

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LOCALIZATION:

Lessons and Resources from USAID's YouthPower 2 Collaboration Group

This brief, which contents were drawn from the insightful discussions that took place during the YP2LE Collaboration Group meeting held in February of 2023, is meant to be a resource for USAID Missions and implementers across all geographic areas and sectors. It provides a high-level overview of two complementary and mutually reinforcing frameworks, positive youth development (PYD) and localization, as well as tangible recommendations, examples, and resources for integrating them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of development initiatives.

LOCALIZATION AND PYD AND HOW THEY ARE RELATED

To put it simply, localization is the aim and set of practices to put local actors in the lead so services are more relevant, responsive, and grounded in the local system.¹ Positive youth development (PYD) is an evidence-based approach to supporting and engaging youth through building their assets and agency, supporting healthy relationships, and fostering a supportive environment and system.²

The design, implementation, and evaluation of the most successful development initiatives are already infused with the ethos of localization and PYD, regardless of if the concepts and frameworks are used explicitly. Both localization and PYD are approaches that support the equity, relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of international development. Applying these concepts challenges international development organizations to adapt their relationships and how their organizations engage with the communities and youth they ultimately serve. Meaningful youth engagement and localization are not separate but are mutually supportive (see Figure 1).

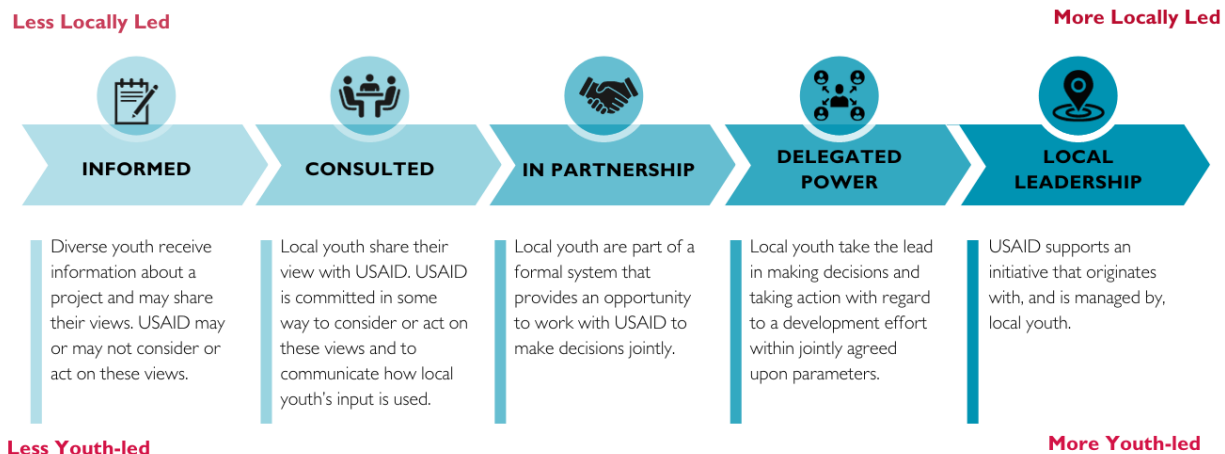


Figure 1. Meaningful Youth Engagement Spectrum

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING LOCALIZATION AND PYD

In discussing how localization and PYD fit together, the Collaboration Group identified two overall recommendations, with associated specific practices, for other organizations to consider in their work.

¹ For more, see USAID's localization page: www.usaid.gov/localization

² www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development

PROACTIVELY REFLECT ON AND ADDRESS POWER DYNAMICS

- **Openly acknowledge existing power dynamics, organizationally and individually.** Understanding and naming these dynamics is the first step towards working with or addressing them.
- **Commit to relinquishing control.** Decision-making power should be shared with local actors, including youth and youth-led organizations.
- **Build relationships and trust between all stakeholders.** Consider collectively establishing explicit group norms and building conversations around open-ended questions.

PRIORITIZE RESPONSIVE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

- **Meet people where they are at.** Accept that your expectations may not be accurate.
- **Local communities and organizations should participate fully** in deciding which capacities to strengthen and how, such as through collaborative self-assessment and planning. Begin early and maintain capacity strengthening support.
- **Remember that capacity strengthening goes both ways.** Be ready to learn from local youth, not just teach them. Each young person is the expert of their own life.

EXAMPLES OF MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT



[Kefeta: Elevating Ethiopian Youth](#) is a five-year youth-focused initiative funded by USAID, spearheaded by AMREF Health Africa, and implemented by a consortium of partners. Kefeta works at the grassroots level with youth-serving organizations, private-sector businesses, and civil society to amplify youth voices and their role in community development. The youth-led, youth-managed “Empowerment Fund” for youth entrepreneurs is one of Kefeta’s most innovative components.



[Youth Excel: Our Knowledge, Leading Change](#) is a global five-year youth-led initiative funded by USAID, spearheaded by IREX, and implemented by a consortium of partners, five of which are youth-led. Youth Excel empowers young people and youth organizations to use implementation research to strengthen local, national, and global development solutions.



[Let's Come Out – Let's Work Together](#) is a three-year USAID activity that advances diversity, equity, and inclusion in Serbia’s workplaces and business communities by promoting economic empowerment of and opportunity for LGBTQI+ people. The activity prioritizes the ongoing capacity strengthening of its main implementer, a local youth-led organization called Grupa “IZADJI.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Localization at USAID: The Vision and Approach](#)
- [USAID Youth in Development Policy](#)
- [USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#)
- [USAID Positive Youth Development Courses: PYD 101 and 201](#)
- [Six Tips for Increasing Meaningful Youth Engagement in Programs](#)

Looking for more on youth engagement or PYD? Find resources and tools on [YouthPower.org](#).

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