



How to move your organization towards being youth-centred - an introduction

Introduction – young people and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

There are more young people living now than at any other time in history - those aged 10-24 make up just less than one quarter of the world's population. And about nine in 10 young people around the world live in less developed countries. However, despite being a significant part of the world's population, young people do not always have the opportunity to participate in society at the same level as older people. Most countries require you to be 18 or older to vote, and young people tend not to be very well represented in formal political systems as well as in the workplace more generally.

When it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, at IPPF we know it's often young people who face the greatest burden. For example, they are disproportionately affected by HIV, and AIDS is the second leading cause of death for young people worldwide. Complications from pregnancy are the second biggest cause of death for girls aged 15-19. When we think about the role of age, we must also acknowledge that gender is key when it comes to realising rights - girls and young women often face the biggest obstacles to living safe and healthy lives due to gendered discrimination.

Why involve young people in our work?

Firstly, young people have a right to participate in decisions which affect them. For those under 18 this is laid out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (which 196 countries have signed up to)¹.

And as you just read, young people are everywhere! Of course they should be included in decisions relating to their health and wellbeing. At IPPF, young people make up almost half of those who seek healthcare and support in our clinics, and they are often the focus of projects we plan to improve sexual and reproductive health, so it makes sense that they would be involved in making sure these projects are really going to reach other young people and be effective. In IPPF young people are not just 'service-users' but also leaders, advocates, educators and more; but we can't take for granted that this will just happen automatically. Without deliberately focusing on youth participation and engagement, we won't necessarily have young people as part of our programming, our staff teams and governing bodies.

1. <https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf>
2. <http://www.who.int/pmnch/mye-statement.pdf>

A Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Youth Engagement² has recently been developed by a number of youth-led and youth-serving organizations and gives the following definition of Meaningful Youth Engagement: *"An inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and world."*

The statement also outlines some key principles for youth participation, including that it is: **rights-based; transparent; voluntary; respectful and inclusive; and safe**. This could be a useful place to start when thinking about your own work – for example, does your organization have effective processes in place to ensure that children and young people are safe from discrimination and abuse? Do you work to ensure that a diverse group of young people are involved in your work at every level, including adolescents, those with disabilities, those without access to higher education and so on? Are you going beyond 'tokenism' to ensure young people's engagement is truly integrated in your work, rather than just taking the form of ad-hoc consultation?

Further resources

This document is just a very brief introduction to meaningful youth engagement and IPPF's youth centred approach. If you're interested in learning more, we suggest you look at some of these documents online!

IPPF (2015) Young at Heart: How to be Youth-Centred in the 21st Century https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_youngath-heart_english.pdf

Mama Cash (2018) Girls to the Front: A snapshot of girl-led organising https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/girlstothe-front_report_web.pdf

International HIV/AIDS Alliance - Aiming High: 10 Strategies for Meaningful Youth Engagement https://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/002/565/aiming_high_10_strategies_for_meaningful_youth_engagement_english_original.pdf

CHOICE for youth and sexuality – resource hub on Meaningful Youth Participation <https://www.youthdoit.org/themes/meaningful-youth-participation/myp-resources/>



Checklist

How are we doing
and where might we
be able to improve?

The checklist below gives some sample questions (this is not a comprehensive list!) to help you assess your organization's commitment to centring young people. Try asking these questions to staff and volunteers in your organisation (crucially, involving young people themselves!) to ascertain which areas you need to focus on to strengthen meaningful commitment towards youth engagement:

Programmes

Try to ensure you are engaging a representative subsection of the communities you are working with and aim to remove as many potential barriers as possible. For example, do you need to provide funded child care to ensure that young parents can attend planning meetings? Are your materials and meeting spaces accessible to those with disabilities?

	✓	✗	Needs improving 
Young people are included in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of our programmes			
Where the organisation provides direct services or education to young people, young people from beneficiary groups are engaged in the provision and assessment			
Young people and adults (including service providers) are trained on issues of youth engagement and non-discrimination			
Young people from diverse backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations and gender identities are involved at all levels			

Advocacy and partnerships

Funding young people to attend meetings is not enough to ensure their meaningful participation in advocacy! Time and resources need to be dedicated to capacity building and ongoing support for youth representatives. Young people need space and opportunity to develop their own messages and advocacy asks, rather than simply being mouthpieces for an organization.

	✓	✗	Needs improving 
Young people are involved in setting advocacy priorities and leading coalitions			
The organization forms partnerships and alliances with youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks within and beyond the SRHR field			
Young people and youth networks are engaged and mobilized in national, regional and international advocacy initiatives			

Institutional commitment

IPPF sets a requirement for governing boards at all levels of the Federation to have at least 20% youth representation. This is an expectation from national level Member Associations to the global board of IPPF, meaning young people are involved in the highest level of decision-making for the organization.

	✓	✗	Needs improving 
Youth programming and youth engagement work is prioritized and costed in strategic and annual plans			
Child protection and youth participation policies are actively implemented, and safeguarding training is provided to staff and stakeholders			
Formal mechanisms exist for young people to participate in strategic planning, and young people are represented in governing bodies			

Programmes

Sometimes we unwittingly create barriers for young people when it comes to recruitment. Requirements for a certain number of years' work experience, or specific qualifications can mean excluding strong candidates, including those who are younger. Remember those just starting out in their careers may have less experience with recruitment so make sure you have clear and transparent processes. Think about advertising in spaces which will attract young people to apply.

	✓	✗	Needs improving 
Opportunities exist for young staff members to take on leadership and management roles			
Young volunteers are provided with expenses and remuneration as appropriate, the organisation ensures internships are offered with a living wage			
Recruitment and induction processes ensure that staff are committed to young people's rights			
HR policies are in place to eliminate structural barriers to hiring young people, especially for entry level positions			