**M5-T4-H1-Youth-led Advocacy Overview**

**Why youth-led advocacy?**

Young people have a unique perspective into how decision-making at the local, national, and global level will impact on their lives in their own local context. Youth-led advocacy is an opportunity for young people to have their voices heard, respected and acted on within decision-making spaces and to raise awareness of issues amongst their peers. Including a youth-led advocacy component within a programme also ensures that the principles of youth engagement are implemented in a way that can help build authentic insight into youth issues, build the advocacy skills of young people and ensure that decision-making reflects the challenges faced by young people, and incorporates youth-solutions to those challenges as well. Furthermore, youth-led advocacy promotes a positive view of young people as agents of change. The Commonwealth Youth Programme stated in a report by the UK’s Department for International Development CSO Youth Working Group, “Intensive advocacy by young people and youth practitioners is required to change perceptions and win commitment to the idea of young people as assets to national development.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

While direct delivery work is crucial, it is also necessary for youth-led advocacy to influence changes within decision-making bodies to make them more receptive and responsive to young people’s voices. In a recent review of Danida’s youth-related engagements, it was advised that development practitioners should advocate for young people’s involvement in political spaces where decisions are taken, rather than in parallel spaces that distance youth from ‘real politics’.[[2]](#footnote-1) This is crucial in order to affect holistic and sustainable change at the institutional level.

**How to do it:**

The key to quality youth-led advocacy will be:

* **Building the advocacy skills of young people**

Advocacy skills (e.g. stakeholder mapping, forming a network, identifying advocacy asks, target mapping, developing an implementation plan) can be developed through capacity building, meaning that it is not necessary to recruit only young people with existing advocacy skills. For example, as part of Restless Development’s Accountability Advocates Programme, 20 young people received training in data collection and advocacy skills during a week-long residential training workshop. Following the training, each Accountability Advocate team was paired with a mentor for additional ongoing support. Training resources, such as the [Accountability in Action toolkit](http://restlessdevelopment.org/youth-led-monitoring-of-the-global-goals-toolkits), and [Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit](http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/global-agreements-grassroots-advocacy-toolkit-pdf), can also be made available on and offline for reference and to allow young people to share the training with their peers.

* **Created and invited spaces**

For young people to meaningfully influence decision-making, existing spaces for engagement must be made more accessible to them. In this sense, spaces can mean anything from the physical space of engagement to the opportunity within which the young person is being engaged. It is the role of development practitioners to map the spaces for youth engagement prior to project initiation, a task which should be done in partnership with young people. Then it can be assessed whether existing spaces need to be opened to include more young people, or whether new spaces need to be created. In a review of Danida’s (The Danish Government’s Aid Agency) youth-related engagements, it was

recommended that “an SRHR [or employment] programme should also support young people to increase their influence and involvement in decision-making, especially within their own communities. For example, by connecting them to local leaders and government offices, or providing information on relevant policies, political processes and power structures[[3]](#footnote-2)”. Development practitioners can play a useful role in connecting young people to these spaces and people in power.

* **Connecting young people to each other**

Development practitioners can also play a role in connecting youth to other youth*.* Connected movements of young people creates a greater support system, strengthens the youth voice, allows for peer-to-peer sharing of skills and expertise, and cultivates shared networks for influence. For example, Action Aid’s Global Platforms[[4]](#footnote-3) are hubs for youth, connecting youth activists and social movements at national and global level by conducting trainings and other youth-related activities, and connecting young people to fight poverty and injustice. The Global Platform has played a crucial role in providing skills to young people on how to organise and campaign (for example, during emergencies in Nepal and Myanmar in 2015). The Global Platforms offer relevant youth-led training to young people from civil society organisations and social movements, and provide spaces for young people to convene, innovate, test new ways of organising and pursue youth political agendas.

**Youth-led Advocacy in Action: National Level**

Youth-led Adolescent SRHR Programming in South Africa

In the Eastern Cape, South Africa, it is estimated that 15,538 young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years were newly infected with HIV in 2015 (ECAC 2016). Teenage pregnancy is the highest in the country. Sexual and Gender Based Violence is widespread, impacting heavily on the vulnerability of girls to early and unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection.

A peer education training programme addressing SRHR knowledge gaps among young people in the Eastern Cape also included a youth-led advocacy component in which:

* Restless Development trained four youth facilitators to deliver inter-generational dialogues in 3 districts which were designed to generate discussion, share correct information, and increase understanding around ASRH and SGBV amongst learners, teachers, SGB members, parents, community leaders and service providers.
* UNFPA and Restless Development supported the establishment of the Eastern Cape Youth Advisory Panel and assisted young people to develop and implement an ASRH advocacy plan. The YAP create platforms for young people to discuss SRH issues at institutions of higher learning and at community level, and create awareness of SRH issues experienced by young people in the province at national and provincial level forums.
* Restless Development facilitated training on programme planning, implementation and evaluation; ASRH, SGBV and HIV and intergenerational advocacy for 5 youth-led CSOs in the Eastern Cape. The purpose of the capacity building was to strengthen youth participation and leadership in SRH and HIV programming with and for young people and to improve coordination in the youth sector in the Eastern Cape for effective advocacy and programming on issues related to SRH and HIV.

Results

An external assessment of the programme in 2016 identified the following results:

* The creation of a critical dialogue space for government, learners, teachers and community
* Increased capacity of teachers to integrate CSE into the curriculum and support effective delivery of the ISHP in the school
* Increased consciousness about ASRH at the entire school, resulting in fewer learner pregnancies and higher examination pass rates due to ISHP interventions
* Increased awareness of adolescent and youth needs at the community level amongst both young people and adults, and improved support to the school for ASRHR interventions.
* Empowerment of young people on ASRH and HIV prevention, comprehensive understanding of ASRH issues among young people, improved access to and uptake of adolescent friendly SRH services.

Youth-led advocacy through the Accountability Advocates Programme in Uganda

Restless Development partnered up with UNICEF’s U-Report in Uganda and worked with 40 young people across four districts to generate community-level data to hold district-level decision-makers to account on development commitments to health, child marriage and employment, also aligning their advocacy with relevant Global Goal targets.

Results

In six months, the following results were achieved:

* In Gulu district, a new ordinance on alcohol was enacted restricting times when alcohol can be purchased
* In Moroto district, a bylaw on construction and use of latrines has been enacted
* In Napak district, the District Community Development Officer used findings on early marriage to co-develop an advocacy programme addressing concerns

The data generated by the youth network has been adopted by the government to improve their programming and decision-makers have noted a marked improvement in their perception of young people’s abilities to lead development. Four youth participants have now be elected into local government positions.

**Youth-led Advocacy in Action: Global Level**

Youth-led accountability in the Voluntary National Reviews: [**MY World Mexico**](http://www.myworldmexico.org/)

Between 2013 and 2015 9.7 million people took part in the MY World Survey across the globe. In Mexico alone, nearly 2 million citizens took part in the online conversation. When Mexico developed its Voluntary National Review to present at the 2016 UN High Level Political Forum, youth voices were marginalised from the process. In response, young people from 40 universities in the region of Jalisco mobilised over 500 volunteers to collect their views on the 2030 Agenda. This network reached more than 400,000 participants in the MY World survey from 72 municipalities, successfully mobilising more than 360,000 offline votes and 40,000 online votes through virtual platforms. As a result of the work in Jalisco, young people partnered with the UN SDG Action Campaign to create MY World Mexico, a model which has been rolled out nationwide. As a result, millions of people across Mexico were reached to raise awareness of the SDGs, with the data they collected cited in the [Mexican Government’s official HLPF report](http://cf.org.mx/archivos/2016-Reporte-Mexico-HLPF.pdf) (pgs. 10 and 47).

1. DFID-CSO Children and Youth Network (2016:16) “[Youth Participation in Development](http://www.restlessassets.org/wl/?id=umaETRcmVyn2VEpSrxu7JWWkHom5RYli): A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy-Makers”. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. DANIDA (2017: 16) “[Youth Leading The World 2030](http://um.dk/~/media/UM/Danish-site/Documents/Danida/Det-vil-vi/Youth%20Leading%20The%20World%202030%20Report%20Final.pdf): A Review of Danida’s Youth-Related Engagements”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. DANIDA (2017: 21) “[Youth Leading The World 2030](http://um.dk/~/media/UM/Danish-site/Documents/Danida/Det-vil-vi/Youth%20Leading%20The%20World%202030%20Report%20Final.pdf): A Review of Danida’s Youth-Related Engagements”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. DANIDA (2017: 17) “[Youth Leading The World 2030](http://um.dk/~/media/UM/Danish-site/Documents/Danida/Det-vil-vi/Youth%20Leading%20The%20World%202030%20Report%20Final.pdf): A Review of Danida’s Youth-Related Engagements”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)