

EQUITABLE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT and CO-LEADERSHIP

A Guide
and Call for
Youth Partnership
and Investment



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PREFACE

Dancers performing at the One Year Out Flash Mob in Uganda in advance of the Women Deliver 2019 Conference. Credit: Hydrogen Studios

Background

In September 2022, Women Deliver committed to working with partners in the gender equality and health sectors to delineate a new approach to youth engagement. This approach, called equitable youth engagement and co-leadership (EYECL), centers marginalized youth advocates as designers, experts, and leaders, alongside traditional decision makers and powerholders, in all gender equality and health advocacy spaces, convenings, and formal mechanisms. Equitable youth engagement and co-leadership is essential to addressing the world's most pressing issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate action, and economic justice and rights. Women Deliver takes a rights-based approach in its advocacy on these three core issue areas.

Methodology

Women Deliver partnered with youth advocates, including Women Deliver Young Leaders, WD2023 Youth Planning Committee members, and external youth advisors, to fine tune and articulate its new approach to youth engagement and model its policy in a highly collaborative, co-creative process of knowledge production, facilitated by [Book Sprints](#).

Over eight virtual sessions between February and April 2023, the co-authors developed a shared vision and worked together to outline, write, and edit the following chapters, which:

- **Highlight** the unique value and expertise that young people bring to policymaking and program design;
- **Demonstrate** the effectiveness of equitable youth engagement and co-leadership in accelerating progress towards gender equality and sustainable development, using quantitative and qualitative data;
- **Champion** actions that challenge structural barriers and power imbalances faced by youth within partnerships and engagement; and
- **Advocate** to increase financing for young people and reevaluate eligibility requirements and funding models in partnerships with youth.

We recommend that decision makers, such as donors, policymakers, and national governments, use this resource to galvanize the adoption of adolescents' and youth's rightful demands for equitable partnerships.

Summary

In Chapter 1, we present our case for why decision makers should invest in youth and youth-led organizations as well as integrate young people into program design and policymaking processes.

Chapter 2 establishes a clear definition and framework for equitable youth engagement and co-leadership. We provide a comprehensive checklist of best practices for decision makers seeking to collaborate with youth, along with several case studies that showcase how equitable youth engagement and co-leadership can yield successful outcomes.

Chapter 3 examines barriers to youth financing, both on a global and national level, and positions equitable and trust-based financing as a solution for these collective challenges.

Chapter 4 delivers a powerful call to action, urging national governments and other decision makers to establish long-term, sustainable partnerships that support and empower young people as key agents of change.

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A young woman with glasses and a microphone speaking. The image is overlaid with a blue tint. The woman is shown in profile, looking to the right, and is holding a microphone. She is wearing a dark jacket with a fur-lined hood and a white lace top. The background is blurred.

WHY YOUTH?

*NOTHING ABOUT US
WITHOUT US*

Young Leader Alum Lorato Modongo speaking about gender equality during a regional workshop in Kenya. Credit: Brian Otieno

We live in unprecedented times, marked by the devastating impacts of climate change, an ongoing global pandemic, and pervasive poverty, conflict, violence, and gender inequality. These problems often disproportionately affect youth across the world.

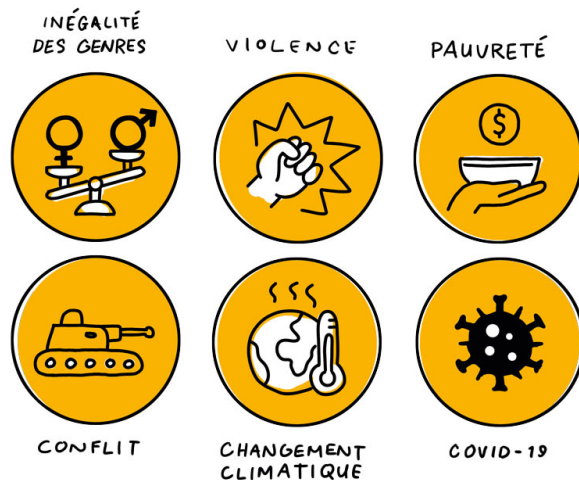


Image 1.1: Problems that disproportionately affect youth

While definitions of "youth" and "young people" vary across cultures and contexts, Women Deliver defines youth as persons under the age of 30. This demographic constitutes half of the world's population today and comprises the largest generation of young people in history. The majority of young people (nearly 90% of the total youth population) live in the Global South, where they are experiencing some of the world's most pressing problems firsthand.¹

As the generation that will inherit these problems, as well as the policies and programs we implement today to address them, young people have the most at stake. They are also uniquely positioned to develop innovative solutions and drive progress.

Young people's civic and political participation is not only a known catalyst for social change but also a fundamental human right according to the United Nations (UN)² and several other global and regional human rights frameworks (see end of this chapter). Yet young people's right to participate in public life has not been fully realized due to a myriad of systemic barriers. Studies show that young people are still excluded from high-level decision making forums,

even though they are directly affected by the decisions made in these spaces. According to the *Be Seen Be Heard Global Youth Report* (2022)³, produced by the UN Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth and the Body Shop, youth are vastly underrepresented in political institutions worldwide: less than 3% of parliamentarians are below the age of 30, while the average age of political leaders is 62 years old.

This must change. Young people and their communities directly bear the brunt of political inaction by leaders and decision makers who are out of touch with their needs. As we confront unprecedented challenges around the world, it is more crucial than ever to shift power into the hands of youth.



The human rights approach to equitably engaging youth recognizes the inherent value and agency of young people as rights-holders and active participants in decision making processes that affect them.

As stakeholders in the future of our planet, young people deserve to be in the driver's seat on policies and programs that impact their lives, their communities, and the planet. And we know that when properly equipped with the resources, technical assistance, and funding to be agents of change, youth accelerate progress toward gender equality and sustainable development.^{4, 5} In the face of pervasive structural obstacles, young people have continued to lead social movements and hold decision makers accountable. The *Be Seen Be Heard Global Youth Report* highlights that more than 69% of people believe that involving youth in policy development would improve political systems. In recent years, multilateral organizations and NGOs have launched initiatives recognizing young people as innovators, entrepreneurs, and important agents of change:

- The theme of the World Bank's recent, Youth Summit, *From the Ground Up: Local Solutions to Drive Global Impact*,⁶ celebrates the potential that youth-led innovations have to create significant social and economic impact, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

- Since 2017, Youth Co:Lab, a joint project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Citi Foundation,⁷ has supported 28 countries in the Asia-Pacific region to invest in youth-led startups, centered around the principle that young entrepreneurs and innovators hold the key to accelerating progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The International Youth Foundation's Global Youth Resiliency Fund⁸ found that youth-led innovations can effectively address social and environmental challenges, with many young people developing practical, low-cost, low-tech, sustainable, and scalable solutions.



Innovation, creativity, and peer learning can help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have greater agency in co-creating solutions to tackle urgent societal problems.

Youth-led innovations are already creating an impact around the world:

- Nossa Horta⁹, an innovative youth-led grassroots movement based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, promotes urban agriculture through the cultivation of community gardens in low-income neighborhoods. Each of these gardens is tailored to support the needs of the local community. Nossa Horta also promotes environmental education, providing knowledge about climate change, medicinal plants, and unorthodox food sources to both children and adults in the communities where the gardens are located.
- CHAVA,¹⁰ a youth-led sex education app in Latin America, seeks to address the systemic and cultural barriers that hinder access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education and services in the region.

- Zvandiri^{11, 12} is a youth-led community-based organization in Zimbabwe that provides support to children, adolescents, and young people aged 6-24 living with HIV/AIDS. The organization trains HIV-positive individuals between 18-24 years old, known as Community Adolescent Treatment Supporters (CATS), to provide clinical and digital services such as HIV testing, counseling, and antiretroviral therapy, as well as monthly community-based support groups. CATS also promote HIV prevention and awareness, SRH education, and life skills training through community outreach programs, and collaborate with social workers, community health workers, and health facilities under the Ministry of Health to offer comprehensive care and support for youth living with HIV/AIDS (YLHIV).

Established in 2004 by YLHIV who recognized the need for peer support and empowerment in their community, the Zvandiri model has since been adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe and expanded by its Ministry of Health.



Image 1.2: Young people are already taking action on important issues around the world

There are many benefits of partnering with youth at the local, national, regional, and global levels.¹³ Young people's advocacy, activism, and dissent have helped move the needle on issues from climate action to universal health coverage. **Their lived experiences, contextual knowledge, and commitment to social justice make them uniquely qualified to disrupt deeply entrenched power dynamics and shape policies and programs to advance gender equality and sustainable development while facilitating systemic change.**

Tapping into this potential requires new ways of engaging and partnering with youth, starting with recognizing that youth have the most expertise on their own lives and that their knowledge and contributions are as valuable as those of other experts and demographic groups. When institutions co-create and co-design programs with young people, those programs represent shared interests and are more likely to be effective, sustainable, and reflective of young people's experiences. Mutual learning can occur from intergenerational partnerships as we move from capacity building to knowledge exchange and reciprocity. Partnerships with youth can then serve as a diplomatic and negotiating tool. Engaging young people as program designers, researchers, evaluators, advocates, and more can also improve the quality and relevance of data collected and increase program accountability.

EXAMPLES

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IS CODIFIED IN SEVERAL GLOBAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of children and young people to express their views and participate in decision making processes that affect them.¹⁴

Action 6.15 of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) affirms that young people should be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives.¹⁵

In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, the UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which identified the “full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision making” as one of fifteen priority action areas.¹⁶

In 2003, the General Assembly reiterated its commitment to “the importance of the full and effective participation of young people and youth organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels... bearing in mind that [young people] are active agents in decision making processes and for positive change and development in society.”¹⁷

The UN’s Youth Strategy (“Youth2030”) includes advocating for “expanded and meaningful youth participation in intergovernmental forums at the global and regional levels... including through extensive and streamlined support to youth delegates and representatives” as one of its top priorities, along with supporting young people’s civic and political engagement.¹⁸

Article 16 of the 2006 African Youth Charter notes that states have a responsibility to secure the full involvement of youth in identifying their reproductive and health needs and designing programs that respond to those needs.¹⁹

The 2012 Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration identifies issues and priorities facing young people within the context of population and development, noting recommended actions for the outcome report of the ICPD +20 review and the post-2015 UN development agenda. It highlights the importance of putting young people’s rights at the heart of development.²⁰

The 2013 Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development follows up on the implementation of ICPD in relation to state obligations and features a section on the rights, needs, responsibilities, and requirements of children, adolescents, and youth.²¹

A group of diverse people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are gathered around a table in a workshop setting. They are looking down at a large sheet of paper covered in handwritten notes and diagrams. One person is using a white marker to write on the paper. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a meeting room with some equipment on the wall. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

EQUITABLE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND CO- LEADERSHIP

Women Deliver Young Leaders collaborate at a regional workshop in Kenya.

Credit: Brian Otieno

Around the world, young people are at the forefront of driving social change. Yet the current approach to youth engagement²² within gender equality and health advocacy spaces often stops at youth participation and consultation, seldom reaching the level of true youth leadership and ownership. Young people are rarely invited to be at the decision making table, and initiatives led by youth in their own right are often conceived to be marginal and have little or no participation by other age cohorts. However, this approach not only presents a missed opportunity for stronger gender equality and health outcomes but also denies young people their right to be in the driver's seat of their future and the future of the planet.

Another shortfall of the existing approach to meaningful youth engagement is that youth are viewed as an undifferentiated and homogenous group, thereby ignoring the unique experiences, vulnerabilities, and needs of distinct groups of young people. In doing so, only the most privileged youth are able to engage in influencing gender equality and health policy. Yet the world's most intractable gender equality and health issues often have a direct, consequential, and disproportionate impact on the most marginalized youth, particularly those that have intersectional vulnerabilities and multiple marginalizing identities such as adolescent girls, non-binary people, and those with differing abilities or belonging to minority groups. These influencing spaces must be created for and alongside the most marginalized youth to equitably engage youth in shaping global policies. With these youth leading in policymaking processes, the world will have more equitable health systems that can more effectively meet the needs of all populations.

This publication introduces a new approach to youth engagement, known as equitable youth engagement and co-leadership (EYECL), which addresses these challenges, as well as provides a clear guide on implementing EYECL within government and other advocacy spaces.

KEY TERM: TOKENISM

Tokenism refers to the practice of including individuals from under-represented groups in a way that is superficial or symbolic, rather than meaningful or substantive. Truly inclusive spaces embrace and celebrate diversity, whereas tokenism involves making performative gestures to appear inclusive. An example of this is selecting individuals based solely on their group identity (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or age) rather than their qualifications or experiences as a way to meet requirements without actually integrating diverse perspectives into design or decision making processes. As a result, tokenized youth may feel undervalued, disrespected, and not truly included.

KEY TERM: INTERSECTIONALITY

Coined by scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1990²³, intersectionality refers to the notion that individuals have multiple, overlapping identities (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and more) and that these identities cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Instead, they are intertwined and can create unique experiences of oppression and privilege.

KEY TERMS: EQUALITY VS. EQUITY

In discussions around social justice, the terms "equality" and "equity" are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct meanings. Equality refers to ensuring that everyone has access to the same resources and opportunities, regardless of individual needs or circumstances. In contrast, equity recognizes that different individuals and groups may require different levels of support and resources to achieve the same outcomes. While equality results from a process, equity refers to the process itself.

The intertwined principles of diversity and inclusivity lay at the core of an equitable approach. Narrowing equity gaps requires a commitment to allocating resources appropriately, tackling the underlying concerns and requirements of underserved and at-risk communities, and meeting young people where they are.

Defining Equitable Youth Engagement and Co-Leadership

Equitable youth engagement and co-leadership is a transformative, intentional process in which young people, in all their diversity, are in positions of power and leadership alongside other stakeholders who may be traditional powerholders. This includes authority to design and create policies, programs, and initiatives, to make decisions and set agendas, and to hold leaders and decision makers accountable.



Image 2.1: The pillars of equitable youth engagement and co-leadership

As part of this process, young people are provided with adequate and fair financial compensation in recognition of their expertise and energy, along with any technical or capacity support needed to be successful in their role.

Lastly, an enabling and inclusive environment is created such that young people are institutionally and structurally recognized as

experts (not solely as representatives of an age group) and treated with respect as equals; young people are free to express themselves and their autonomy is respected without fear of retribution²⁴; robust safeguarding ensures young people's mental, emotional, and physical safety; information is shared in a transparent, timely, and youth-friendly way; and equitable youth engagement and co-leadership is integrated into the design or structure of a process at its conception.

Equitable youth engagement should strive to "maximiz[e] youth potential and minimiz[e] youth vulnerabilities... through programmes, learning and strategic partnerships."²⁵ Our approach to equitable youth engagement encompasses the inter related concepts of co-leadership, co-creation, and co-ownership.

KEY TERM: INCLUSION

Creating an inclusive environment goes beyond simply inviting individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in activities or events. True inclusion requires intentionally addressing bias, discrimination, and exclusion in policymaking and program design.

Co-Leadership

Co-leadership is a leadership model in which two or more individuals share power, authority, responsibility, and influence. It can be particularly effective in situations where multiple perspectives are needed to solve a complex problem.

Feminist co-leadership is a variation of this approach that values collaboration, diversity, inclusivity, and equitable power distribution in decision making processes. Grounded in feminist principles, it requires a high degree of trust and communication and a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities to avoid confusion or conflict. When done right, feminist co-leadership can serve as a "practice of collective liberation," but this requires being "sensitive and attentive to flows of power, spreading and weaving manifestations of power in ways that disrupt the linear and vertical concentrations of power that are at the foundation of patriarchal, capitalist systems of inequality."²⁶

While co-leadership is not a new concept, in the field of youth engagement, it is increasingly recognized as a best practice that not only gives young people greater agency over decision making and agenda setting but also leads to rich intergenerational relationships and mutual learning. Co-leadership can help young people decentralize traditional hierarchies and renegotiate power while uplifting each other and cultivating community. While building relationships – a key aspect of co-leadership – requires investing more time, it can ultimately make programs more effective by creating an enabling environment for collaboration, constructive criticism, and conflict resolution. Additionally, “when considering strategic vision and risk-taking, co-leadership offers the opportunity for bold moves due to the additional dialogue, analysis and support”²⁷ that diverse leaders can bring to the table. Last but not least, a co-leadership approach can enable “critical cycles of rest and replenishment,”²⁸ which is particularly crucial in social justice, gender equality, and sustainable development spaces.

KEY TERM: POWER

Power refers to the exercise of potency in public spaces or formal systems of governance and accountability, such as political bodies, organizations, or social movements. However, decision making spaces often prioritize the needs of powerful actors over those of marginalized people, who may be excluded from these spaces altogether. Decision makers collaborating and engaging with young people must be cognizant of power dynamics that are rooted in multiple and intersectional identity markers, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, ability, socio-economic status, and more, in order to adequately address power imbalances.

KEY TERM: DIVERSITY

In this context, diversity refers to the obvious yet often overlooked fact that young people are not a monolith. They occupy a wide range of intersecting identities, which include differences in race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, and more. Promoting diversity requires actively embracing these differences and recognizing that young people’s diverse backgrounds, skills, and perspectives can help bring fresh ideas and foster creativity and innovation.

Co-Creation

Co-creation is a participatory approach to decision making and program design that values the input and expertise of diverse perspectives to generate more innovative and effective solutions.

It involves a shift away from traditional top-down approaches in favor of a more inclusive process, where all stakeholders are empowered to speak up, contribute to the outcome, and shape the society in which they live. Writer and researcher Julian Stodd describes co-creation as a “process of social learning and collaboration that we experience within community, an iterative and refining process of editing our messages and thinking,” and further asserts that “[c]o-created change is powerful, as it’s owned both emotionally and intellectually by the team.”²⁹ The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) Young Feminist Manifesto adds that co-creation “helps us to tap into our collective knowledge” while “chang[ing] the way we approach ownership.”³⁰ While equitable youth engagement and co-leadership is based on the principle that young people are experts on their own lives and, therefore, best equipped to identify solutions for problems facing their communities, co-creation processes enable them to articulate, map, and build these solutions. This supports youth agency and empowers young people to become active contributors to change.



Image 2.2: People engaged in the co-creation process

The co-creation process may not be linear, and like co-leadership models, may require a greater time or financial commitment. However, co-creation can be understood as a longer process that yields long-term solutions, as co-creation is more likely to guarantee the sustainability of programs and policies. The co-creation process helps build trust between young people and partners because everyone involved cultivates relationships throughout the project. This can lead to greater collaboration in the future. Additionally, co-creation builds ownership among those involved because the co-creators each see their own ideas represented in the project.³¹ Joint ownership can result in more sustainable outcomes because more people are invested in the success of a project and even long-term continuation if needed. Partners and decision makers committed to collaborating with youth must understand that power imbalances can make it difficult to reach a common language and rhythm. However, increasing youth agency can serve as both a solution to this challenge and a positive outcome.

Why Do Many Organizations Find It Difficult to Engage Youth Equitably?

Some organizations, governments, and other adult-led institutions may resist changing traditional working methods or lack trust in young people's abilities and expertise. These institutions are often influenced by stereotypes and norms that constrain or exclude youth participation. Addressing these biases is a crucial starting point for equitable youth engagement and co-leadership.

Even when adult-led institutions seek to partner with youth, power imbalances between adults and youth can create challenges in cultivating equitable relationships. Working with diverse youth may also require more patience due to differences in languages, working styles, and interests. Still, if institutions are interested in engaging youth, they must first acknowledge and target inequitable power dynamics. To increase young people's agency, institutions working with youth must establish a differential age approach with concrete measures to reduce gaps and asymmetry as much as possible.

Additionally, equitable youth engagement and participatory models are often misunderstood as ways to transfer work responsibilities. As a consequence, unrealistic goals are often set. Although young people are experts on their lives, this must not be conflated with professional expertise. Learning processes demand time and effort in order to create an enabling environment that allows young people to advance their skills and expertise. In addition to considering the skills of young people, the capacity and experience of adults in working with young people must also be reviewed. Adults seeking to partner with young people may need training or guidance on how to meaningfully and equitably form these relationships.

CASE STUDY

CO-LEADERSHIP AT THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM AND THE CREATION OF THE GENERATION EQUALITY YOUTH TASK FORCE

In 2021, the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), a five-year action journey to achieve irreversible progress toward gender equality, was founded on a series of concrete, ambitious, and transformative actions. The Forum was convened by UN Women and co-chaired by the governments of France and Mexico in partnership with youth and civil society. It occurred from March 29 to 31, 2021 in Mexico City, Mexico, and from 30 June to 2 July 2021 in Paris, France. This was the first time in the history of the UN that an initiative was co-designed, co-created, and co-chaired by member states, youth, and civil society, with those involved all sharing power and commitment. The Forum generated \$40 billion in various financial, policy, and program commitments.

In order to represent young people in all of their diverse and intersectional identities and to facilitate youth leadership and participation in the GEF, the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (YTF) was created. The task force comprised 40 youth advocates worldwide who have dedicated their lives to advancing gender equality. It also represents diverse constituencies, including adolescents, LGBTQIA+ youth, young people living with HIV, young people with disabilities, indigenous youth, Afro-descendants, youth belonging to ethnic, religious, or caste minorities, health sector professionals, and climate justice activists. YTF is one of the co-chairs of the GEF.

While the structure for youth co-leadership was very promising, adolescents and youth also faced challenges in engaging in the GEF. Although UN Women and Member States have shown support to YTF's leadership, there is still a power imbalance within the GEF and its other structures. Some YTF members observed that their engagements were purely tokenistic in nature and raised issues with inclusion and diversity in various GEF sessions. As a result of these concerns, young people recommended strategies for shifting and sharing power, some of which were implemented. Young people involved in the GEF also co-created the Young Feminist Manifesto³² to highlight the aims and aspirations of all the youth structures within the GEF.

Implementing Equitable Youth Engagement and Co-Leadership

Drawing on these existing frameworks and input from young advocates, we have designed a clear and streamlined process that organizations, funders, and governments can implement when engaging youth as co-creators, co-designers, and co-leaders. This process can be applied to projects such as:

- Forming a youth advisory committee or board;
- Jointly producing a resource, publication, or research;
- Co-creating or designing programs with and for youth, including in consultations with youth;
- Engaging in participatory grantmaking programs or processes; and
- Intentional skills building for youth through trainings, knowledge sharing, mentorships, and the sharing of learning resources.

The United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Generation Unlimited partnership notes:

“It is important to highlight that a reserved position on a Board or Committee does not necessarily translate to meaningful youth participation or genuine co-leadership. Where entrenched hierarchical decision making structures or a culture of adultism prevails, this can easily slip into tokenism. Clearly defining the young person's role and articulating the mutual accountabilities to those in power are important prerequisites. It is important to be intentional about shifting power and to consciously address cultural norms or barriers that may hinder co-leadership. A full co-creation process that is underpinned by principles of transparency, accountability, and power-sharing can help to establish genuine partnerships between older and younger generations.”³³



- 1 **Incorporate Equitable Youth Engagement and Co-Leadership in the initial design of the project or process.**
- 2 **Use an equitable and transparent process to identify the people, organizations, and institutions with whom to co-create, co-design, or co-lead.**
- 3 **Define the project and ways of working.**
- 4 **Collaborate on the project.**
- 5 **Complete and evaluate the project.**

Image 2.3: The process for equitable youth engagement and co-leadership, co-creation, and co-design

1. Incorporate equitable youth engagement and co-leadership in the initial design of the project or process.

- Consider at the inception of any given project whether and how youth can engage and contribute to the project.
- Identify the purpose of working with young people in this project at the outset. Avoid tokenistic inclusion and ensure that the intention is rooted in equitable engagement rather than simply meeting quotas.
- Assess the risks, especially of exploitation and abuse, posed by engaging young people in the project. Design appropriate mitigation measures to ensure the safety of young people in the project. For additional resources, Women Deliver and its partners have developed the following policies and resources regarding safety and wellness, especially the safety of young people:
 - [Child and Young Person Safeguarding Policy](#)
 - [Safeguarding Guide for Youth](#)
 - [Digital Safeguarding Guidelines](#)

2. Use an equitable and transparent process to identify the people, organizations, and institutions with whom to co-create, co-design, or co-lead.

- Establish clear criteria for selection based on the requirements of the role. Examine whether the criteria will exclude or discriminate against otherwise qualified candidates.
- Remember that young people are a diverse group made up of many different populations. A small selection of young people will not represent all youth from a given population. Take this into consideration when designing your criteria.
- Avoid tokenism in the selection process – select people because of the value they add, not only because they are a member of an identity group.
- Form a diverse review and decision makers committee that includes people from the target applicants' communities.
- Simplify the application or expression of interest process to ask only what is needed to make a selection. As the recruiting entity, do not create more work for the applicant.
- Clearly define and communicate what compensation, training, or support will be offered right from the start so that applicants can make informed decisions about their participation in a project.

3. Define the project and ways of working.

- Make time to get to know each other on a personal level and develop relationships before starting the project.
- Define the goals and objectives of the project and ensure everyone is aligned on these goals.
- Establish rules and agreements for how to work together, including the structure or format for collaboration, such as meetings or joint editing. Some additional ways of working that are important to note include:
 - Ensuring accessibility by simplifying language, avoiding jargon, and providing clear definitions on any specialized terminology, as appropriate.
 - Using tools that enable young people with disabilities to engage equitably in policymaking, such as screen readers and alt text.
 - Being flexible – working with young people may require working differently than with adult colleagues, especially if they are in school or have other jobs, are located in low-bandwidth settings, or are in different time zones.
- Jointly determine the level of effort, work, and commitment required from each participant and ensure they are adequately compensated for their contributions.

CASE STUDY

WOMEN DELIVER'S APPROACH TO HONORARIA FOR YOUTH

As part of its commitment to becoming an anti-racist, decolonial, inclusive, and accessible NGO, Women Deliver believes in honoring and recognizing the time, expertise, and energy given by young people in a Women Deliver-affiliated opportunity. Providing honoraria is one way Women Deliver prioritizes effective accessibility, communications, and resourcing. Additionally, providing honoraria encourages a shift from viewing grassroots, local, and/or youth advocates as beneficiaries to leaders and experts. Honoraria can support in bringing diverse voices to the table who historically have been ignored or tokenized.

Providing honoraria is just one step in a much longer journey towards ensuring equitable youth engagement, as described in this chapter, and should not be used in place of compensation for services, travel or Internet stipends, or per diem. Women Deliver offers between \$25 to \$1,000 depending on the scope and longevity of the project and/or activity, the amount of time and effort contributed by the recipient, the level of effort (LOE) provided by the recipient, the availability of funds, and the equitable dispensation of honoraria for project participants. Generally, the LOE is the most important factor to consider. If the LOE is limited, a smaller honorarium can be offered. If the LOE is more substantial, a corresponding increase in the amount offered is warranted. The potential safeguarding risks of providing funds, especially to adolescents, must be addressed before the provision of honoraria.

4. Collaborate on the project.

- Conduct regular check-ins for feedback and evaluate how things are going.
- Establish clear channels for open and honest communication.
- Make adjustments for accessibility and inclusion.
 - Recognize the prevalence of adult-centrism in traditional organizational and institutional design and acknowledge the difficulties that young people may encounter when working alongside adults.
 - Establish clear strategies that respect different learning rhythms and contextual conditions of young people involved.

- Hold each other accountable for delivering the work according to the agreed upon ways of working.
- Share information and knowledge resources transparently.
- Provide training and resources throughout the process.

5. Complete and evaluate the project.

- Acknowledge everyone involved as co-owners, including as part of the public announcement or project publication, as appropriate.
- Reflect on what worked and what did not work in the co-creation process, with the intention of mutual learning and improvement.
- Jointly determine an evaluation framework (metrics, indicators, etc.) that encourages learning, and complete the evaluation as agreed.

CASE STUDY

CO-CREATION AT WOMEN DELIVER: WD2023 YOUTH PLANNING COMMITTEE

In preparation for its flagship conference, Women Deliver 2023 (WD2023), Women Deliver recognized the critical importance of placing young people in decision making roles for youth programming at WD2023. The formation of a youth advisory body was included in the initial design of the creation of WD2023, to provide strategic input in the development and implementation of the Conference by co-leading and co-creating all youth programming.

The WD2023 Youth Planning Committee³⁴ is comprised of six Women Deliver Young Leaders, six Young Leader Alumni, and six youth advocates beyond the Women Deliver Young Leaders Program. This composition was an intentional part of the design to ensure that all three groups of youth constituents were represented equally on the Committee. Women Deliver created comprehensive terms of reference (TOR) for the Youth Planning Committee that included background information, the purpose of the Committee, key responsibilities, compensation and technical support provided, qualifications, and a description of the application and selection process. This TOR was posted on Women Deliver's social media and shared with Young Leaders and youth networks to ensure an open application process. After the four-week application window closed, a diverse review committee of Women Deliver staff, Regional

Consultants, and members of the Young Leaders Alumni Committee reviewed the applications using a common review matrix. Each application was assessed by 2-3 reviewers. The final selection was made based on reviewer comments and efforts were made to ensure a regionally and demographically diverse Committee.

The WD2023 Youth Planning Committee held its first meeting in the fourth quarter of 2022. The first meeting focused on relationship building, aligning the responsibilities and expectations of the Committee members, and co-creating ways of working. For example, it was decided that monthly meetings would take place at two different time options to account for the large span of time zones in which members live.

The WD2023 Youth Planning Committee met monthly from October 2022 to July 2023 and carried out much of its work in specific Subcommittees based on the deliverables the Committee was charged with creating. Women Deliver staff and Regional Consultants regularly met with individual or small groups of Committee members to check in, address concerns, and move the joint work forward. Committee members worked collectively to design WD2023 youth programming, which was still in formation at the time of this publication's drafting.

Applying Equitable Youth Engagement and Co-Leadership to Policymaking in Government

Governments must engage young people in policymaking and programming to ensure responsiveness to their needs. This can also lead to additional funding for youth-led initiatives and youth programming, and providing this funding at the national level is the most sustainable long-term approach to ensure ownership and continuation of these programs.

Given their formal and sometimes bureaucratic ways of working, governments need institutionalized mechanisms through which young people can equitably engage in policymaking and program development. Some specific ways governments can institutionalize youth engagement meaningfully and equitably include:

- Establishing formalized youth advisory boards within specific government ministries or providing young people with a platform to co-create with policymakers.
- Appointing young people to public offices, committees, and other governing bodies where key decisions are made, particularly if the issues affect youth. However, avoid a tokenistic approach in which young people are only selected because of their age; rather, appoint young people to roles because of their expertise and lived experience.
- Ensuring that budgets allocated for youth programming are not cut or deprioritized when there are budget realignment measures or situations requiring austerity measures.
- Developing tailored training for young people who are engaging in policymaking to build their capacity and knowledge, based on the actual needs and requests of young people. This can even start with school-age young people who may run for school councils or participate in programs such as Model UN or mock Parliament.
- Partnering with community-based and youth-led organizations that have expertise in working equitably and meaningfully with young people.

- Developing a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to equitable youth engagement and co-leadership that applies across ministries and agencies. This unified approach will ensure all agencies are working together and advancing the same values as it relates to youth engagement. This makes it easier for young people to engage and participate in government mechanisms, as well as results in better policies and programs.

In addition, governments should not only focus on innovative ways to engage young people in policymaking but also think about how they work with youth-led organizations. This means listening to youth-led organizations and understanding how they want to partner with the government and what resources and support they need.

CASE STUDY

EQUITABLE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND CO-LEADERSHIP IN THE GOVERNMENT OF NORWAY

In 2019, the Norwegian government introduced a new law, the Local Government Act,³⁵ which mandates the establishment of youth councils in all municipalities in Norway to provide young people with a voice in local decision making processes. Youth council members can hold office for up to two years and must be younger than 19 at the time of election. The law also requires that the municipality must ensure that young people are informed about the decisions made by the municipality and the reasons for those decisions. In 2022, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir)³⁶ developed [a guide for newly created youth councils](#) in consultation with several more established youth councils in Karasjok, Alta, and Hammerfest, emphasizing the role youth councils play in promoting youth participation in decision making processes. The guide provides examples of best practices for youth councils, including how to engage young people in recruitment, how to facilitate meetings, and how to establish partnerships with local government officials.

How do we measure equitable youth engagement? What does successful equitable youth engagement look like from the perspective of young people?

Measuring equitable youth engagement and co-leadership can be tedious and challenging. The number of young people involved in a project or activity can be a good starting point, but it is important to go beyond the numbers and consider the quality and depth of their involvement. Asking young people for feedback on their experiences and evaluating the long-term impact of their involvement can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of youth engagement efforts. Assessing the diversity and inclusivity of engagement activities can guarantee that every young person has an equal opportunity to participate and contribute.

Successful equitable youth engagement from the perspective of young people requires being treated as equal partners and decision makers in projects or programs that directly impact their lives. This means that young people should have a say in the planning, design, budgeting, and implementation of initiatives, as well as receive the necessary support and resources to contribute meaningfully. Decision making processes must be made accessible to all young people without coercion and discrimination.

Offering financial, logistical, and emotional support and discussing the needs of young people in advance is not only crucial to equitable youth engagement, but it's also an ethical imperative. Young people bring valuable knowledge and lived experiences to the table and should be compensated like any other experts. Supporting them with stipends and honoraria, paying for their time, and providing them with contracts are just a few examples. It is vital to recognize the value of their time and effort.

**WOMEN
DELIVER**

FINANCING FOR YOUTH

Women Deliver Young Leader Alum Ali Kaviri speaking in front of a group at a Young Leaders workshop in Uganda. Credit: Women Deliver

When young people are supported with funding, they have the potential to challenge harmful norms, push for institutional and legislative reforms, and transform their communities. Yet young people face three significant barriers to equitable access to and distribution of funding, both at the global and national levels.



Image 3.1: Barriers to accessing funding

This chapter unpacks these three critical barriers and offers recommendations for equitable and trust-based funding practices that all grantmaking partners can adopt.

Towards Sufficient Funding for Youth Programs and Young People

Globally, official development assistance (ODA)³⁷ for youth- and gender-focused programs, which most often goes to UN agencies, is quite limited within the scope of total development financing. In 2020, 5.56% (\$7.6 billion) of total ODA from the top ten gender equality donors went to assistance programs that have gender equality goals and focus on young people aged 10-24. This is a vast underinvestment in a global population of 1.8 billion people ages 10-24³⁸. Furthermore, while exact data on the proportion of ODA that goes directly to young people and youth-led organizations is not available, qualitative evidence suggests it is a tiny fraction of this already small total.

Based on research published in [Resourcing Girls](#), “adults generally don’t feel comfortable with young people in true decision making power, and so a lot of the grantmaking ends up going to adult-led organizations and maybe they have special programming that’s devoted to youth. All of these things are important, but it’s not the same thing as having meaningful youth participation in terms of decision making about where funding goes and how that funding could best support young people.”³⁹

Meanwhile, domestic funding for youth-led organizations and initiatives is also quite limited in most countries. Governments face many competing priorities and are overwhelmed with what to prioritize. Often they prefer to fund tangible projects that their citizens can see, such as building roads, hospitals, health centers, and schools. On the other hand, alternative funding from local non-state entities is constrained by policy, socioeconomic, and environmental factors, such as performance instability. As a result, funding for youth programming or direct funding to youth primarily comes from non-domestic sources, such as organizations like Women Deliver. Unfortunately, scaling meaningful youth-led projects is often impossible, and the funding ends as soon as the development partner stops financing the work. Scaling and sustaining this work can only

happen with national governments whose mandate is the development of their own country.

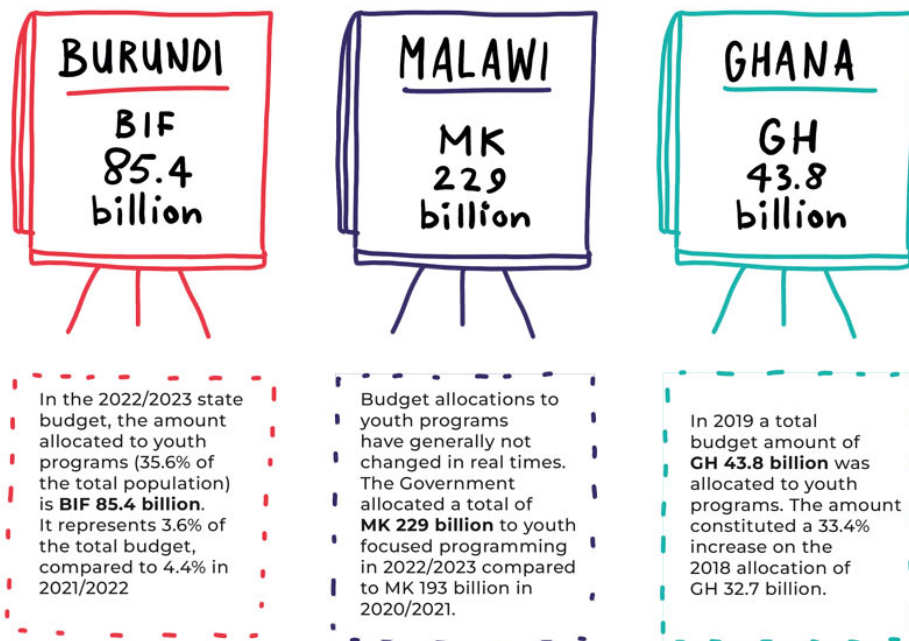


Image 3.2: Examples of domestic financing to youth in select countries

Global and domestic funding for youth should be restructured to promote sustainability of impact on young people's contribution to society. A collaborative approach by grantmakers, governments, and non-state entities to the challenges faced by youth and the partnership arrangements in solving these problems should be reflective of the needs of society and how young people prefer to be involved.

CASE STUDY

DOMESTIC FUNDING FOR YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA

The Rwandan National Youth Council (NYC), in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Culture, has proactively implemented equitable youth engagement initiatives with substantial funding. NYC coordinates all youth activities across the country, mobilizing and facilitating the formation of youth cooperatives through a structured network of executive committees.⁴⁰ This allows youth representatives at all levels to advocate for their needs and, at the same time, accelerates the buy-in of both local and international organizations to fund youth initiatives directly. In 2020, the Ministry of Youth and Culture, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), awarded 5 million Rwandan Francs each to 55 youth cooperatives in rural areas, successfully reaching some of the most vulnerable youth in the country and creating jobs for more than 3,500 youth across the country.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Youth and Culture has put in place a practical approach to securing domestic funds for youth initiatives through leveraging existing opportunities from other local and government institutions. In 2019, the Ministry of Youth and Culture negotiated with the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Local Government to contract 153 youth-led companies for recurring road maintenance activities across the country. Each company receives monthly funds of 3 million Rwandan Francs, creating 7,760 jobs.

More efforts for domestic funding continue as NYC advocates for promising projects created by youth to secure funds from organizations such as the Business Development Fund Rwanda. Additionally, the Ministry of Youth and Culture regularly organizes competitions through Youth Connekt Africa and other local initiatives, where youth-led organizations can win grants to implement their initiatives while also receiving coaching and mentorship services to strengthen their management and leadership capacities. These initiatives have provided significant opportunities for youth to showcase their capabilities while contributing to their communities' development.

Equitable Funding Practices

According to the 2009 NESTA report *Youth-led Innovation: Enhancing the Skills and Capacity of the Next Generation of Innovators*,⁴¹ trust and support from adults, coupled with constructive feedback, are critical to promoting innovation and effectiveness in youth-led initiatives. However, funding relationships with youth are often not trust-based. This lack of trust often stems from the misguided assumption that youth lack the skills or expertise to carry out advocacy projects or make decisions, resulting in a push for capacity-building even in situations where it's not necessary or helpful. **Young people are still often seen as beneficiaries rather than agents of change.** This lack of trust manifests in several ways throughout the grantmaking process.

Financial Exclusion and Eligibility Criteria

It is essential for all stakeholders to prioritize the need to facilitate and ensure equitable distribution and access to funding and investment to young people and youth-led initiatives. Before even applying for a grant, young people are systematically excluded from financial systems, making it challenging to have the necessary financial infrastructure, such as a bank account, to receive a grant. This is a significant hurdle for youth advocates, as this lack of trust is institutionalized to prevent youth from receiving and managing funds. In many cases, banking regulations prevent youth from opening bank accounts, and funds are often held by other institutions rather than going directly into the hands of young people. According to the 2020 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Advancing the Digital Financial Inclusion of Youth*,⁴² nearly half of the young people around the world between the ages of 15 to 24 – a population of 1.8 billion – do not have a basic bank account at a formal financial institution. For instance, while 16% of young people in high-income countries are financially excluded, over 60% in Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean lack access to financial services.



Image 3.3: Financial exclusion

Moreover, financially excluded people are more likely to be female, residing in rural areas, belonging to the poorest 40% of their respective countries, and less likely to have access to the internet or digital tools. This means the world's most vulnerable youth are often locked out from accessing grantmaking mechanisms.

To be eligible to apply for a grant, many grantmaking institutions require an organization to have legal registrations in their country, such as recognition as a nonprofit organization. This can be an expensive and lengthy process that disqualifies nascent youth-led organizations and grassroots movements, as well as organizations working on politically sensitive topics that their government may oppose by blocking their registration. Furthermore, these criteria place undue importance on formalized registration processes, which is a standard that originated in the Global North and is rooted in colonial practices that inherently demonstrate a lack of trust in young grantees unless recognized by formal institutions that are deemed trustworthy, such as the government.

As a result, both globally and nationally, funding to young people often goes to a small, relatively privileged group of youth who are able to meet the stringent requirements described above and who have access to the networks and relationships that lead to these funding relationships. These funding practices exclude and further marginalized young people who live with disabilities, reside in rural communities, or lack internet access or proficiency in the English language. Additionally, given the vast diversity among young people,

a small subset of youth cannot possibly represent the expansive views of all young people. However, by funding this subset, donors believe they have fulfilled their obligation to support youth and subsequently don't look beyond the highest profile youth in a community or country. This approach can silence more marginalized youth who already face barriers to accessing opportunities.

It is essential to refine eligibility criteria for funding opportunities and consider the nature of local partnerships. This process can include research and evaluation of various factors that are context-specific within funding arrangements. Organic youth-led community groups, organizations, and initiatives have the potential to bring about desired community change. Community-based organizations (CBOs) can play a critical role in supporting young people in accessing funding opportunities and designing projects that are meaningful and relevant to their communities. Since they are positioned within the community and work closely with people from different backgrounds, CBOs are well-connected to the lived realities of many girls and women. However, most funding does not go to CBOs because of the lack of technical competencies required by grant makers and donors to be able to finance their programs. As a result, larger and well-established organizations who have the technical expertise to meet the funding requirements but lack community knowledge to implement or have access to the communities frequently receive funding that would have otherwise gone to CBOs with local expertise. This leads to INGOs or other non-local organizations implementing programs that may not truly address the needs of that community, especially the needs of girls and women.



Image 3.4: Inequitable funding criteria

Funding Priorities

Grantmaking institutions, rather than young people themselves, often determine the funding priorities for youth-focused grants and programs. Not including youth in the development of funding priorities robs them of their agency and results in funding priorities that are less likely to match their needs. Furthermore, funders frequently view young people as a monolith and neglect to account for the diverse backgrounds – and diverse needs – among this age group. These same principles apply to the grant review process, which often does not include those representative of the populations with whom a funder seeks to partner.

Based on research published in *Resourcing Girls*⁴³, “Girls also said they needed to conform to an adult way of being, changing how they present themselves and their work to be accepted in the formal, adult world. The girls expressed frustration that some of the funders supporting their work did little to develop relationships of trust, and the resultant lack of proximity to their realities led to a deep chasm between girls’ work and the funders’ understanding of it. Girls also felt their agency and power was overlooked: they want to be included in the processes that seek to communicate their work, and more so to be afforded the visibility, representation and voice in decision making that is so critical to meet their needs.”

Designing grantmaking opportunities for youth with youth under the spirit of co-leadership should be a priority. Grantmakers should implement participatory methods to define the needs, solutions, and priorities in youth financing, as this provides an opportunity for trust building and increased contextual knowledge for all parties. The Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation uses similar strategies where reciprocity is a core value between partners, with both the funding partner and the receiving partner declaring an interest and participating in the development of the project as a prerequisite for funding support. This process seeks to minimize power imbalances and promote collaborative agenda setting and shared interests.

In addition, designing grantmaking opportunities for youth with youth also enables youth to determine funding priorities. Such a model of supporting young people minimizes prescriptive and conditional

financial support to youth initiatives and promotes innovation. This model has been applied by several foundations where innovative youth ideas are funded based on their relevance to society more than the priorities and interests of the resource holder. The Tony Elumelu Foundation⁴⁴ is one such institution that has supported social entrepreneurship ideas by African youth.

There are many promising models for equitable and trust-based funding with and for young people. To tackle these issues in funding relationships with young people, donors and governments must recognize their power as resource holders and take steps to address this in their work with youth, enabling young people to negotiate financial terms, resources, and priorities without the fear of sanctions or economic exclusion. Resource holders must also increase funding to youth-led and youth-serving organizations to address the needs of the very large adolescent and youth populations globally.

CASE STUDY

GRAND CHALLENGES CANADA

Grand Challenges Canada has a peer reviewing model in which young people with lived experiences are invited to read, review, and comment on the applications they receive for funding. The young people referred to as expert reviewers are assigned to evaluate applications based on their innovation, accessibility, and affordability. They are asked to provide inputs based on their personal knowledge and lived experiences and are compensated for their time. The process is transparent and flexible in its approach to funding youth-led initiatives and organizations. One main eligibility criterion is for organizations to have a young person in a leadership role.

Grant Structures

Most funding to young people is awarded on a short-term project basis rather than long-term, unrestricted funding. When funders impose excessive reporting requirements or restrictions on how funds are used, this can limit the effectiveness of youth-led initiatives. Especially in advocacy work, where changes often happen incrementally over long periods, short-term funding makes the sustainability of an organization or an advocate's work challenging, as well as undermines their ability to design and invest in effective long-term advocacy strategies. Additionally, funders, as the holders of financial resources, have more power in negotiating grant terms, making it difficult for young people to advocate for grant agreements that actually work for them.

One specific grant structure from ODA funders is localization, a development approach of funding domestic organizations that have expertise in their own communities. Unfortunately in the experience of the co-authors, as a result of this approach, national offices of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) often end up applying and competing for funding with domestic youth-led organizations. In order to qualify for local and youth-targeted funds, INGOs will apply for funding in partnership with national youth-led organizations. After the funds are awarded to INGOs, they often do not allow youth partners to access them. Instead, they rely on the youth-led organization to reach specific populations, such as rural or grassroots communities. As a result, localization funds often expose young people to financial predation, where their involvement is exploitative and facilitatory rather than empowering.

The complex bureaucratic processes within governments make it even harder for young people to engage and participate in these processes. For example, for young people to join a planning meeting at a government ministry requires approvals from many departments and technocrats. This makes it almost impossible for young people to get these approvals as the technocrats follow orders from above. Yet it is a crucial first step for young people to be involved in these planning processes to ensure their priorities are included in government work plans and budgets.

Rigid Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Reporting processes imposed by donors have historically been used to monitor and even police the grantee's use of funds, indicating a lack of trust in the grantee's ability to manage funding responsibly. This is based on misguided assumptions about young people's abilities and a lack of recognition of their agency as change-makers. Similarly, instead of using monitoring and evaluation tools as opportunities for learning and innovation or capacity development, they are usually focused on strict compliance and accountability. Additionally, these reporting requirements often require significant time to comply, which many young grantees and youth-led organizations cannot spare, thereby disqualifying them from these funding opportunities.

Resource holders need to create context-specific capacity assessment frameworks and monitoring, evaluation, learning, and reporting frameworks that promote equity in funding opportunities. This would include reevaluating funding and evaluation requirements to promote learning and growth over policing and compliance, as well as creating competence assessments and funding arrangements that encourage capacity development towards compliance rather than disqualification from funding. This process can, for example, include a case-by-case capacity assessment and plan for disbursing resources over time relative to short-term goals until the institutions are fully meeting the funding requirements for larger amounts.

CASE STUDY

WOMEN DELIVER SMALL GRANTS TO YOUNG LEADERS

Many of the challenges and solutions identified above reflect learnings from Women Deliver's experience working with young grantees through its Small Grants, which is a component of the Young Leaders Program. Through the Small Grants Program, Women Deliver provides Young Leaders with the financial and technical resources they need to advance their own advocacy goals in their communities and contexts. Since 2014, Women Deliver has provided 213 Small Grants of \$5,000 to \$5,500 to Women Deliver Young Leaders and Young Leader Alumni, for a total of over \$1 billion. Women Deliver's current approach to grantmaking models many of the equitable practices described above, and Women Deliver plans to implement further changes to its grantmaking practices in the next iteration of the Young Leaders Program.

Designing the Funding Opportunity and Criteria

Women Deliver views Young Leader grantees as the experts in designing their projects. Women Deliver does not pre-select any specific advocacy topics beyond its overarching goal of advancing gender equality, allowing young people to set their own priorities rather than imposing Women Deliver's priorities on them. Additionally, the criteria for applying for a Women Deliver grant are minimal, making the Small Grants Program available to all applicants who are active members of the Young Leaders Program and have completed Digital University, which provides foundational advocacy training to all Young Leaders. On occasion, when there are funding criteria preferences dictated by Women Deliver's funders, such as a geographic focus, Women Deliver communicates those in the call for applications. However, others that do not meet that preference are still eligible and welcome to apply.

Grant Application

Women Deliver holds two grant rounds each year within the Young

Leaders Program, with applications open for 3-4 weeks for each round. During the application process, Women Deliver holds a Q&A session and one-on-one calls with Young Leaders to share the application and practical tips. Young Leaders can ask specific questions about their project ideas. Women Deliver's Regional Consultants also advise Young Leaders by providing critical context-specific guidance.

The streamlined application asks for a project statement, a narrative on a Young Leader's approach to measuring their success, a simple risk assessment, and an overview of any additional partners working on the project. Young Leaders also share a simple budget and a monitoring and evaluation framework, which they are free to design themselves. While the application has been simplified in recent years, Women Deliver plans to revise this application significantly by exploring submissions in multiple languages, video or visual submissions, or even application by interview.

Grant Application Review

Applications are reviewed by a diverse review committee made up of Women Deliver staff and Regional Consultants, as well as Young Leader Alumni who have been Women Deliver grant recipients in the past. A clear and concise set of criteria for application review is provided to the reviewers, which is also provided to Young Leaders in the application process. Each application is reviewed by 2-3 reviewers to ensure a diversity of perspectives on how the application meets the criteria. Scores are provided as a helpful review indicator, but applications are ultimately selected on a holistic review of the comments from reviewers, as well as to ensure demographic diversity in the total cohort of awarded grants.

Grant Structure

Grants from Women Deliver go directly to Young Leaders, so they do not exclude those who are unaffiliated with an organization and ensures that the funding is fully utilized by the individual. This also protects the grantees from financial exploitation, as described earlier in the chapter. Women Deliver is also flexible with the disbursement of funds by providing the funding to a bank account that is accessible to the Young Leader, including the account of a trusted friend or family member, or a PayPal account.

A limitation of Women Deliver’s approach to grantmaking is the limited funding amount, timeframe, and restricted nature of the grant. Currently, its grants are \$5,000 to \$5,500 for six months and must be used for a specific advocacy project. Young Leaders have shared in evaluations and feedback with Women Deliver that these aspects of the grant structure make it challenging for Young Leaders to develop and implement longer-term advocacy strategies, and there is often not sufficient length or funding to see advocacy outcomes. As a result of this feedback, Women Deliver is re-envisioning its grantmaking program in the next iteration of the Young Leaders Program, which will launch in Fall 2023.

Technical Support

Grantees have the flexibility to adjust their project budget as needed during their grant and shift or adapt their tactics based on the needs of the project and the realities on the ground. To support grantees in this process, Women Deliver’s Regional Consultants, based within the regions and contexts in which grantees are working, are available to troubleshoot and advise grantees, at their request. Additionally, Women Deliver staff and Regional Consultants hold a group orientation call for all new grantees, as well as individual calls to provide targeted feedback on their application. Individual interim and close-out calls are also held to support the Young Leader grantee during and after their project to adapt and distill learnings.



Image 3.5: Young Leader Grantee on a digital check-in call

Reporting, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Young Leaders provide an interim report at the halfway point in their project (three months) and a final report at the end of the project. Reports consist of six narrative questions, a budget report, and a report of their monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) results. Young Leaders design their own metrics for success in their projects and can utilize any MEL framework that is helpful for them.

Women Deliver acknowledges that given the size and length of the grant, this frequency and depth of reporting is excessive and could create a burden for Young Leaders to comply with these requirements. In the future grantmaking program, Women Deliver will develop reporting practices that are appropriate for the size and length of the grant and do not present a burden for grantees. This could include submission in multiple languages, verbal or interview reporting rather than written, and more informal reporting structures. Additionally, all reporting structures will focus more on learning and growth for the Young Leader grantee.

A large, diverse audience of women is shown in a conference hall, cheering enthusiastically with their hands raised. The scene is captured in a blue-tinted, high-angle shot, emphasizing the collective energy and participation of the attendees. The women are dressed in professional attire, and the room features large windows in the background, suggesting a bright, open environment.

CALL TO ACTION

Audience members cheering during the One Year Out Theater Performance in Kenya in
advance of the Women Deliver 2019 Conference.
Credit: Brian Otieno



Young people are key agents of change for the world's most pressing challenges. The co-authors of this publication are calling on decision makers and resource holders to partner with and invest in youth in the ways described throughout this publication. While this approach for working with adolescents and youth can apply in many contexts, we specifically call on national governments to adopt these recommendations to ensure long-term, sustainable partnerships and financing for youth.



1

Adopt the equitable youth engagement and co-Leadership approach and transform ways of working with adolescents and youth

by ensuring young people, in all their diversity, are in positions of power and leadership within your initiatives, organizations, programs, and policymaking processes for gender equality and sustainable development. This is grounded on the following three pillars:

- **An inclusive and enabling environment** in which young people are seen as equals, are free to express themselves safely, have access to the information needed to complete the project in a youth-friendly manner, and are safe mentally, emotionally, and physically.
- **Adequate and fair compensation for youth** who are co-creating, co-designing, co-leading, and co-owning advocacy work.
- **Technical and capacity support** for adults and young people to ensure everyone has the necessary skills to accomplish the project's goals and cultivate a meaningful and equitable partnership.

2

Increase funding for youth-focused programming & direct funding to young people and youth-led organizations especially at the national level:

- Prioritize investment in youth development policies and programs when setting national budgets. Youth programming is as important as every other issue – not only does it have a cross-cutting impact across all development areas, but it is also necessary to create a just and equitable society.
- Allocate a specific national budget to fund context-specific youth-led initiatives nationwide.

3

Convert inequitable funding practices with youth to trust-based, multi-year, flexible, and unrestricted funding.

- Revise grantmaking policies, guidelines, eligibility criteria, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks for accessibility, fairness, and sustainability.
- Ensure youth have access to financial systems and resources, such as the banking system.
- Include youth systematically in grantmaking processes to ensure youth priorities are addressed and that grantmaking is participatory.

4

Evaluate and report transparently and clearly on actions taken to co-create, co-design, and co-lead with young people, and continuously reflect on learnings from the co-Leadership process.

- Communicate learnings and takeaways with young people through traditional and social media.
- Continuously scale up efforts to increase the quality, depth, and timeliness of equitable youth engagement practices.

5

Improve the quality and transparency of data on funding to youth.

- For youth-focused programs, data should include the total funding allocated, how the funds were spent, and gender, age, and ability disaggregated data of those the program reached.
- For funding to young people, data should include total funding allocated directly to young people, how funding decisions were made, the terms of the funding agreements, and gender, age, and ability disaggregated data of those who received the funding.

A photograph of three young people participating in an exercise at a workshop. On the left, a young man in a dark blazer and light shirt is smiling and looking upwards. In the center, a young woman with long, wavy hair, wearing a striped dress, is laughing and holding a string. On the right, a young woman with braids and glasses, wearing a striped top, is also smiling and looking towards the center. They are standing in front of a stone wall. The word "APPENDIX" is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters across the middle of the image.

APPENDIX

Women Deliver Young Leaders taking part in an exercise at the Southern and Eastern Africa Workshop. Credit: Brian Otieno

Citations

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