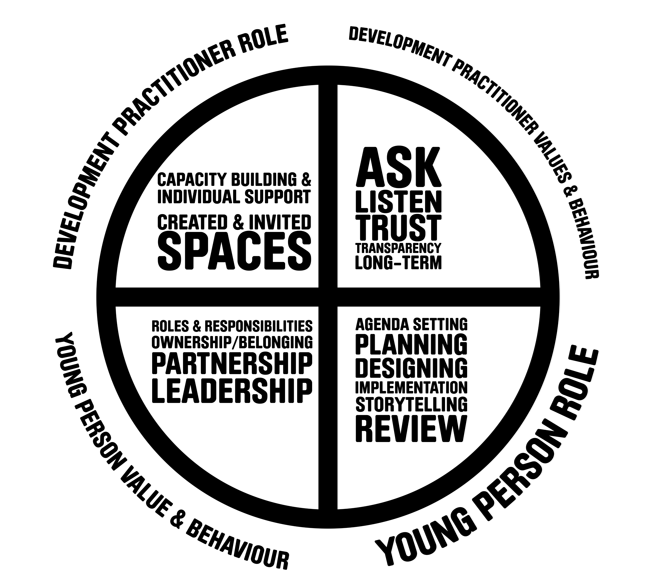
**M3-H4-Restless Development’s Meaningful Youth Engagement**

**Bullseye & Questions**



**Figure 1. Meaningful Youth Engagement Bullseye, Restless Development**

The Meaningful Youth Engagement Bullseye can be used in conjunction with the following five questions to ask yourself before creating a youth engagement opportunity or in reviewing a current youth engagement opportunity:

1. Which young person(s) are you engaging and why them?
2. What is the defined role and responsibility for the young person(s) you are engaging?
3. What is the space within which the engagement will take place?
4. What is the mandate that the young person(s) will have in this engagement and what is the result they can hope to achieve?
5. What support and which spaces will you as the development practitioner be offering them?

**Development Practitioner Role:**

1. Created and Invited Spaces: In this sense spaces can equate with anything from the **physical space** of engagement (the USAID office, a specially set up training room, an HIV AIDS youth clinic) to the **opportunity** within which the young person is being engaged. Spaces within which young people can be engaged as partners or leaders can often be divided into the two types of created or invited, and can be formal or informal in nature.[[1]](#footnote-1)
   * + The **created/ invited distinction** refers to the level of ownership of the young person over the space and the inside-outside meaning that the space has.
     + On the other hand **the level of formality** that a space has corresponds with the level of recognition or legitimacy of that space in development decision making.

The role for the development practitioner when looking to engage young people is to facilitate access to spaces for youth partnership and leadership. Often in efforts to have young people partner in or lead development, youth-specific spaces and programs are set up (created) which are separate to broader on the ground development efforts or internal development organisation governance systems. While sometimes this is necessary in order to create a ‘safe space’ (to deal with sensitive issues as is the case for the DREAMS program), this can impede young people’s meaningful participation if they are in a different space to those making decisions. Ideally young people will be invited to participate in the same spaces as other decision makers on development (be that a development practitioner for USAID or a DREAMS Implementing Partner) and feel ownership over this space.

1. Capacity Building and Individual Support: Skilled trainers, dedicated support staff or facilitators are essential to ensure quality and collaborative participation by young people.When inviting young people to participate in a space or creating space for them, tailored support by individual development practitioners will be necessary to engage them and have them meaningfully participate in those spaces. The support that can be offered by a development practitioner can be divided in two:
   * + a) Capacity building support through which young people have increased confidence or skills to engage within their communities.
     + b) One-to-one or individual support through which engagement can become fully tailored and accessible to a young person.

Capacity building is important to make sure that rather than bringing a development initiative or opportunity ‘down to the young person’s level,’ upskill, motivate and support the young person to meet development practitioners in the development initiative or opportunity. Especially when engaging young people in invited or formal spaces there is a need for young people to develop different technical experiences and capacities. Key to offering individual support is an employment of a step-up, step-back approach, as there will be moments when young people need development practitioners to step up more and support, or to step in if things aren't quite going well and if young people need help. But equally as important is for the development practitioner to know when and how to step back and allow young people to partner or lead, without ever completely disappearing.

Complementing the specific role that a development practitioner has towards a young person, there are a number of key values and behaviors central to meaningful youth engagement. Transforming and negotiating values for working with and for youth is crucial to fostering an enabling environment for youth participation in development.

**Development Practitioner Values and Behavior**

1. Ask: Young people have the energy and skills to identify challenges and suggest workable solutions. They bring unique perspectives, experiences and ideas to development issues and initiatives. When shaping youth engagement opportunities be wary of judging what young people are capable of and asking the bear minimum of young people’s participation through that lens. Instead ask young people from the beginning what they think and what they want. Central to this ask is also the way in which it is done. The development practitioner needs to be aware of not ‘dumbing down’ the ask but making it accessible, by ensuring the ask comes in good time for the young person to engage and is done in accessible language so that a diverse group of young people can engage.
2. Listen: As an extension of the development practitioner’s role of capacity builder or individual support, the active type of listening by development practitioners which is necessary in meaningful youth engagement is the form where the main role the development practitioner’s voice plays is to ask questions and offer information that supports youth participation and leadership in development.
3. Trust: Working with young people requires collective action, implying mutual trust, joint learning and collaboration (youth as partners). Young people will only be able to fully lead development and it’s agenda setting, planning, design, implementation, storytelling, review if fully trusted in their ability or leadership by the development practitioner. Trust in meaningful youth engagement means that even if young people have a different approach to leading development, Development Practitioners keep an open mind and are flexible to the extent that a common partnered approach can be found (youth as partners) or trust in that this is the right way for young people to lead development (youth as leaders). This does not suggest that development practitioners ignore their own expertise or evidence provided by research (indeed this is key to the development practitioner’s role of capacity building and support), however it is important they remain open minded, do not dismiss young people’s ideas and suggestions when different, however value the alternative perspective and question their own assumptions.
4. Long-term: Meaningful youth engagement does not happen overnight or through a single engagement. Long-term indicates two things:
   * + 1) Patience. Have patience and make time for youth engagement there will be a greater ROI involving young people, but there will be an investment of time and effort (and resources) to support young people to participate in/lead development. flexibility/being open to change
     + 2) Full engagement. Ensuring the young person is engaged throughout the length of the development initiative, ensuring they are part of development from agenda setting to reviewing the progress made and can take ownership or have a sense of belonging within the development initiative. This takes effective planning and the understanding that time needs to be carved throughout the duration of a youth engagement initiative to ensure a meaningful journey for that young person to learn, contribute and lead.
5. Transparency: Young people will not be able to meaningfully partner in or lead an initiative if they are not fully informed of what the issue is or how the process within which they are engaged is running. Moreover key to young people trusting development practitioners with their views and involvement is feeling the development practitioner is approaching them in an open and honest way.

**Young Person Role**

For meaningful youth engagement a young person needs to be involved throughout the entire program or initiative cycle, from agenda setting, to planning, designing, implementation, storytelling and monitoring and evaluating. Moreover, involving young people throughout the program cycle proves to be more effective than involving them in either just one stage or in simply delivering the end results of the program.

1. Agenda Setting: It is crucial that young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, are able to voice their priorities within development. Young people should be engaged to make sure their priorities are made visible and acted on. Youth priorities should determine where time, money and efforts are invested.
2. Planning: This entails giving young people a stake in deciding how resources are allocated, the timeline for activities and who should be involved.
3. Design: Young people have the energy and skills to identify challenges and suggest workable solutions. Young people bring unique perspectives, experiences and ideas to development issues and activities. Programs designed for young people that have involved youth in both design and implementation level have a higher success rate than those that exclude youth involvement.
4. Implementation: This can take the shape through young people implementing, managing and overseeing development. Key to the success of young people implementing development is for them to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to take ownership of.
5. Storytelling: More systemic transformational outcome if the story is told. Talking rather than talked about
6. Review: In order for young people to feel that they have been meaningfully engaged it is important for them to review the results of their participation or leadership, as well as offer feedback on what worked and what did not work, to improve future programing design. Young people are more likely to be consulted in early stages of initiatives, so young people’s involvement with ongoing reviews is limited offering few chances for young people to provide critical inputs. From stories during the DREAMS Young Ambassadors workshop it was clear that for a young person to feel empowered within an opportunity they needed responsibilities and to see the result of those responsibilities.

**Young Person Values and Behavior**

1. Clear Role and Responsibilities: To ensure that a young person’s presence in a development initiative does not feel tokenistic or ‘empty’ a clear role or mandate is necessary for the young person to understand what contribution they are expected to make and what results they can expect to see from their contribution. From stories during the DREAMS Young Ambassadors workshop it was clear that for a young person to feel empowered within an opportunity they needed responsibilities and to see the result of those responsibilities.
2. Ownership/ belonging: The DREAMS Young Ambassadors made clear that for youth engagement to be meaningful they need to have a sense of ownership over the opportunity within which they are being engaged as well as a sense of belonging within the space that they are being engaged in. This sense of belonging can be fostered through long term engagement and ensuring that whether the space is ‘invited’ or ‘created’ , spokespeople
3. Partnership: This means young people are collaborating within development initiatives and are fully consulted and informed, certain decision-making is shared by young people and development practitioners. These collaborations can be with development practitioners, with other young people (peer to peer) and with their community.
4. Leadership:Youth-leadership is the behavior that a young person can adopt when the initiative which the young person is engaged in is initiated by them and the young person directs interventions within this initiative. Youth-leadership can also occur when space is opened up for youth-led decision-making within existing structures, systems and processes.

1. Post-2015 report [↑](#footnote-ref-1)