

USAID YouthPower2 Symposium (November 9-10, 2021)

SESSION NOTES

Youth Engagement and Relationship Building

Track I: Trust, Bias, and the Roots of Inequality: How to Address Diversity in MYE

Wednesday, November 10, 2021 – DAY TWO
9:10 – 10:00 AM
Breakout Session

Session Participants

Moderator:

Lorraine Perricone-Dazzo, Senior Manager, Restless Development

Presenters:

Jean Manney, U.S. Director, Restless Development

Nafisa Ferdous, Senior Program Manager, Restless Development

Session Overview

This session will build conceptual clarity on how to shift power and address diversity in MYE by featuring youth voices/testimonials and real-life examples of programmatic shortcomings, adaptations, and strategies to change our ways of working. It will provoke questions around deep-rooted systematic biases, based on the feminist understanding that the ‘personal is political,’ and share youth-led, intersectional challenges to this status quo.

Proposed Learning

Attendees will be able to critically question top-down, technical-driven solutions to diversity and consider underlying inequality and power systems within ways of working. They will also be exposed to justice-based approaches and concepts on diversity and take away real-life examples and activities to apply to their workplaces.

Session Notes

Main Topic: The session focused on how power can shift to be more inclusive of youth and be aware and welcoming to intersectionality. It provided conceptual clarity on ways to shift power in the international development space. Provoke more profound questions about power in the systems in which we live and work. Inspiration for work in youth engagement around diversity and inclusion.

Introspection is a valuable tool even when conducting a reflection activity. For example, the make-up and the order of the aspects of identity when conducting the trusted five reflection activity could/should shift based on the audience. Change the leadership hierarchy as a starting point versus an end goal. A pipeline for diverse decision-makers makes meaningful youth development sustainable.

Collaborate more, listen more, and commit to meaningful youth development. Because shifting power is not a one-off exercise but rather a sum of various conscious actions.

Concrete action is possible - as Restless Development has shown with making changes to their leadership team by shifting from a predominantly male, white senior leadership team to a much more diverse group, with most people of color from 6 countries, including three youth. The change will happen when people who have levers of power act and make changes; this could start with awareness creation about existing (and often unconscious) biases by using the "trusted inner circle" with a leadership team or board members or other groups power.

There are many areas where change should happen. This session highlighted inequalities in compensation, white supremacy in leadership, and partnerships through short videos by youth. Youth in the session noted that USAID Administrator Samantha Powers in her recent speech, did not mention youth. They felt this was a real gap and missed opportunity.

Reflection exercise/trusted five; names of 5 people (excluding family members) whose counsel is sought. This exercise surfaces an inherent blindspot that drives access to leadership and professional opportunities. The inner circle is often an unconscious mirror of ourselves. Cultural and environmental biases impact work and life at all times. The exercise surfaced the need for young people's visibility in current DEI priorities.

Changing who is in the room when the conversation around youth development is being had yields results. Time and financial constraints are felt most in the youth development space. Fair compensation for young people continues to be a challenge. If youth work is valued, fair, inclusive, and equitable compensation needs to be normalized.

Restoration of power to young leaders of color in the international development space can help dismantle institutionalized, systemic injustices and inequalities. The stigma and cultural biases toward youth are a constant barrier to equity and access to health services, particularly reproductive health.

Nafisa/Jean:

- Greater clarity on how to shift power
- youth-led examples of inclusion challenges
- embed in political systems
- Critically question top-down solutions
- Actively listen
- Activities and stories to address diversity
- They did this with their Board:
- Trusted Five Activity
- Think of your inner circle (other than relatives) - the people you trust the most, those whose counsel you seek in making decisions, or who you call for advice
- Reflection activity
- Checkmark next to their name if they are the same race
 - if the same gender
 - if the same sexual orientation
 - if the same education level
 - Do most share the same identity factors

Trust:

- People trust people who share similar identities - often unconscious mirrors of ourselves
- Leaders trust typically those inner circles - which share the same opinions and biases.

- “Global North Culture sometimes results in our work.”
- Check and reflect on discussions on diversity in our workplace.
- We do it as an opener of conversation. We unpack “that the personal is political.”

Diversity:

- Diversity is about recognizing and actively changing the biases that we all carry
- Diversity and inclusion - Samantha Powers spoke about this
- did not speak about young people specifically
- The term has been coopted - inclusion
- Youth movements are among the loudest voices talking about inclusion.
- But often, they are not hired to lead in organizations.
- We reached out to youth in our network.
- Many of the answers are not theoretical.
- We want to be partners, not just beneficiaries.
- We share 3 young people’s videos

We have active conversations and action at Restless - the leadership team is no longer all white. Now majority people of color from 6 different countries and including three youth in the senior staff body.

Gender and Partnerships for YouthLead Organizations:

- Facilities - not youth-friendly for contraception (e.g., declining it to unmarried youth)
- Accessible and friendly to youth
- We are a national youth organization based on equity and access - information is youth-friendly.
- Youth are teaching other youth (e.g., HIV, AIDS, abuse)
- We utilize radio, Twitter, Insta, and FB to reach youth - to affect youth attitudes on sexual health
- Work with young people in rural areas - using mobile phones
- Partner with youth-led organizations - in designing and implementing SRH programs - true partners, not treated as beneficiaries.
- Need to meaningfully partner and share
- Not just one-off consultancies and consultations.

We have not mentioned many topics - e.g., language justice, digital gap, technology = talk about gender on internet gap; LGBTIQ inclusion.

Takeaways for USAID:

Their leadership in building trust with youth and convincing youth that USAID is serious about genuinely including youth as trusted partners. Youth in the session noted that USAID Administrator Samantha Powers in her recent speech, did not mention youth. They felt this was a real gap and missed opportunity. USAID may want to highlight more explicitly (e.g., in communications) how USAID actively includes youth in leadership roles inside USAID and on USAID-funded projects. USAID should ensure that addressing the roots of inequalities is actively practiced by all in positions of power.- including their implementing partners. Providing adequate compensation for youth contributions is crucial to avoid that programs and policies are truly diverse.

- Build in time and flexibility in youth programming and support agency for communities and youth-led groups to make decisions around funding
- Build in technology and compensation for young people in budgets
- Dedicate funding for DEI activities targeting youth

- Vet and amplify partners/implementers whose organizational practices promote DEI

Takeaways for Donors, Partners, and Implementers:

INGOs and other implementers need to enter into genuine partnerships with local youth-led organizations, even if this means potentially longer timelines, additional budget/investment in technology (e.g., funding internet access), additional training investment, and capacity building.

- Implementing organizations need to involve youth in leadership roles on their projects. Youth should be involved in the early stages (e.g., proposals, SOW), not only during implementation.
- Implementers should promote youth into positions of power.
- Translate more resources to allow for broader inclusion.

Embrace peer to peer models

Actively recruit young people in decision-making leadership roles.

Build-in technology and compensation for young people in budgets

Champion and model inclusive organizational practices, e.g., lead on fair compensation for youth

Takeaways for Youth:

Youth and youth-led organizations must continue to push for and lobby for adequate compensation for their contributions to avoid only the elite youth shaping youth programs. Whenever youth leaders are given the power of voice, they should promote inclusion (e.g., in videos). Youth needs to continue advocacy for inclusion.

- Question and challenge existing norms
- Provoke deep discussions around youth engagement
- Ask for compensation when called upon to lead or participate in programs.

Resources

[Population Works Africa](#) - Decolonizing Development Webinar

[YouthPower Learning Resources | YouthPower](#)

[Radical Communicators Network](#)

[White Supremacy Culture by Tema Okun](#)

[Short video about diversity and inclusion by Restless Development, featuring Inés Yabar](#)

[Short video about diversity and inclusion by Restless Development, featuring Primrose Manyalo](#)

[Short video about diversity and inclusion by Restless Development, featuring Mambepa Nakazwe](#)