

USAID YouthPower2 Symposium (November 9-10, 2021)

SESSION NOTES

Youth Leading COVID Responses and Track I: Food Systems

Tuesday, November 9, 2021 – DAY ONE
11:00 – 11:50 AM

Plenary Intro Presentation and Breakout Session

Session Participants

Presenters:

Hilda Namakula, Youth Research Advisor, Restless Development

Juan Felipe Pinto Castelblanco, Chiefhead Environmental and Sustainable Development Program, TECHO

Session Overview

Introduction Presentation

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us, especially the lives of our world's young people who have been disproportionately affected by disrupted schooling, vulnerability issues (health, gender-based violence), and access (connectivity, social supports). Youth have also demonstrated their creativity, strength, and leadership throughout the crisis as community activists, volunteers, and entrepreneurs across various sectors. They have adapted to the challenges in ways large and small. This session takes a deep dive into the impact of the pandemic on three key sectors: food systems, health, and education. Each breakout session is co-facilitated by youth who will share firsthand perspectives on the impact of the pandemic and how they have responded in their communities.

Track I: Food Systems

Agricultural food systems bring together a complex array of economic, health, social, and environmental issues. As COVID-19 has demonstrated, changes or disruptions to one or more of these sectors can significantly impact our food systems. This breakout session will explore the links between our food systems and the environment and how young people, in particular, have been impacted by COVID-19, and how they are responding to these challenges. Moderator Hilda Namakula will join Speaker Juan Felipe Pinto Casetblanco, Advisor for Environmental Procedures for Research at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia), to explore this topic, offering insights from their work on both COVID-19 research and the environment.

Proposed Learning

Attendees will hear personal reflections and researched-based insights on the specific impacts of COVID-19. Additionally, they will receive insights into the role of youth as leaders and innovators in their communities in response to the pandemic (as community activists, organizers, and social impact entrepreneurs). Lastly, take away recommendations from youth on where USAID and NGOs should be focused and investing to better support youth in response to the pandemic.

Session Notes

Main Topic Focus: Sharing how young people in Colombia have dealt with food insecurity and hunger during the pandemic. The importance of engaging youth in food security issues because our future depends on their level of responsibility and empowerment.

If we don't act now, there will be drastic consequences for our future.

Juan Felipe Pinto Castelblanco is a 30-year-old MBA student from Colombia, Advisor for Environmental Procedures for Research at Pontificia Universidad. Colombia was hit hard by the pandemic in terms of hunger, compounded by migration from Venezuela.

- *TECHO programming*: focuses on water, waste, food security, *fourth thing I didn't catch the name of - environment?*. TECHO delivered over 59,000 food kits during the pandemic; local community members primarily coordinated the delivery
- *Mandalas workshops*: Combining art with food security.
- *Mindfulness workshops*
- *"Reinvent Ourselves" event*: invited young people to generate new ideas to help communities during the pandemic (3 women won, they wanted to create a brochure to teach children emotional control through raising and caring for plants)
- *Let's Harvest Life and Health*: delivered covid-19 info/resource kits (i.e., DIY masks) and supplies to grow vegetables at home

Access to the internet poses a challenge with food distribution! Food security is an intersectional issue related to tech access, education, gender, etc. Young people have taken up leading through social media on TECHO's Instagram.

Takeaways for USAID:

Establish trust with young people. Generally, it is better to "teach a man to fish." However, give a man a fish" in the case of emergencies like COVID, that is not always possible. Transparency, honesty, not making false promises - all very important.

Takeaways for Donors, Partners, and Implementers:

Follow-up is key. It is essential to implement programming and follow up and see if it was effective and gain participants' feedback. Most effective methods for mobilizing youth: challenges (often with hashtags!) on Instagram, tagging people spreads the word, and allows for networking. Be adaptable; what works now might not work tomorrow.

Takeaways for Youth:

Young people can play an important role in raising awareness on topics such as climate change. Network with those in your country but also think more significant - connect with those in your continent even.
"Be informed, be engaged, act!" -Juan Felipe.

Session Quotes:

“Our survival depends on the balance of the ecosystem and a healthy environment.”

- **Juan Felipe Pinto Castelblanco**, *Chiefhead Environmental and Sustainable Development Program, TECHO*

“[Young people:] Be informed, be engaged, act!”

- **Juan Felipe Pinto Castelblanco**, *Chiefhead Environmental and Sustainable Development Program, TECHO*

Resources

[Session Presentation](#)