the region's most pressing challenges. Over the last three years, Youth Co:Lab has been implemented in 25 countries and territories across Asia-Pacific. The national dialogues, regional summits and social innovation challenges have reached over 75,000 participants. The initiative has benefitted over 7,100 young social entrepreneurs and helped to launch or improve over 1,000 youth-led social enterprises. Youth Co:Lab has also established partnerships with over 180 key ecosystem players through its Youth Empowerment Alliance.

5 Youth Empowerment

Meaningful youth engagement is considered to be deeply "connected to actual opportunities to exert power today."[31] Most key informant interviews (90% implementers, 90% youth, 87% funders) revealed that youth contributions are relevant beyond the WoW as well, pointing to associations with multidimensional empowerment, where young people are empowered and become agents of empowerment for others beyond the program life cycle.

KEY CRITERIA

— **Personal empowerment**: Transformational outcomes at the individual level, where young people have a chance to "practice who they want to be."[32] In practice, when youth plan for the world they want to participate in, they become motivated to acquire the information and learning, skills, tools and networks they will need to start moving the needle.

— **Community-level impact**: This refers to "youth feel[ing] engaged when they are connected and/or are contributing to something larger than themselves."[33] Specifically, meaningfully engaged young people enable the creation of better informed, increasingly youth-responsive initiatives and ideas that reflect the diversity and priorities of young people.[34] This, in turn, can lead to community changes in areas that directly affect their lives.[35]

— **System-level influencing**: As a longer-term, more aspirational subdimension, this pertains to the responses of youth to norms and systemic barriers, structures and practices (including invisible ones)

that affect their position in society.[36] Entrenched barriers can leave youth "fighting for more responsibility and power."[37] Through their engagement, young people challenge the injustices caused by exclusion, violation of rights, social marginalization and lack of access to social capital. Thus, meaningful youth engagement can be synonymous with a shift in power dynamics.[38]

SAMPLE HIGH-LEVEL INDICATORS

- Percentage of young people in the program who report feelings of increased agency and/or personal growth with regard to the WoW, as a result of their pursuit of the objectives of the youth employment program (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis]ability)
- Number of young people in the youth employment program who have completed life/soft/core work skills trainings in the context of youth engagement work, and the percentage of those who indicate that the trainings critically improved their position in the WoW (e.g., school-to-work transition, career advancement) within six months of program completion/exit (disaggregated by age, gender, [dis]ability and possibly by type of training)
- Percentage of young people in the program who report feeling that they improved the quality and youth responsiveness/relevance of the youth employment program (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis] ability)
- Percentage of young people from the program who report positively influencing the institutional, policy and regulatory aspects of the labor market in ways that increase youth inclusiveness (disaggregated at least by age, gender and [dis]ability)
- Existence of a demonstrated commitment and/or strategy among influential labor market stakeholders to renegotiate/improve the WoW position of young program participants, and to more effectively include them or mainstream them into their and other relevant labor market structures (e.g., declaration of intent, draft reforms)
- Establishment of a representative, accredited, inclusive and properly resourced program to create an alumni network for peer mentoring and for training new youth recruits in meaningful youth engagement in subsequent youth employment programs

OUTCOME

Through the youth employment program, the young participants grow empowered, enhance project quality and youth employment outcomes and influence labor market developments in favor of the program's targeted youth.

CASE STUDY NO. 4:

Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture Initiative for Developing Innovative, Youthful "Agripreneurs"

The *Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture initiative* (YIYA) in Uganda supported by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is an example of how self-empowerment can be supported by the implementing organization, and by young people. The project helped identify innovative youth "agripreneur" champions. Youth champions received cash support, training and coaching to help them understand and navigate agribusiness services. They started sharing their knowledge and experience with other young people, providing capacity building and mentorship. Over time, youth champions significantly grew their own businesses and youth employee base, and acquired the confidence and power to act as role models for others. Fellow community youth followed their example, setting-up their own agribusinesses and adopting innovative practices pioneered by the youth champions, such as aquaculture. This successful experience was scaled up with a second edition launched in 2020, and is being replicated in other countries like Kenya.

A Roadmap to Meaningful Youth Engagement in Action

This section provides a step-by-step guide to the key phases of youth employment programs. Recognizing that funders will be at different points along their meaningful youth engagement journeys, the roadmap includes general guidance and maps out milestones designed to help funders and implementers embed meaningful youth engagement into the various stages of their programs.

Planning Phase

This roadmap considers all the pillars to be equally important and mutually reinforcing, and maintains that meaningful youth engagement depends on the achievement of all the pillars. However, we recognize that funders and implementers are characterized by different capacities, arrangements and program contexts. To operationalize meaningful youth engagement, funders and implementers may have to tailor their approaches and determine what can be realistically be achieved within each pillar in the life-cycle stages.

> **"I think youth employment programs can be created by others, of course. But young people themselves must always be involved in this creative space – not only as beneficiaries, [not only as] opportunity-[seekers], but as co-workers. I think this is the way to make it possible and keep both sides balanced."**
>
> – YOUNG WOMAN LEADER, LATIN AMERICA

Mainstreaming Meaningful Youth Engagement into the Program Life Cycle

The planning phase sets the tone and direction for meaningful youth engagement in a youth employment program.

The following specific action steps are recommended for the planning phase:

MILESTONE (M)	ACTION STEPS
M1. A vision for meaningful youth engagement in the program is identified.	1.1. Develop a map of formal and informal youth-participatory organizations and youth-centered civil society organizations (especially those working in the youth employment sector) to work with during the program design and/or implementation. 1.2. Establish a clear vision for meaningful youth engagement in the youth employment program, including in project teams. Make sure it aligns with the organizational agenda, mandate, processes and programmatic context. 1.3. Identify opportunities for direct youth input into a project document to ensure their representation. 1.4 Cleary define and communicate the role of a youth representative. Understand the desirability, extent of engagement and needs of the youth representative.[39] 1.6 Establish memoranda of understanding or similar forms of agreements with youth organizations that were selected based on the mapping.
M2. Human resources and processes are mobilized to support the meaningful youth engagement vision for the program.	2.1 Develop diversity-responsive, developmentally appropriate, competency-based functions and job TOR for program youth participants. 2.2 Recruit and/or identify specialists to deliver meaningful youth engagement results. Ensure that strong, diversity-responsive human resources support is available. 2.3 Appoint a focal point as the go-to resource person who will assess and address meaningful youth engagement-related issues throughout the program.
M3. Youth-infused program project documents are developed.	3.1 Develop a draft business case for meaningful youth engagement, and a fluid theory of change or a logical framework (LogFrame). An accompanying work plan, with clearly articulated roles and flexible timelines, will also be needed.[40] 3.2 Develop a staffing matrix with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities. 3.3 Develop a preliminary budget that covers identified youth needs and assumes the (necessarily higher) cost of recalibrating engagement investments throughout the program life cycle to help vulnerable youth.[41] 3.4 Develop operational youth safeguarding policies adapted to the programming context (e.g., urban/rural, post-conflict, disaster-stricken).
M4. Adult champions are identified, selected and trained to work with and coach youth.	4.1 Review and revise the job descriptions of identified adult champions within the program. 4.2 Assess and address the capacity needs of adult champions to support their functioning as co-decision-makers with young people in the program.[42]
M5. Context-specific, youth-friendly and inclusive resources, tools and support are secured for youth representatives.	5.1. Create a strategy to obtain community and parental buy-in for meaningful youth engagement, particularly for youth, including those from the most vulnerable groups. For example, consider incorporating positive masculinity and working with men in community awareness efforts to address gender-related issues involved in women's engagement. 5.2. Diversify, increase and adapt youth-friendly and inclusive safe spaces, work styles and online/offline communication methods. 5.3. Identify and develop resources that acknowledge and respond to their specific concerns (e.g., gender- and disability-related, youth concerns and challenges). 5.4. Prepare to offer gender- and disability-responsive peer-mentorship arrangements for program youth participants and representatives, especially for building of self-confidence and soft skills (such as problem solving and personal resilience).[43]

Benefits of Working with Youth Organizations in the Planning Phase

Getting diverse youth voices and perspectives as early as the planning phase can offer an array of benefits, including:

- enabling youth employment program funders to understand the big changes that a program should be contributing to and what programmatic success will look like from the youths' point of view;[44]
- filling in gaps in youth responsiveness at the onset of the program;
- helping prevent "capture" effects, in which spaces are dominated by more influential or more affiliated youth groups and constituencies;
- allowing youth to become familiar with donor thinking and to start working early on in the youth employment program life cycle, thus getting a head start on building a trust-based, shared-value relationship with funders; and
- giving youth a chance to ensure that their concerns and interests are reflected farther along the youth employment program life cycle.

CASE STUDY NO. 5:

Youth-Participatory Safeguarding Strategy: UNFPA's Approach to the ICPD25 Summit

The approach of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to designing safeguarding mechanisms for youth participants at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 (International Conference on Population and Development), provides a useful guide for creating an inclusive, respectful and safe environment for all participants, acknowledging that adolescents and youth in attendance might be in a particularly vulnerable position and hence need additional measures for their safety and wellbeing. The safeguarding mechanisms were designed and implemented with the input of young people. who were engaged through the Youth Engagement Reference Group — a platform bringing together all the UNFPA regional youth focal points and youth-led and youth-/serving organizations.

All participants of the Summit received a system-generated message with Safeguarding Guidelines for Youth Participants, which clearly explained expectations from all sides and how incidents may be reported. Guidelines contained tips on how to network safely and respectfully, with particular emphasis on cultural differences and digital communication.

A team of 25 dedicated youth "safety monitors" were trained to serve as referral points for youth who wanted to raise complaints. During the training, particular emphasis was put on the situation of the most disadvantaged youth groups, such as adolescent girls, persons with disabilities and LGBTIAQ+ youth; and throughout the event, youth safety monitors were easily identifiable and evenly distributed across the summit venue.

A Meaningful Youth Engagement-Responsive Youth Employment Program Budget and Why Funders Need One

When embedding meaningful youth engagement into a youth employment program budget, the budget should be flexible and integrate all anticipated expenses throughout the project life cycle. This will reduce the likelihood of having to troubleshoot and address meaningful youth engagement-related issues farther along the youth employment program life cycle. For example, it should factor in youth staff salaries, allowances or compensations and any (additional) costs resulting from working with diverse and from working with diverse youth groups, including the most vulnerable. Currently, the short- and long-term financial impacts of COVID-19 on youth staff should also be considered in the budget.

Governance Phase

The governance phase establishes mechanisms for joint adult-youth governance and decision-making, and equips adults and youth with adequate resources, systems and procurement process. This is important for supporting the funders' commitment to youth-engaged, bottom-up processes.

The following specific action steps are recommended for the governance phase:

MILESTONE (M)	ACTION STEPS
M1. An adult-youth joint program governance board is established, with appropriate procurement policies in place.	1.1 Determine a reasonable proportion of seats that young people should occupy. Consider their heterogeneity and program setting, as well as the power dynamics and social norms that can exclude vulnerable youth groups.[45] 1.2 Procure contracts that facilitate youth recruitment. 1.3 Co-develop a board agenda based on the latest youth employment program theory of change and youth- and community-accountability mechanisms that will record and track all future decisions taken.[46] 1.4 Set up formal youth engagement-coaching arrangements between youth and adult board members. Consider diversity-related needs such as those based on gender, disability and age.[47] 1.5 As a board, identify, agree on and develop youth-accessible, knowledge-management systems.[48]
M2. Young board members are recruited using diversity-responsive methods, so they can serve as youth program leaders.	2.1. Ensure that job descriptions for youth board members incorporate gender- and disability-responsive language that clearly articulates expectations. Allocate sufficient resources for these roles.[49] 2.2. Employ diverse recruitment practices, such as online and offline, gender-responsive and youth-friendly channels; allow candidates to come to the interview with a supportive friend; and recruit through peer networks, by word of mouth, etc. 2.3. Appraise candidates based on anticipated project skill needs, especially where complex and expert skill sets are required.
M3. Context-specific, youth-friendly and inclusive resources, tools and support are secured for the work of the youth program board members.	3.1. Secure a safe and conducive environment for youth program board members. Where necessary, get the buy-in of parents and communities before engaging youth on the board. 3.2. Agree on accessible, youth-friendly, age-appropriate and gender- and disability-responsive safe spaces and means of transport; work styles ("office" hours, language used, etc.); and communication methods (phone calls, emails, newsletters, Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GoToWebinar, etc.).[50]
M4. Youth board members' relevant competencies are strengthened.	4.1. Assess technical and managerial skill gaps and areas in need of capacity building among youth board members. 4.2. Draft gender-sensitive, age-appropriate and diversity-responsive, capacity-building plans for young board members.[51] 4.3. Develop or adapt relevant existing gender-responsive, youth-friendly handbooks and curricula based on the program funders' and implementers' training materials.[52]

CASE STUDY NO. 6:

Youth on the Board

Plan International USA created a dedicated seat on the Board of Directors for a young person in 2015 but began the process of ensuring that the young person was positioned for success in 2010. A key action to realizing the full benefits of having a young person as a member was the need to focus programming not on the incoming youth member but with the adult board members to get them ready. This included training the board on how to effectively engage youth in dialogue, and be mindful of "adultism" – prejudices and biases adults carry that almost reflexively cause them to dismiss the ideas and thoughts of young people. Youth don't just show up at an adult-led organization and fit in. Plan has invested in the systems, policies and training to facilitate this, including building a pipeline of youth engaged with Plan at different levels. There is a ladder of engagement with substantive, increasing responsibility, and opportunities to lead. These range from advocacy initiatives, a Youth Advisory Board, a summer leadership academy and dedicated positions on the full board.

Co-learning and co-leading are exemplified in the Youth Advisory Council/Board/Group model, which has been shown to foster intergenerational partnerships and give young people a seat at the decision-making table at the local and institutional levels.[53] During the research, 40% of key informants confirmed the high relevance and transferability of youth advisory councils to programmatic governance settings, with features and good practices of the youth advisory councils being adapted to project decision-making mechanisms, such as youth program advisory or executive boards.[54]

Design Phase

Young people feel greater ownership of initiatives that they have played an active role in shaping. Involvement in refining the program design, in particular, will present a major opportunity for youth to inform the predetermined youth employment program trajectory set by funders, implementers and youth organizations in the early preparatory stages.

The following specific action steps are recommended for the design phase:

MILESTONE (M)	ACTION STEPS
M1. Youth team members are recruited.	1.1. Use innovative outreach strategies to reach wider groups of young people in broad demographic areas that will result in a deep recruitment pool (e.g., radio, social media, grassroots networks, traditional and nontraditional educational institutions). 1.2. Co-develop the functions and job descriptions for prospective youth team members with engaged youth. 1.3 Provide recruited youth team members with an on-boarding orientation to acknowledge and respond to their specific (e.g., gender- and disability-related) concerns and challenges.
M2. Youth employment program theory of change is updated and refined through youth-participatory research.[55]	2.1. Identify the participatory research needs of all youth staff. 2.2. Prepare and submit research terms of reference (TOR) to the youth-adult program board for validation.[56] 2.3. Conduct youth-participatory research and labor market assessments with potential support from the funder and implementer organizations, especially in challenging program settings (e.g., post-conflict, disaster-stricken or remote). 2.4. Conduct a power mapping of the WoW with respect to youth groups and employment issues that are the focus of the program.[57] 2.5. Use youth-friendly, evidence-gathering tools (e.g., photography, storytelling), in addition to traditional research methods. 2.6. Finalize the youth employment program theory of change and strategic goals based on research and youths' inputs. Develop baseline targets and collect relevant data. 2.7. Submit the final version of the theory of change to the joint adult-youth program board for validation.
M3. Subsequent youth employment program-related project documents are finalized and approved.	3.1. Encourage youth teams to review and propose adjustments to the youth employment program's overall work plan, staff TOR and budget. They could factor in their own capacity needs, new interventions and capacity-building requirements.[58] 3.2. Let the program board subsequently approve all the final versions of the project documents (work plan, TOR, capacity-building plans, budget, etc.) 3.3. Allocate appropriate resources (including budget) to support youth-participatory activities.
M4. The program-relevant skills of the youth program teams are enhanced.	4.1. Provide resources to project youth teams with ample resources to consolidate technical and managerial skills that are relevant to the youth employment program.

CASE STUDY NO. 7:

The ChispaRural.gt Youth-Participatory Digital Solution for Young Agripreneurs in Guatemala

In Guatemala, ChispaRural.gt, a dedicated digital service supported by the FAO, is enabling a new generation of farmers to easily access and share information that will boost their production, marketing and networking activities. The service was co-designed with more than 150 youth and local technicians. Engaging rural youth during the design phase ensured that the digital solution was accessible, responsive and flexible. To ensure the sustainability of ChispaRural.gt, FAO will continue to work with rural youth in Guatemala to strengthen their digital skills and multimedia content-development capacity in order for youth to continue to drive the adaptation and usability of the tool.

Diversifying recruitment practices can address complexities linked to youth heterogeneity. A variety of hiring approaches help ensure fair youth representation in management and program structures. The recruitment of youth through various channels can particularly mitigate the risk of capture of youth engagement processes by dominant youth groups (e.g., the more connected, better educated).[59] Similarly, when hiring for youth employment programs, not just social media, radio stations and organizational websites, but also communities and schools should be leveraged for the purpose of reaching out to young people beyond closed or urban networks.[60]

Implementation Phase

The implementation phase offers young people the opportunity to connect with each other and see their initial ideas on program design turned into action on the ground. A promoted practice, especially with young women and youth with disabilities, is for programs to engage youth leaders, peer trainers and mentors who have the same background or status as their youth constituencies.[61]

The following specific action steps are recommended for the implementation phase:

MILESTONE (M)	ACTION STEPS
M1. Core engagement-enabling resources are continuously leveraged.	1.1 Enforce youth safeguarding and other do-no-harm policies and protocols. Pay attention to high-risk situations and how they may affect young people differently (e.g., young women, youth with disabilities, LGBTQIA+). 1.2 Continue providing youth engagement core enabling tools and practices, such as safe spaces, youth-friendly communication and working methods, and payments or compensation for the youth representatives. 1.3 Sustain regular and consistent youth engagement mentoring, skill development and coaching for youth representatives.
M2. Youth-participatory piloting and delivery of a youth employment program are initiated.	2.1. Ensure that resources are provided to support outreach by the youth representatives to the program's target youth groups (including future youth beneficiaries and recipients). This will help speed up the program's outreach to youth.[62] 2.2. Ensure the alignment of implemented youth-participatory program activities with the final youth employment program theory of change and agreed-on work plan(s). 2.3. Support youth members in their monitoring of grant disbursements and co-management of the overall youth employment program budget.

M3. Youth-participatory advocacy is encouraged locally, and young voices on youth-employment issues are raised to national, regional and global levels.	3.1. Support youth-participatory advocacy activities concerning youth employment issues related to the program. 3.2. Encourage the program governance board to promote the integration of youth-participatory program initiatives into formal programs of WoW institutions (e.g., public TVET institutions, national social protection systems and formal business organizations, depending on the nature of the activities). 3.3. Adopt and implement with youth an influencing strategy to promote meaningful youth engagement and the youth employment program at relevant local and international policy and advocacy forums.[63] This could open up further, longer-term engagement opportunities for youth representatives, both in the youth employment program and in the wider WoW.

CASE STUDY NO. 8:

Youth Excel: Young People Leading Implementation Research and Youth Development Programs

Youth Excel addresses the imperative of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to involve young people in solving development challenges using data-driven and research-based approaches. The program supports young leaders and youth-participatory and youth serving organizations around the globe in their conduct of quality implementation research; use of data and learnings to improve their own cross-sectoral, positive youth development programs; their synthesis of data and learning; and their engagement in intergenerational dialogue with adult decision-makers, so that youth and adults can together shape and advance data informed development policies, agendas and programs. Youth Excel therefore confronts barriers that youth face in leading and implementing development interventions, including the lack of a broadly credible research and evidence base for youth programming, as well as other barriers that prevent youth from influencing decisions about programs, policy and funding in their societies.

Monitoring Phase

The monitoring phase features feedback loops that provide young people with the critical opportunity to constructively inform (through testing and iterating) the funders' project strategy. At this stage, specifically, the focus should be on promoting youth-participatory program monitoring.

The following specific action steps are recommended for the monitoring phase:

MILESTONE (M)	ACTION STEPS
M1. The continued relevance and effectiveness of core engagement-enabling resources and the youth members capacities are monitored.	1.1 Check whether engagement-enabling resources and practices are still continuously being provided. 1.2 Address and capture unforeseen and new youth support requirements to maintain a safe and conducive program environment, with particular attention to the situation of young women, youth with disabilities and other potentially vulnerable groups. 1.3 Ensure the provision of resources to address youth-capacity-development issues and unexpected skills-training needs with regard to monitoring processes.
M2. Youth-participatory adaptive programming is put into practice.	2.1. Encourage youth members to monitor and document the project activities they lead or are involved in.[64] Encourage them to share their thoughts on the program's development with the knowledge management system.[65] This is a process that young people strongly advocated for in key informant interviews and youth focus group discussions. 2.2. Work with youth members to decide on the needed pivots and to develop action plans for the required program iterations.[66] Actions plans can be submitted to the program board for validation. This is a great way to foster co-leadership between the youth and adults in the program. 2.3. Ensure that action plans developed at the monitoring stage inform any reviews of grant allocations and consider any general budget implications of the proposed intervention changes.
M3. Youth employment program improvements that may be linked to youth monitoring efforts are documented.	3.1. Link visible improvements in the project quality/trajectory or in the youth responsiveness of the youth employment program to updated action plans. Make sure the improvements are recorded and amplified.

CASE STUDY NO. 9:

Search Tanzania – Youth-Participatory Action Research to Fight Child Labor and Support Access to Education and Training

Search Tanzania created a pilot youth-participatory research project to identify the drivers that caused children to drop out of school and start working in local gold mines, thus seriously affecting their ability to secure decent work in the future. Children in the mines were not willing to speak with adults, but young people from local secondary schools managed to approach the children as peers and conduct interviews. Through this process, youth researchers were able to determine that children were leaving school primarily because of specific economic constraints. Youth researchers then presented their findings through community meetings, radio broadcasts and newspaper articles. They encouraged community adults to explore the issue in greater depth and take action to facilitate children's reintegration into the education and training system. Thanks to youth researchers' efforts, seven children were able to leave the mines and go back to school, preserving their prospects for quality jobs in the future.

Evaluation Phase

Youth-participatory evaluation provides depth and context to youth employment program results.

The following specific action steps are recommended for the evaluation phase:

MILESTONE (M)	ACTION STEPS
M1. A youth-participatory youth employment program evaluation is prepared and launched.	1.1 Allow sufficient time for the young staff at the youth employment program to provide inputs for the evaluation TOR.[67] 1.2 Involve youth board members and youth organizations in formally selecting youth evaluator candidates. Provide youth evaluators with additional coordination or training support.[68]
M2. Youth-participatory dissemination of lessons learned is supported and success stories are recognized, showcased and celebrated.	2.1. Support youth-participatory dissemination activities.[69] 2.2. Recognize and celebrate the roles youth members played in program successes and pay-offs. [70] 2.3. Showcase individual accounts of success through the funder and adult ally networks.[71]
M3. The meaningful youth engagement experience of the youth employment funder/ implementer is assessed.	3.1. Have the meaningful youth engagement focal point and the funder/implementer measure results using the program-tailored meaningful youth engagement matrix, which was developed in the planning phase.
M4. Preparations for the institutionalization of meaningful youth engagement and the scale-up in youth employment programs are completed.	4.1. Hold discussions on ways to institutionalize lessons learned regarding meaningful youth engagement within the funder/implementer organization.[72] 4.2. Support the establishment of an active, catalytic and inclusive program for meaningful youth engagement alumni,[73] who could act as meaningful youth engagement "ambassadors."[74] 4.3. To support the alumni's work following the end of the youth employment program, allocate sustained resources for the medium to long term (e.g., 12 months). 4.4. Prepare necessary documents, including evidence, to support meaningful youth engagement in the next program cycle.

The Goals and Objectives of a Successful Youth-Participatory Evaluation of Youth Employment Programs

A youth-commissioned program evaluation should: (i) be independent; (ii) have accurate expectations with regard to the work commissioned; (iii) be based on a program theory of change that has been co-developed with youth during the earlier phases of the program (in which the youth decided what mattered to them in terms of the changes to be measured); (iv) reflect a clear intention to understand the broader impact of the youth employment program across various indicators, thus leaving a large share of the analysis to qualitative evaluative tools, which are usually more accessible to youth, more bottom-up and which tend to be preferred by young people because they feel that this is where and how they can offer maximum added value in terms of knowledge creation; and (v) make an effort to follow up with youth program beneficiaries on how they are using the resources and skills gained from the program, what their future needs might be, and on what feedback they can offer regarding donor strategies for subsequent programs.[75]

CASE STUDY NO. 10:

Restless Development's Approach to Working With Program Alumni

"Restless Experts" was started in Zambia by Restless Development, and is currently being expanded. Essentially, the platform encourages alumni who have gone on to develop advanced technical skills and careers to bring those skills back to Restless Development through consultancy projects. The platform therefore recognizes young people's expertise holistically, harnesses it and provides ways to keep tapping into it well beyond the lifetime of an individual intervention. In another example, under Restless Development's "Youth Think Tank" program, in cooperation with the Mastercard Foundation, young researchers "graduate" by providing training in professional and job-seeking skills to other young people. An Alumni Governance Board further supports the delivery of the program to current youth cohorts by helping Restless Development reconsider how the Think Tank initiative could be better designed to meet young researchers' needs and personal development goals.

Mainstreaming Meaningful Youth Engagement into Organizational Strategies

This section maps out the basic milestones to help funders secure support for embedding meaningful youth engagement into institutional systems and strategies for youth employment. It consolidates the insights and advice provided by decision-makers, practitioners and researchers on the necessary choices, strategies and behaviors to support youth rights and enable youth to have their voices consistently heard on the decision-making level. The recommendations are divided into: (i) the starting/early stage and (ii) the intermediate and advanced stages of an institution's journey to meaningful youth engagement.

For funders at the start of the institutional youth engagement journey:

1 **Change the discourse and language about youth, especially those in high-risk situations.**
Funders and other stakeholders can avoid perpetuating negative and harmful perceptions of young people by minding how they refer to youth in their programs. Stigmatization might arise from the use of negative discourse and attitudes regarding young people, such as referring to youth as "problems to be fixed." This is particularly important to youth in high-risk situations or environments (e.g., young ex-combatants, adolescent girls, youth with disabilities) who may otherwise be perceived as dangerous or dependent.

All youth key interviews and focus groups, and nearly all interviews with implementers (90%) and funders (80%) highlighted the importance of positive relationships when dealing with major (labor) market players, whose help is needed to promote youth engagement in youth employment programs (e.g., with established financial institutions). Some funders (20%), implementers (20%) and youth (25% of youth focus groups, 30% youth key informant interviews) noted adult stakeholders' reluctance to work with youth. They highlighted the impact of perceived difficulties in intergenerational relationships, unless there was a purposeful strategy by donor organizations to de-risk this segment of the financial market – both through donors' discourse and actions. Respondents also recommended that the approaches used to tackle this challenge should be intentional and proactive, with the aim of unlocking dialogue and opening up avenues to partnerships for those youth who are the most likely to be excluded from engagement opportunities in youth employment programs (such as young women).

2 **Identify and work with meaningful youth engagement champions within the organization.**
As pointed out by young people and funders during the research for this roadmap, the funders' openness and readiness to allow meaningful youth engagement with their inner operations will be critical for kick-starting these organizations' youth engagement journeys. Institutions need to hold honest dialogues about how comfortable they are with the idea of intergenerational cooperation in youth engagement processes and strategies.[76] The key to making it all work lies in the leadership of genuinely committed and influential youth engagement champions within these organizations (ideally senior managers).[77] Champions can help cultivate their organizations' receptiveness to new internal participation mechanisms by disseminating information, including examples of successful youth partnerships based on their own first-hand experience.[78]

Meaningful youth engagement within organizations will mean shifting away from existing working norms and practices, which tend to patronize young people and ignore tokenistic behaviors.[79] Responding in a constructive way will require the emergence of a clear, consensus-driven and collectively owned vision for meaningful youth engagement at the institutional level.[80] Several key informant interviews and youth focus group discussions recommended that this vision be shared by all staff members (adults and youth), and that it build on youth-adult partnerships, participation and empowerment. Once in place, meaningful youth engagement organizational principles or guidelines that explicitly formulate this vision, and that recognize young people's agency and contributions to youth employment processes and strategies, can be produced.

3 **Partner with funder and implementer organizations that are experienced in meaningful youth engagement.**
In order to measure the effectiveness, results and value of meaningfully engaging youth in youth employment programs, a recommendation from funders is to partner with and learn from other organizations that already practice meaningful youth engagement through their own employment programs. Lessons learned from these partnerships may also serve as an opportunity for funders to assess the challenges, as well as the best practices, of their partner organizations in implementing meaningful youth engagement.

Depending on the comfort level of the partner organization, important information for starting up meaningful youth engagement — such as funding models, institutional designs that accommodate youth, and other preparatory steps that enable the smooth institutionalization of meaningful youth engagement — will be very valuable resources that can help the funder prepare for its own meaningful youth engagement initiative. Further, the partner may provide step-by-step guidance and support to the funder when initiating meaningful youth engagement.

4 **Start internal meaningful youth engagement advocacy at the top.**
Calvert, Zeldin and Weisenbach (2002) highlight the importance of embedding meaningful youth engagement into organizations' institutional approaches, and of involving youth representatives in internal decision-making procedures at the senior executive level. Such mechanisms will allow for maximum youth participation in the funder/implementer organizational structures and processes, where critical decisions are made (e.g., regarding strategic funding priorities and programming orientations) — typically without youth presence.[81]

Many youth employment funders and implementers felt that youth participation should be deeply ingrained in their organizations, and experienced by the leaders at the highest possible level — well before youth engagement programs are conceived.[82] They noted that successful meaningful youth engagement institutional processes and journeys naturally involve an intrinsic, ongoing and permanent relationship between the adult funder/implementer decision-makers and relevant young people, and that this relationship should be situated well beyond the limits of a youth employment program life cycle or of a one-off youth employment intervention.

5 **Identify supportive institutional funding processes/mechanisms.**

The availability of resources enables funders' efforts to promote meaningful youth engagement internally and to embed youthful voices into their institutions. Therefore, considering the higher costs of including marginalized youth, funders should prepare to redirect institutional investments toward mainstreaming youth voices throughout their organizations and toward reaching youth diversity and inclusion milestones. This process will require organizations to internalize the concept of meaningful youth engagement and to be clear about the mechanisms through which they will fund their actions in support of internal change that will help achieve meaningful youth engagement.

Funders should also agree that meaningful youth engagement must be given high priority on their institutional or strategic agendas. This means they need to understand how meaningful youth engagement will serve and support not only their own operational models, but the wider economy, as well. This "business case" may vary, however, depending on the organization.[83]

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs offers a telling example of how institutionalizing youth engagement at the highest level helps youth employment funders infuse meaningful youth engagement into standard strategic and policy practice. The Ministry is currently setting up a Youth Advisory Committee that will include young people from the Netherlands and from various geographic regions of focus, who will closely advise on the formulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' youth economic empowerment program priorities, reflected in the government's "Youth at Heart" strategy.[84] With their combined expertise being articulated at the senior executive level of the Ministry, young people have successfully influenced the development of a key national policy document regarding the Netherlands' commitment and strategic approaches to youth employment, education and participation across the world.

While some youth employment organizations might be able to integrate and finance meaningful youth engagement as part of their core business models, solutions to the challenge of funding the institutionalization of meaningful youth engagement varied greatly among the respondents from key youth employment organizations (and they might still evolve as COVID-19 keeps reshaping the ways of working collectively). Some responses were rather aspirational in nature, with suggestions ranging from brokering public-private, shared-value partnerships (including governments sharing financial risks with other stakeholders) to leveraging innovation/challenge funds and other agile funding mechanisms.

For funders at the intermediate and advanced stages of the institutional youth engagement journey:

"I gave my honest opinion and feedback on how the process went, so they invited me back to kind of cocreate the whole process. … Nowadays, all projects are aimed toward the future, toward being sustainable. … These are not projects for a year or two; [instead], they evolve, and one project grows into another one. That is also how relationships [with adult funders and implementers] evolve from one project to another."

YOUNG WOMAN, EASTERN EUROPE

1 **Invest in organizational capacity development and meaningful youth engagement-enabling structures, systems and policies.**

In "internalizing change," staff members need to become familiar with the practice of meaningful youth engagement in institutions.[85] This will help to sustain the efforts focused on organizational structures, systems and policies, and to implement meaningful youth engagement-responsive changes where necessary. To build staff capacity, funders may need to develop a meaningful youth engagement awareness-raising and practice curriculum that supports institutional mainstreaming (i.e., with measures of institutional-level outcomes, including key performance indicators).

When developing the curriculum, funders can focus on youth-participatory, practitioner-friendly capacity-building tools. The content should include information on how to operationalize meaningful youth engagement within institutional youth employment strategies, processes and structures, including where to start, what to look out for and how to effect incremental change toward meaningful youth engagement.[86] The curriculum and tools can be delivered through peer organization learning (among organizations situated at different stages of their institutional youth engagement journeys), online webinars and forums, technical assistance and training and employee volunteering or secondment schemes.

Institutional meaningful youth engagement transformation outcomes driven by strong organizational capacity may include revised internal policies and operational practices, such as youth-participatory and youth-centered institutional safeguarding guidelines and protocols; more flexible, diversity-responsive human resources capability and rules, allowing for the smooth procurement and contracting of youth services and youth project staff; and less stringent, more meaningful youth engagement-responsive organizational performance management processes that enable youth to provide quality control and oversight for youth employment institutional strategies.[87]

2 **Partner with youth organizations, especially those representing vulnerable and marginalized youth.**

Funders at the more advanced stages of their journeys typically find that youth-adult partnerships facilitate the process of transformation to meaningful youth engagement. In particular, through youth organizations, a more diverse, representative pool of youthful talent can be recruited to participate in strategic decisions regarding an institution's structure, funding, policies and programming priorities. Youth organizations could therefore effectively complement the work of youth who belong to institutional executive boards.

For this to happen, flexible, long-term partnership arrangements are necessary, backed by reliable resources that can support diverse, context-relevant youth-participatory groups — including informal youth groups with an active grassroots presence. Indeed, when youth organizations operate in granular ways, cannot be found, lack a formal structure, or do not represent the full diversity of the funder/implementer's youth institutional constituency or program target, it is

important to consider reaching out to these potential youth partners in innovative ways, such as through informal structures.

Agreements with youth organizations can ensure a quick, targeted and regular mobilization of youth partners to inform meaningful youth engagement, institutional choices and organizational processes. Agreements should also be explicit about youth participation rights and remain mindful of the power dynamics across the partnership structure created by the funder/implementer with specific youth organization(s). This is especially true if the partnerships involve associations for traditionally marginalized youth, such young women's groups or youth disability-support networks.

Restless Development (2017) and Women Deliver (2016) find that, while seeking to partner with youth groups at the institutional level, it is critical for the youth employment funder/implementer to invest in strengthening the capacity of all young people as equal collaborators in the organizational processes and practices under revision.[88] This means that the youth employment funder/implementer organizations should produce their own youth-friendly, developmentally appropriate, gender- and disability-responsive handbooks, briefs, toolkits and case studies about the organization's internal strategies, guidelines, policies and structures; its youth employment-specific areas of technical and advocacy expertise; and/or its youth employment project management procedures.

Funder and youth participants alike consider it best to avoid exploitative or transactional relationships in which young people are used as a means of assisting or implementing the donors' own projects. Similarly, WHO (2018) finds that, at the foundation of youth-donor partnerships, there should be a true desire on the part of donors to build a sustainable relationship and alliance with the same young people through long-term engagement.

3 **Research and continuously adapt to the meaningful youth engagement journey.**

Continuous foundational research based on what Zeldin, Christens and Powers (2013) call "observation and categorization" is needed to further refine the parameters and value of good practices in organizational youth engagement — particularly to see what works and does not work in engaging youth with funders' and implementers' structures, processes, strategic funding priorities and programming orientations.[89]

Based on the knowledge gaps identified by the literature review and discussions with funders, implementers and youth, additional research areas that youth employment funders/implementers could benefit from include:

— how organizations can smoothly and effectively change their funding models to embed meaningful youth engagement;

— best practices for flexible recruitment and contracting to facilitate the direct hiring of youth or procurement of youth services;

— comparative studies on overarching youth governance structures used across funder and implementer institutions to better understand strategic issues regarding youth employment,

as well as research into practical methods for making such structures sound, considering youth identity heterogeneity and intersectionality;

— strengthening the evidence base of the impact of private sector investment into meaningful youth engagement;

— research on the categories of young people who are not participating in youth employment institutions (e.g., the most marginalized, such as youth with certain types of disabilities); and

— mapping possible variations of the meaningful youth engagement institutional journey within funder and implementer organizations, based on the differences among relevant youth groups and the communities where they live (e.g., ways to integrate both formal and informal organizational engagement pathways for the most vulnerable youth).[90]

Conclusion

Meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs has evidently emerged as a critical issue for funders to prioritize. Deepening the conceptual and practical understanding of how youth voices can be better embedded into youth employment programs, particularly, has taken the journey from scholarly works to practical applications.

While requiring further research, from the body of knowledge that exists, this roadmap does find that when youth's inputs are taken into consideration in a cocreation process, and when young people are treated as shared value partners, returns on investment can be expected – ranging from program-related benefits to ripple effects on the young people themselves. Existing literature and discussions with funders, implementers and young people carried out for this research also confirm the increasing recognition of young people's engagement as valuable in its own right.

The roadmap argues that meaningful youth engagement requires proactive measures from start to end to foster shared-value intergenerational partnerships among youth and adults. This includes understanding the complexities of young people's inherent heterogeneity and how practical constraints can easily determine the extent of their participation. Additionally, being conscious of and correcting prevailing biases, norms and entrenched barriers that impede young people from being seen as shared-value partners go a long way toward strengthening funders' commitment to working with youth.

Nevertheless, while meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs continues to gain more attention, much more work is urgently required in terms of research, execution, replication and scaling. The untapped potential that meaningful youth engagement offers to youth employment programs is not yet fully known. What is clear is that programs that do not include it can no longer be considered holistic or complete. Our collective endeavors can only be successful when meaningful youth engagement is truly embraced and is clearly evident in youth employment interventions in the form of intergenerational partnerships that not only benefit young people, but also adults, communities, societies and the labor market.

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Endnotes

1. The age range in the definition of meaningful youth engagement is informed by the United Nations Youth Strategy and by the maximum age for this paper's research youth participants.
2. Women Deliver. (2019b). *Nothing about us without us: new initiative to focus on engaging youth around sexual and reproductive health and rights*. New York: Women Deliver.
3. Sukarieh, M., & Tannock, S. (2008). In the best interests of youth or neoliberalism? The World Bank and the New Global Youth Empowerment Project. London, U.K.: Journal of Youth Studies, 11 (3), pp. 301-312.
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5. United Nations. (2020). *Youth and the SDGs*. New York: UN, Retrieved September 2020., from United Nations website: *Youth – United Nations sustainable development.*
6. A summary of the findings of the literature review can be found in Annex B.
7. Palinkas, L. A. et al. (2011). *Mixed method designs in implementation research. administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*. Bethesda, Md.: Administration and Policy in mental health and mental health services research. 38 (1), pp. 44-53.
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10. As convenors of youth from diverse backgrounds, specifically disadvantaged youth, our work with the Youth Advisory Panel enabled us to reach out to a sample of representative youth from all major geographic regions of the world. This ensured that youth voices were amplified in this study.
11. Intergenerational partnerships built on principles of collaboration, trust and co-decision-making were defined differently by funders, implementers and youth. Youth focus groups, in particular, consider such intergenerational partnerships to be "equal value partnerships," compared to funders and implementers who view this as "shared value partnerships."
12. In this context, soft skills refer to what the Youth Employment Funders Group (2018) describe as "the broad set of skills, attitudes, behaviors and personal qualities that enable them to effectively navigate their environment, work with others, perform well and achieve their goals." Soft skills were perceived by some funders and implementers to help youth transition more smoothly across education and training systems and into the labor market.
13. The focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and survey conducted for this study included youths aged 18 to 30.
14. Saito, R. N., & Sullivan, T. K. (2011). *The many faces, features and outcomes of youth engagement*; Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh, Journal of Youth Development, 6, pp.109–125.
15. Trivelli, C., & Morel J. (2019). *Rural youth inclusion, empowerment and participation*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).
16. Stibbe, D., Reid, S., and Gilbert, J. (2018). *Maximising the impact of partnerships fot the SDGs*. Oxford, U.K.: The Partnering Initiative and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).
17. Development Alternative. (2019). *Towards a thriving, credible, and sustainable youth civil society.* London: Restless Development; Trivelli & Morel (2019). *Rural youth inclusion*; Iwasaki, Y. (2016). *The role of youth engagement in positive youth development and social justice youth development for high-risk, marginalised youth*. Edmonton: University of Alberta, Applied Development Science: International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 21 (3), pp. 267-278.; Jardine, C. G., & James, A. (2012).*Youth researching youth: Benefits, limitations and ethical considerations within a participatory research process*. London: Informa UK, Ltd., International Journal of Circumpolar Health, 71 (1). pp. 1-8.; Kirshner, B., O'Donoghue, J., & McLaughlin, M. (2001). *Youth-adult research collaborations: bringing youth voice and development to the research process*. In Organized Activities As Contexts of Development. New York: Psychology Press. pp. 143-168; and Mastercard Foundation. (2014). *2013-2014 youth think tank report: engaging young people*.Toronto: The Mastercard Foundation.
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19. Development Alternative. (2019). *Towards a thriving*; Trivelli & Morel (2019). *Rural youth inclusion*; Iwasaki (2016). *The role of youth engagement*; Jardinen & James (2012).*Youth researching youth*; Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin (2001). *Youth-adult research collaborations*; Mastercard Foundation. (2014). *2013-2014 youth think tank report*; Saito & Sullivan (2011). *The many faces*; Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation in the solutions for youth employment coalition.* London: Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE); Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*; National League of Cities. (2010). *Authentic youth civic engagement*.
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21. Iwasaki, Y. (2016). *The role of youth engagement*; Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth engagement toolkit*; and Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
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26. Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; and Women Deliver. (2016). *Engage youth: a discussion paper on meaningful youth engagement*. New York: Women Deliver.
27. Development Alternative. (2019). *Towards a thriving.*
28. Powers & Tiffany (2006). *Engaging youth*.
29. Trivelli & Morel (2019). *Rural youth inclusion*.
30. Trivelli & Morel (2019). *Rural youth inclusion*.
31. Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*.
32. Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*; Saito & Sullivan (2011). *The many faces*.
33. Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth engagement toolkit*.
34. Saito & Sullivan (2011). *The many faces;* UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent;* and Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*.
35. Saito & Sullivan (2011). *The many faces*.
36. Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*.
37. This insight came from a key informant interview with a young participant in the roadmap research activities.
38. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*; Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., cited in: Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*
39. Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; and UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*.
40. This will also ensure that any future successful elements of the youth employment programs can be easily absorbed or mainstreamed back into national structures.
41. This is from a key informant interview with a representative from a funder organization.
42. Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; and Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*.
43. Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*.
44. Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust. (2019). *Decades of struggle and hope: a Zimbabwean youth compendium; 2019 report*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust.
45. *YouthPower Learning.* (2020). *Community of practice (COP).*
46. Plan International. (2019). *Pathways to Partnering with Youth-Led Groups and Organisations.* Woking, United Kingdom (U.K.): Plan International.; WHO. (n.d.). *Global consensus statement: meaningful adolescent & youth engagement* Geneva: World Health Organization; UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Office, & Restless

Development. (2019). *Youth leadership, participation and accountability 2.0: parts 1, 2, and 3. Sunninghill, South Africa: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and London: Restless Development.*

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48. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
49. Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; and WHO. (n.d.). *Global consensus statement*.
50. Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; WHO. (n.d.). *global consensus statement*.
51. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
52. The youth board members' training needs can differ from one member to another, and range from youth employment technical issues relevant to the youth employment program to action research and cooperative inquiry methods, design thinking and adaptive programming, project or financial management, youth-led evaluation, and youth-led policymaking (usually a very resource-intensive type of training, requiring considerable levels of expertise).
53. Plan International. (2019). *Pathways to partnering*. Woking, United Kingdom; United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2009). *Youth councils: an effective way to promote youth participation; some initial findings from Africa*. Washington, D.C.: USAID; YouthPower Learning. (2019). *Youth advisory councils: eight steps to consider before you engage*. Washington, D.C.: USAID; and Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust. (2019). Harare, Zimbabwe: Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust.
54. For details about how to form and work with youth advisory councils, see: USAID. (2009). *Youth councils*; and University of Michigan, Adolescent Health Initiative. (2014). *Creating and sustaining a thriving youth advisory council: a collection of youth experiences and recommendations compiled by Adolescent Health Initiative*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Health Systems., quoted in: YouthPower Learning. (2019). *Youth advisory councils* .
55. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; and Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
56. Regarding meaningful youth engagement, youth-employment-program literature shows that youths tend to enjoy participatory research because it gives them some level of control over knowledge production and data-analysis, helping them fulfil their right to active participation.
57. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
58. Even though youth-employment-program youth staff were recruited based on specific skill sets and areas of expertise that matched program needs, it is expected that considerable competency gaps might be revealed among youth following the conduct of program design research to refine the program's theory of change. Indeed, as program requirements become clearer through research, so do the types of skills needed to address them.
59. USAID. (2009). *Youth councils*; and University of Michigan, Adolescent Health Initiative. (2014). *Creating and sustaining a thriving youth advisory council*. quoted in: YouthPower Learning. (2019). *Youth advisory councils*.
60. USAID. (2009). *Youth councils*; and YouthPower Learning, YouthPower Learning. (2019). *Youth advisory councils*.
61. Iwasaki (2016). *The role of youth engagement*.
62. Youth peer-outreach is recognized by youth employment funders and implementers as the approach most likely to yield positive results in terms of youth enrolment and retention in programs.
63. "A young person's social network should expand, not shrink, following a youth-engagement activity." See: Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth engagement toolkit*.
64. Youth employment funders and implementers generally agree that, rather than being rushed to complete all program activities, "insider" youths close to program developments should be encouraged to take a step back and reflect on the impact of youth employment programs (e.g., what works well or less well). This can also help increase young people's motivation and provide them with an opportunity to plan for the world they want through continuous participation, in turn enhancing their own personal growth, thanks to constant learning and improvement.
65. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; and Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
66. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; and Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
67. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; and Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth engagement toolkit*.
68. Work in Progress! Alliance. (n.d.) *Youth-Led Evaluation Guide*. The Hague, Netherlands: Oxfam Novib.
69. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*;Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*; and Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth engagement toolkit*.
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71. UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for adolescent*; and Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
72. Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*.
73. Mastercard Foundation. (2014). *2013-2014 youth think tank report*; Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth Engagement Toolkit*; Plan International. (2019). *Pathways to partnering*; UNICEF. (2018). *Toolkit for Adolescent*; and Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation*.
74. This came from key informant interviews with representatives from funder and implementer organizations.
75. Work in Progress! Alliance. (n.d.) *Youth-led evaluation guide*. The Hague, Netherlands: Oxfam Novib.
76. Calvert, M., Zeldin, S., & Weisenbach, A. (2002). *Youth involvement for community, organizational and youth development: directions for research, evaluations and practice*. Chevy Chase, Md: Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development.; Powers & Tiffany (2006). *Engaging youth*.
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79. Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health. (2018). *Youth engagement toolkit*.
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81. Calvert, Zeldin, & Weisenbach. (2002). *Youth involvement for community* ; Powers & Tiffany (2006). *Engaging youth*.
82. Plan International. (2019). *Pathways to partnering*.
83. This came from key informant interviews with representatives from funder and implementer organizations.
84. Government of the Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2020. *Youth at heart: young people at the heart of Dutch development cooperation*. The Hague, Government of Netherlands.
85. Saito & Sullivan (2011). *The many faces*; and Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*.
86. Saito & Sullivan (2011). *The many faces* ; and Women Deliver. (2019a). *Meaningful youth engagement*.
87. Restless Development supports young people's role as facilitators in conducting analyses of funder, network and implementer organizations' own structures, in order to identify the barriers to and opportunities for meaningful engagement with youth, to define what success in that regard would look like, and to propose recommendations for youth-engagement strategies.
88. Restless Development. (2017). *Strategies for youth participation; Women Deliver. (2016). Engage youth*.
89. Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*.
90. Zeldin, Christens & Powers (2013). *The psychology and practice*.