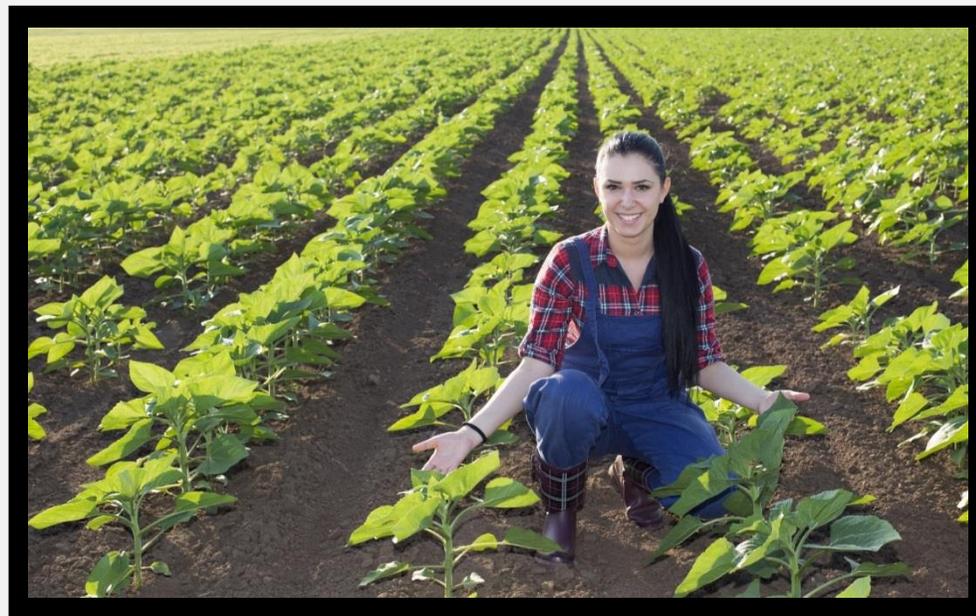


YouthPower Learning Brief

Systematic Review of Positive Youth Development in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Findings on Workforce Readiness & Employability



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Executive Summary: Key Findings

This brief summarizes findings from the [YouthPower Learning Systematic Review of PYD Programs in LMICs](#) relevant to **Workforce Readiness and Employability (WR&E)**. It also leverages insights from the [YouthPower Learning PYD Measurement Toolkit](#).

1 Most programs classified as WR&E also work towards outcomes in other sectors.

PYD programs were classified as WR&E if they worked to improve youth's ability to secure work, or if they measured outcomes related to employability or economic growth. The review finds that a majority of WR&E programs also include activities targeted at improving outcomes in other sectors, such as health, democracy and governance, and education.

2 WR&E programs focus on building youth assets.

All identified WR&E programs focus on improving and increasing youth assets, including vocational and soft skills. Building youth agency and supporting an enabling environment for youth development were also part of most WR&E programs.

3 Several programs that addressed WR&E reported positive outcomes relevant to that sector, as well as positive health and gender equity outcomes.

- WR&E outcomes: Increased formal and self-employment, better quality of employment, and financial assets.
- Health outcomes: Increased voluntary contraceptive use, improved HIV and pregnancy knowledge.
- Gender equity outcomes: Decreased child marriage, as well as improved community gender norms.

4 Overall, WR&E programs lack rigorous evidence.

A significant evidence gap on the effectiveness of WR&E PYD programs remains: Only 26% of PYD programs working in the WR&E sector included experimental or quasi-experimental studies.



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PYD is positive, proactive, and holistic.



Positive Youth Development (PYD) engages youth, along with their families, communities and/or governments, so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

- PYD transitions away from traditional approaches that respond to young people in a risk or problem frame.
- Instead, PYD supports youth holistically by proactively fostering positive attributes which can lead to an improved quality of life.
- PYD theory suggests that if young people have adequate knowledge, skills, and support, sector-specific outcomes will improve.
- Improved outcomes may include quality health, economic success, and meaningful contribution and engagement within communities.



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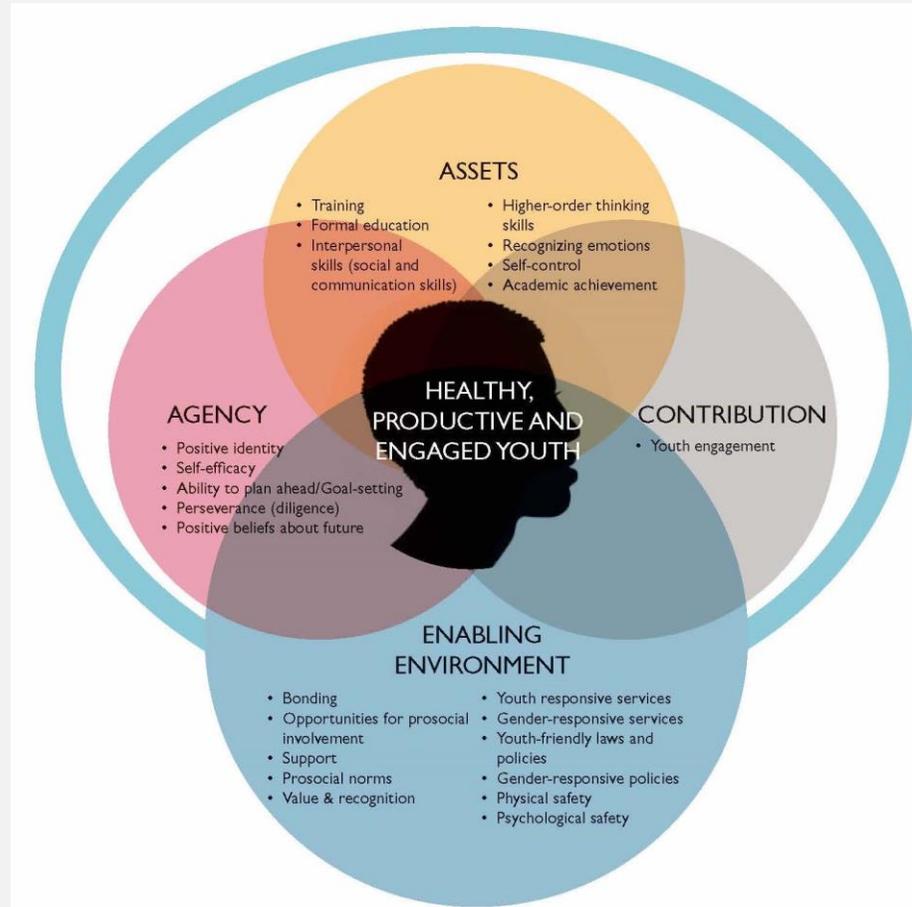
To achieve the vision of healthy, productive and engaged youth, PYD programs, practices and policies must work with youth to improve the following qualities:

Assets: Youth have the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.

Agency: Youth perceive and can employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions, in order to achieve desired outcomes without fear of violence or retribution.

Contribution: Youth are engaged as a source of change for their own and for their communities' positive development.

Enabling Environment: Youth are surrounded by an environment that maximizes their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities, as well as their ability to avoid risks, stay safe and secure, and be protected. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive.



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Systematic Review of Positive Youth Development in LMICs



YouthPower Learning's Systematic Review of Positive Youth Development answered two questions:

- 1. How have PYD approaches been implemented in low- and middle-income countries?*
- 2. What does the evidence say about the effectiveness of those approaches?*

Search Criteria

- Projects engaging youth (ages 10-29)
- Studies included at least two PYD-related outcomes within the domains of assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment

Literature Identification Approach

- Systematic search for peer-reviewed literature
- Purposive search and survey for grey literature: program descriptions, case studies, evaluations or end-of-project reports

Scope

- Searched for papers published between 1990 and 2015
- Covered three sectors: health, democracy and governance; education; and economic growth

Quality

- Assessed using an adapted version of the [Checklist for Blueprint Program Evaluation](#), which sets standards for reviewing research designs, measures, and analyses

Identified **108** reports on **97** PYD programs implemented across **60** countries.



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Defining Workforce Readiness & Employability (WR&E) Programs



In general, Workforce Readiness and Employability Programs:

- Are initiatives that help youth develop the necessary skills, competencies, and resources to secure and maintain meaningful employment.
- Often focus on creating opportunities for youth within the formal employment sector, but may also aim for economic engagement in the informal sector or entrepreneurship as desired outcomes.
- Can work towards outcomes related to other sectors as well (health, education, etc.)

For this review:

PYD programs identified through the systematic review were considered to be WR&E if they included **any activities intended to improve youth's ability to secure work, or measured outcomes related to employability or economic growth** (including quality of employment, income levels, etc.)



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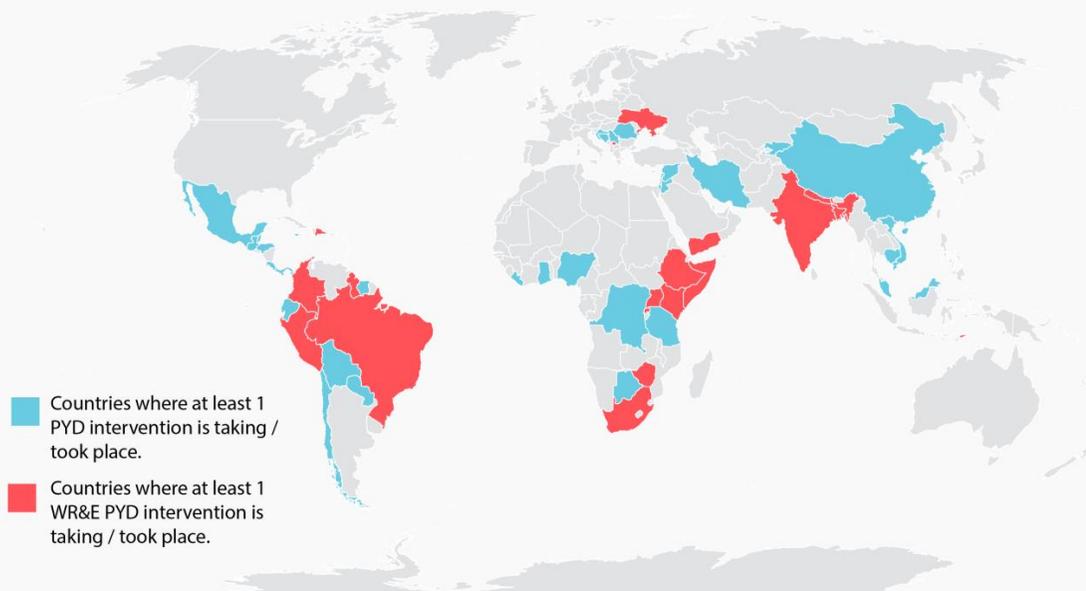
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PYD WR&E programs are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and work across sectors.

Key Findings: Location & Sectors

- **Programs working in WR&E make up one-third of all PYD programs identified in this systematic-review: 33 out of 97 programs work toward WR&E outcomes.**
- **Location:** WR&E programs included in the review operate in 20 countries, with a concentration in sub-Saharan Africa (15).
- **Sectors:** Many WR&E programs also work towards outcomes in other sectors, including Global Health (23), Democracy and Governance (21) and Education(20).

PYD for WR&E in Low- and Middle-Income Countries



- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| • South Africa (4) | • Belize | • Kosovo |
| • Brazil (3) | • Colombia | • Nepal |
| • Ethiopia (3) | • Dominican Republic | • Peru |
| • Somalia (2) | • East Timor | • Rwanda |
| • Uganda (2) | • Guyana | • Ukraine |
| • Zimbabwe (2) | • India | • Yemen |
| • Bangladesh | • Kenya | |



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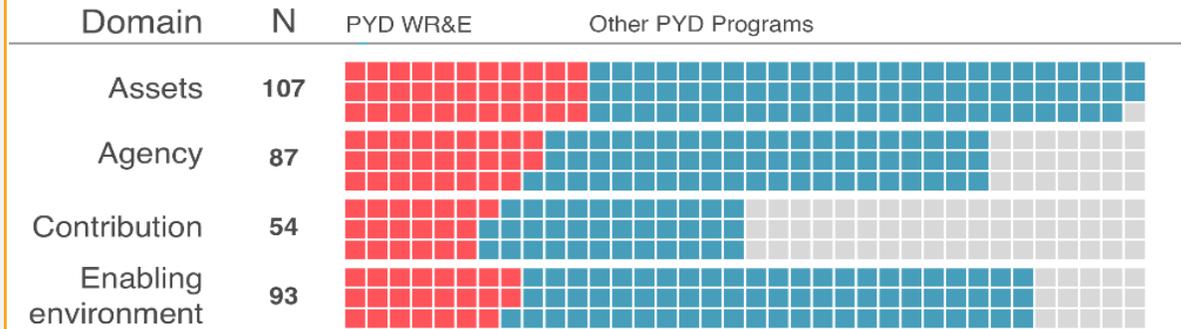
PYD WR&E programs focus on building youths' assets.

Key Finding: Domains

Domains:

- All WR&E programs identified through the review focus on building youths' **assets**, in particular by building **vocational competencies** and **soft skills**.
- In addition to **assets** (33), WR&E programs also address **agency** (25) and **enabling environment** (23).
- Fewer programs (only 19) include **contribution**.

PYD Domains: WR&E vs All Programs



Assets: WR&E programs work to ensure that youth have the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes. Asset constructs include:

- Technical skills training
- Recognizing emotions
- Formal education
- Interpersonal skills
- Academic achievement
- Self-control
- Higher-order thinking skills



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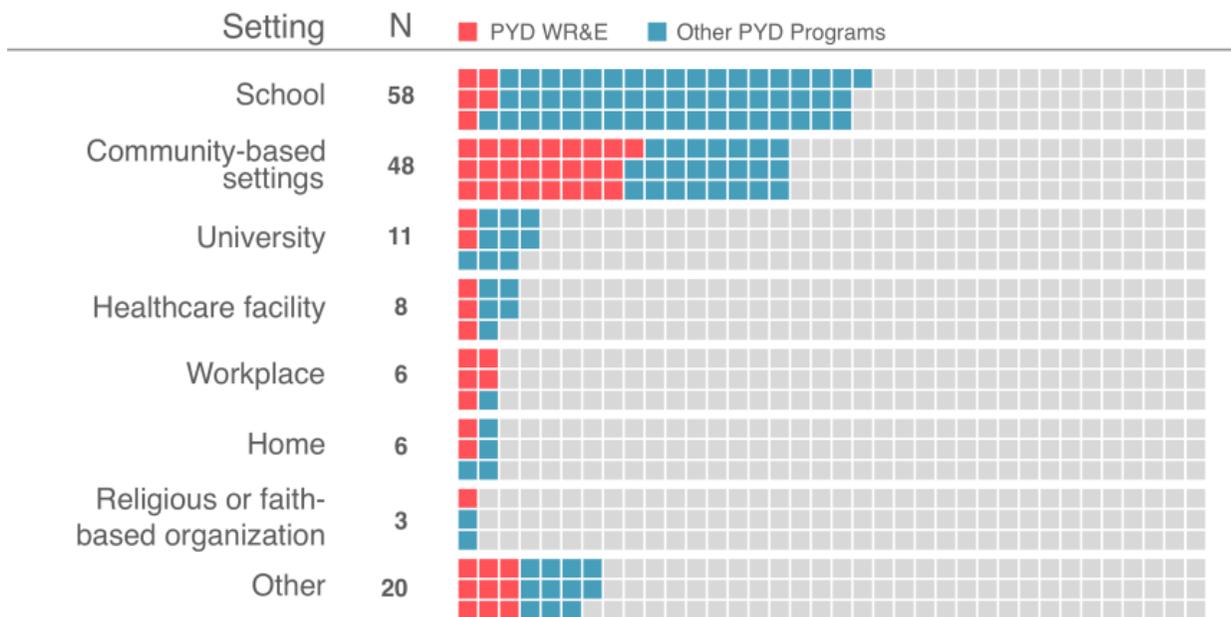
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PYD WR&E programs are mostly implemented by NGOs and take place in community-based settings.

Key Findings: Program Implementers and Setting

- **Setting:** 25 of the 33 WR&E programs included in the review take place in community-based settings, compared to the majority of PYD programs, which occur in schools.
- **Implementers:** A majority (22) of WR&E programs are implemented by NGOs.

Program Settings: WR&E vs. All Programs



Implementation in multiple settings: 13 out of 33 WR&E programs were implemented in more than one setting, which has been shown to positively impact soft skills development (Soares et. al 2017) and is considered a success factor for PYD programs (Catalano et. al 2004).

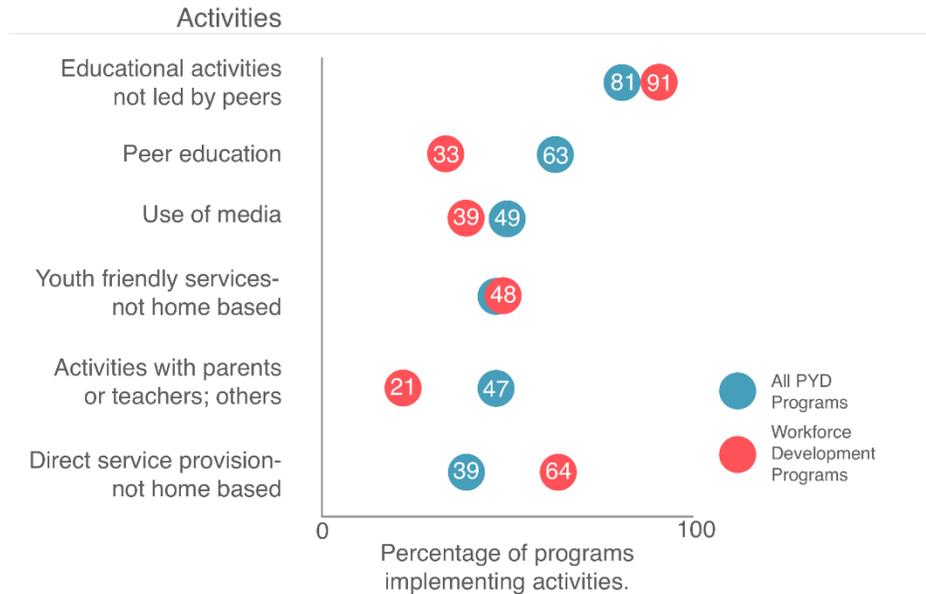
PYD WR&E programs are delivered through direct service provision, and around half integrate gender issues in programming.

Key Findings: Gender Focus & Activities

Activities:

- WR&E programs tend to work less with parents and teachers than the average PYD program, and instead focus on direct service provision and educational activities (through training sessions, for example).
- 20 of the 33 WR&E programs implemented four or more activity types listed at right.

Program Activities: WR&E vs. All Programs



Gender Focus:

- About two-thirds of WR&E programs served both young men and women.
- Eight programs provided services only to young women.
- 18 programs integrated gender issues in programming, including addressing gender-based violence, forced and early marriage, and social and economic gender equality.



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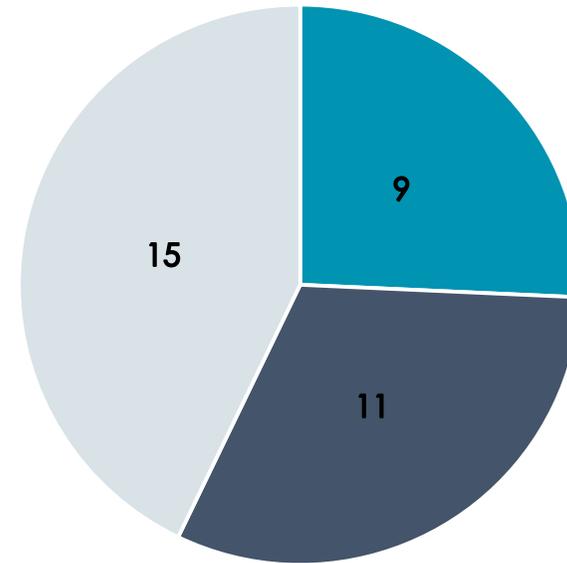
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Overall, PYD WR&E programs lack rigorous evidence.

Key Findings: Evidence Gaps and Impact

- **Lack of rigorous evidence:** While 36% of the 108 PYD reports were categorized as experimental or quasi-experimental studies, the same is true of only 26% of WR&E studies.
- **Studies often did not report evaluation outcomes:** Over 40% of WR&E studies did not report any evaluation outcomes. Only a few experimental studies yielded statistically significant effect sizes relevant to WR&E.

Rigor of Evidence of WR&E Studies



- Experimental or Quasi-Experimental Studies
- Non-Experimental Studies
- No Evaluation



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Programs classified as WR&E demonstrated promising impacts across several measures.

Key Findings: Evidence Gaps and Impact

- **Cross-sector outcomes:** A number of programs produced both WR&E outcomes *and* health outcomes. Impacts related to gender norms were also captured in experimental or quasi-experimental studies.
- **Health outcomes:** Positive outcomes were found in several studies, including a decrease in the number of sexual partners, increase in contraceptive use, and increases in knowledge related to HIV and pregnancy.
- **Gender equity outcomes*:** Decreases in child marriage, pregnancy, and unwanted sexual contact, as well as improved community gender norms and wages for young women, were also found.

Positive Outcomes from WR&E Programs

Increases in **formal and self-employment, as well as quality of employment** found in 3 of 9 experimental or quasi-experimental studies

Increases in **assets and earnings** occurred in 4 of 9 experimental or quasi-experimental studies

Other WR&E outcomes included **increased savings, duration of employment, and work experience**

Increases in ability to **apply for a job, understand marketing, and develop a business plan** were seen in some studies

Positive outcomes related to **adolescent sexual and reproductive health** were found in 3 out of 9 experimental or quasi-experimental studies

*Gender equity outcomes were found in both female-only programs and in programs targeting both genders. The extent to which programs used gender-based intervention strategies, and data was not consistently clear from evaluation reports.



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Projovent: Demand-led training and labor market experience in Peru

Projovent - Peru

- **Objective:** Facilitate access into the formal labor market for young people with limited resources by providing them with demand-led short-term training and labor market experience.
- **Evidence:** One experimental study
- **Activities:** Projovent offered in-classroom technical training for three months, which was later supplemented by three-month internships. The program did not directly provide in-classroom training, but hired private or public training agencies (PPTAs) that were responsible for the design and provision of training. Courses were designed in coordination with firms in which beneficiaries would later do their internships.

Outcomes

- Statistically significant impacts were observed on formal employment, which increased specifically for young men and the youngest youth bracket.
- Statistically significant impacts were also observed on registered employment and income, but only for women and youth aged 18 or older.

Diaz & Rosas (2016)



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Akazi Kanoze: building skills and fostering connections in Rwanda

Akazi Kanoze - Rwanda

- **Objective:** Akazi Kanoze builds capacity and creates linkages between youth, the Rwandan economy and the public and private sectors so that youth can access increased opportunities for productive engagement in society.
- **Evidence:** One experimental study
- **Activities:** 100-hour work readiness curriculum that included topics such as personal awareness, communication, professional conduct, financial literacy, personal health, and rights and responsibilities. The program also provided all participating youth with access to workforce linkage opportunities (internships and apprenticeships), formal sector jobs, and entrepreneurship and other livelihood opportunities. Internships provided on-the-job experience and in some cases led to full-time employment.

Alcid (2014)

Outcomes

- Youth who participated in the treatment group had 13% higher rate of employment than youth in the control group
- In addition, treatment group students were :
 - 21.1% more successful at applying for a job
 - 16.2% more able to develop a business plan
 - 17.3% more able to understand marketing techniques
 - 15% more likely to have savings



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Balika: Economic empowerment and gender norms in Bangladesh

Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA)

- **Objective:** Aimed to bring change in girls' lives and their status in the community so that they are perceived as assets rather than as burdens and liabilities to their families and to society.
- **Evidence:** One experimental study
- **Activities:** In-school participants received tutoring in mathematics and English, whereas out-of-school participants received computer or financial training. All participants received training on gender rights, negotiation, critical thinking, decision making, and livelihoods skills, and met weekly with mentors and peers in safe, girl-only locations (youth centers).

Amin et. al (2016)

Outcomes

- The program led to an increase in youth experience in working for pay, and a decrease in out-of-school girls.
- The evaluation results suggest a significant reduction in the likelihood of child marriage as well as an increase in “love marriages” and participant girls' desire to marry.



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Stepping Stones + Creating Futures: An integrated health and employability model

Stepping Stones + Creating Futures in South Africa

- **Objective:** The Stepping Stones + Creating Futures hybrid is an example of a cross-sectoral PYD program which has produced health and employability outcomes. Originally, the intervention only addressed health and gender norms. It was later supplemented with an economic empowerment intervention, which fostered employability and entrepreneurship skills.
- **Evidence:** One experimental study
- **Activities:** The program consists of 13 core sessions on topics related to health, gender, and employability, including sexual and reproductive health; menstruation; contraception; STDs; gender-based violence; dealing with grief and loss; building assertive personal skills; finding and applying to work; and setting up a business.

Jewkes et. al (2014)

Outcomes

- Young men's mean earnings increased by 247% and women's earnings increased by 278%.
- There was a significant reduction in women experiencing the combined measure of physical or sexual interpersonal violence compared to the prior 3 months, from 30.3% to 18.9%.
- Men and women scored significantly better on tests of gender attitudes, and men reported significantly reduced controlling practices in their relationships.
- The prevalence of moderate or severe depression symptomatology and suicidal thoughts among men decreased significantly.
- No significant outcomes specific to prevalence of HIV were found.



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Summary & Conclusions



PYD programs classified as WR&E are prevalent in LMICs and work across sectors and domains.

- PYD programs working towards WR&E make up about one-third of PYD programs in the systematic review.
- All WR&E programs focus on improving and increasing youths' assets, including vocational and soft skills. Building agency and an enabling environment were also a goal of most WR&E programs.
- A majority of WR&E programs also include activities targeted at improving outcomes in the sectors of health, democracy and governance, and education.

Studies have found impacts of PYD programming on WR&E outcomes, as well as cross-sectoral outcomes.

- Programs such as Stepping Stones + Creating Futures and BALIKA suggest that PYD programs conducting health and economic empowerment activities can foster positive outcomes across sectors.
- Positive outcomes on gender equity have also been identified.

A significant evidence gap remains on the effectiveness of WR&E PYD programs.

- Only 26% of PYD programs working in WR&E conducted experimental or quasi-experimental studies.



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- 1** **WR&E program implementers interested in deepening the support they provide to youth should leverage existing PYD resources and approaches.**

Implementers working on WR&E programs can look to PYD programs for examples of holistic (cross-sectoral and multi-setting) youth development if they are interested in broadening the impact of their programs to address youth needs across sectors.

WR&E implementers may also want to incorporate youth-led and community-based approaches (such as peer education or activities with parents and teachers) into their programming to build broad support for youth and enable them to contribute to their communities. These approaches are more commonly used among non-WR&E PYD programs.



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2 Funders should support high-quality rigorous evaluations to expand the evidence base of WR&E PYD programs

There is a need for more rigorous evidence to better understand the added value of PYD programming in WR&E. Support for high-quality rigorous evaluations of promising models, including impact evaluations and cost-benefit analyses, should be considered.

3 Funders should invest in promising approaches for cross-sectoral impact

The review highlights promising outcomes for PYD programs that address WR&E, including cross-sectoral outcomes (specifically health and gender equity). Proven models could be expanded and replicated.

4 Researchers, implementers, and funders interested in capturing cross-sectoral impact should leverage existing PYD tools for monitoring and evaluation

Implementers and researchers can leverage existing PYD resources (such as the [YouthPower Learning PYD Measurement Toolkit](#)) for guidance on assessing PYD indicators.



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YouthPower Learning Documents

[YouthPower Learning Systematic Review of PYD Programs in LMICs](#)

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Click [here](#) to learn more about Positive Youth Development, or visit YouthPower.org for more details.



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