



MY BODY, MY LIFE, MY WORLD
OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

MODULE 5
YOUTH
LEADERSHIP AND
PARTICIPATION

YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

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ABBREVIATIONS

DFID	UK Department for International Development
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
LACRO	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/non-cisgender identities (such as gender non-binary/non-conforming and agender)
MHPSS	mental health and psychosocial support
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
ToR	terms of reference
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOY	United Nations Office on Youth

**MY
BODY**

- 1. ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS
- 2. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**MY
LIFE**

- 3. COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION
- 4. HARMFUL PRACTICES

**MY
WORLD**

- 5. YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION
- 6. YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY
- 7. HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

CROSS-CUTTING

- 8. HUMAN RIGHTS
- 9. ADVOCACY AND POLICY DIALOGUE



INTRODUCTION

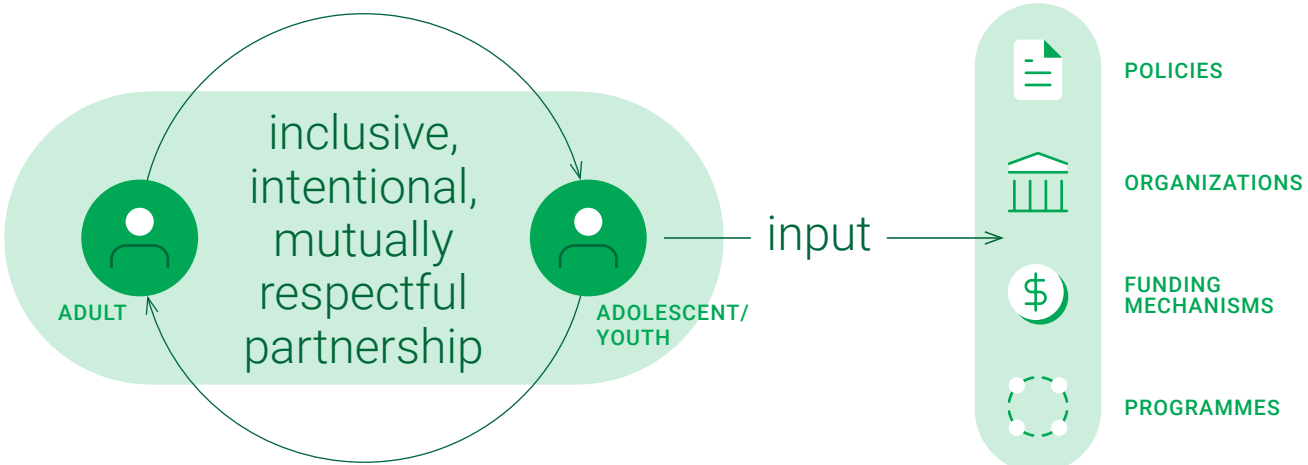
→ WHAT IS YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION?

With the emergence of the largest ever generation of adolescents and youth globally, young people have become a demographic that is central to discussions about development, humanitarian issues and peacebuilding. Youth leadership and participation refers to young people’s ability to express their views, seek protections and be involved in decision-making at all levels in matters that affect them and their communities.

There are several definitions of what youth participation is and how it can be meaningful. UNFPA endorses a widely accepted definition from the *Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement* (2018):



“Meaningful adolescent and youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually respectful partnership between adolescents, youth and adults, whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people’s ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programmes, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and world.”



Participation and empowerment are at the core of the human rights approach to development, and this extends to young people as well. Up to the age of 18, an important safeguard is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children have the right “to express [...] views freely in all matters affecting [them], the views [...] being given due weight in accordance with [their] age and maturity” (Article 12). Civil, political, social and economic rights that are set out in various human rights instruments reaffirm every citizen’s right to participation, and they apply to young people of all ages.

Youth participation is inherently linked to youth leadership at the individual, community and societal levels. The large-scale changes that the world needs in order to achieve sustainable development require strong, values-based leadership. Through leadership and organizing, adolescents and young people can amplify their voices and work to realize their vision of the world they want to live in.



Participation and empowerment are at the core of the human rights approach to development, and this extends to young people as well. Youth participation is inherently linked to youth leadership at the individual, community and societal levels.

📖 For more definitions and discussion of meaningful youth participation, see the following publications:

- *Principles and Barriers for Meaningful Youth Engagement* (UN Major Group for Children and Youth, 2017)
- *Meaningful Youth Participation* (CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality, 2021)
- *Meaningful Youth Engagement: Sharing Power, Advancing Progress, Driving Change* (Women Deliver, 2019)
- *Participate: The Voice of Young People in Programmes and Policies* (IPPF, 2008)
- *Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers* (DFID–CSO Youth Working Group, 2010)

→ WHY DOES YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION MATTER TO UNFPA?

The vision of “My World” in *My Body, My Life, My World*, UNFPA’s global strategy for adolescents and youth, is that “all adolescents and youth can exercise their right to participate in sustainable development, humanitarian action, and sustaining peace.” UNFPA works for a world where every young person’s potential is fulfilled. This encompasses fulfilling their right to shape the world they live in. All adolescents and youth must have opportunities to learn and practise decision-making skills in their families, communities and beyond. The strategy says:



UNFPA will work with partners and youth networks to strengthen the capacities of adolescents and youth, and ensure their contributions span the local to the global [...] Bolstering youth movements and working with youth-led organizations will expand possibilities for them to shape a more equitable, peaceful and just future.

Youth leadership and participation is both a stand-alone programme area for UNFPA and a consideration in all areas of programming. In the strategy, many of the interventions under “My Body” and “My Life” are related to young people’s ability to meaningfully participate in their communities, by supporting skills development and decision-making over their bodies and lives. Youth leadership and participation principles also apply to all areas under “My World”, encompassing young people’s participation in sustainable development, humanitarian action and sustaining peace. You can find recommendations and examples of how youth engagement can be mainstreamed into the various areas of UNFPA programming in the other modules of this operational guidance.

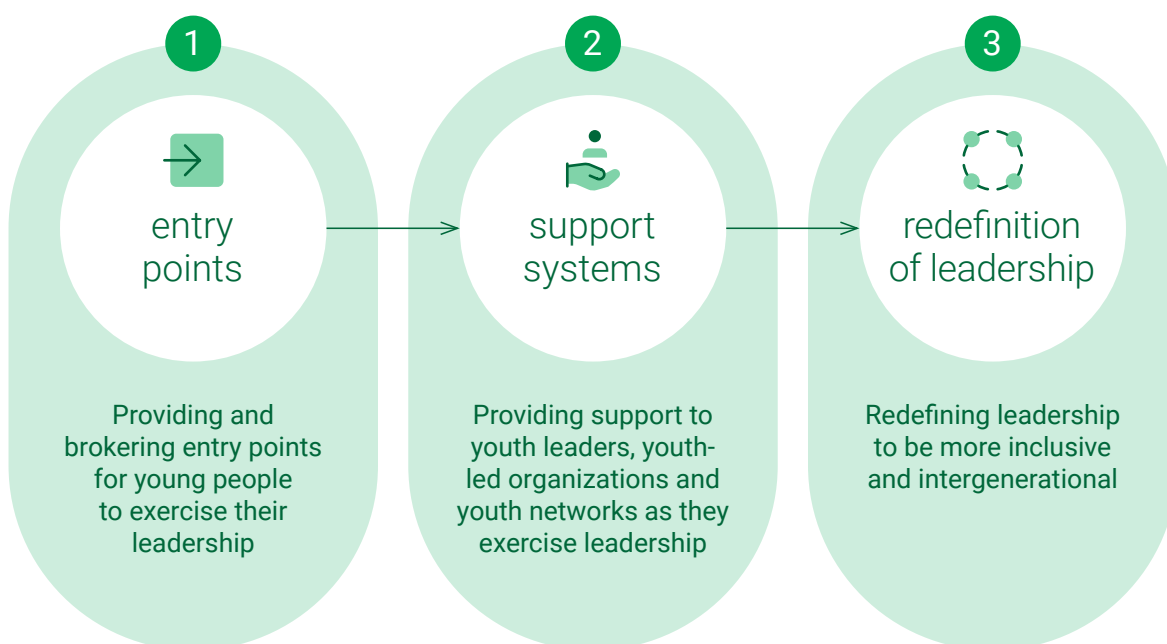
All adolescents and youth must have opportunities to learn and practise decision-making skills in their families, communities and beyond.

→ HOW CAN UNFPA SUPPORT YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION?

UNFPA recognizes that young people are effective drivers of change, and supports them in taking steps to fulfil their vision of the world, for example by:

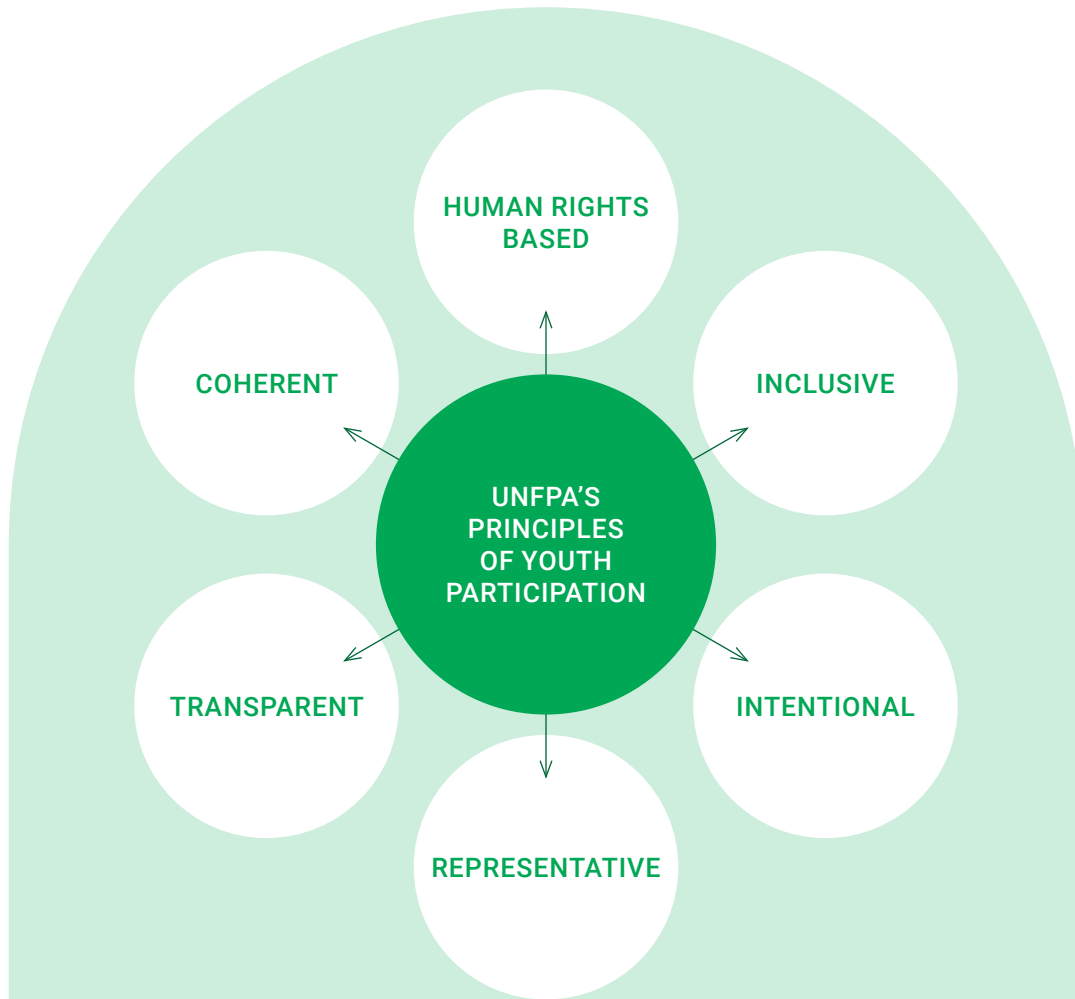
- partnering with young people and youth-led organizations in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- facilitating youth participation in subnational, national, regional and global forums
- strengthening young people’s ability to advance human-rights and development issues such as health, education and employment, through leadership development
- investing in and strengthening youth-led organizations and youth networks, with a particular emphasis on those led by marginalized populations
- supporting youth-led advocacy, mobilization and accountability mechanisms
- promoting the participation of underrepresented youth, such as Indigenous youth, LGBTQ+ youth, youth of African descent and migrant youth, young people living with HIV, young key populations and young people with disabilities.

UNFPA’s activities related to youth leadership and participation fall into three stages, which this module breaks down into a series of steps.



→ UNFPA'S PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Here are a few important principles that underlie all UNFPA's youth leadership and participation work.



- **HUMAN RIGHTS BASED:** Applying human rights principles, leaving no one behind.
- **INCLUSIVE:** Ensuring diversity, balancing representation across groups, sectors, issues of young people and organizations.
- **INTENTIONAL:** Engagement is directed at a clear outcome and supports the development of young people's skills and competencies.
- **REPRESENTATIVE:** Young people represent their communities, and their representation feeds back to their respective constituencies.
- **TRANSPARENT:** Clear and transparent process for selection, preparation and safeguarding of young people.
- **COHERENT:** Integrated with UNFPA's programmatic work.

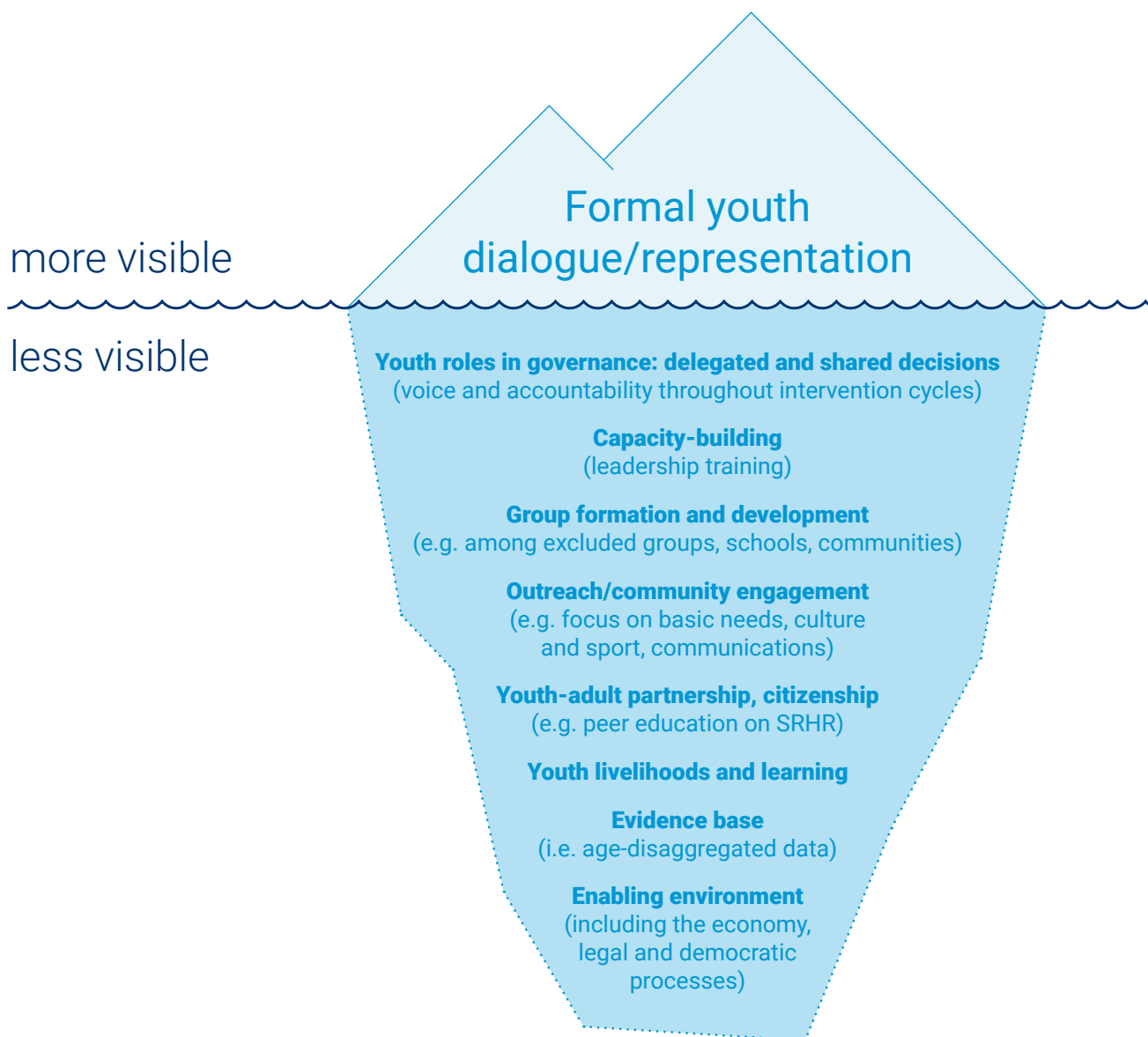
FOUR THINGS TO REMEMBER!

1. Young people are not a homogenous entity.

Youth participation often homogenizes young people's experience, but adolescents and young people have very different needs and experiences, based on many factors about their identity and life conditions. Inclusivity and supporting those left behind are important to counteract this perceived homogeneity – and they are at the heart of UNFPA's narrative about young people.

2. Youth participation in formal processes is just the tip of the iceberg.

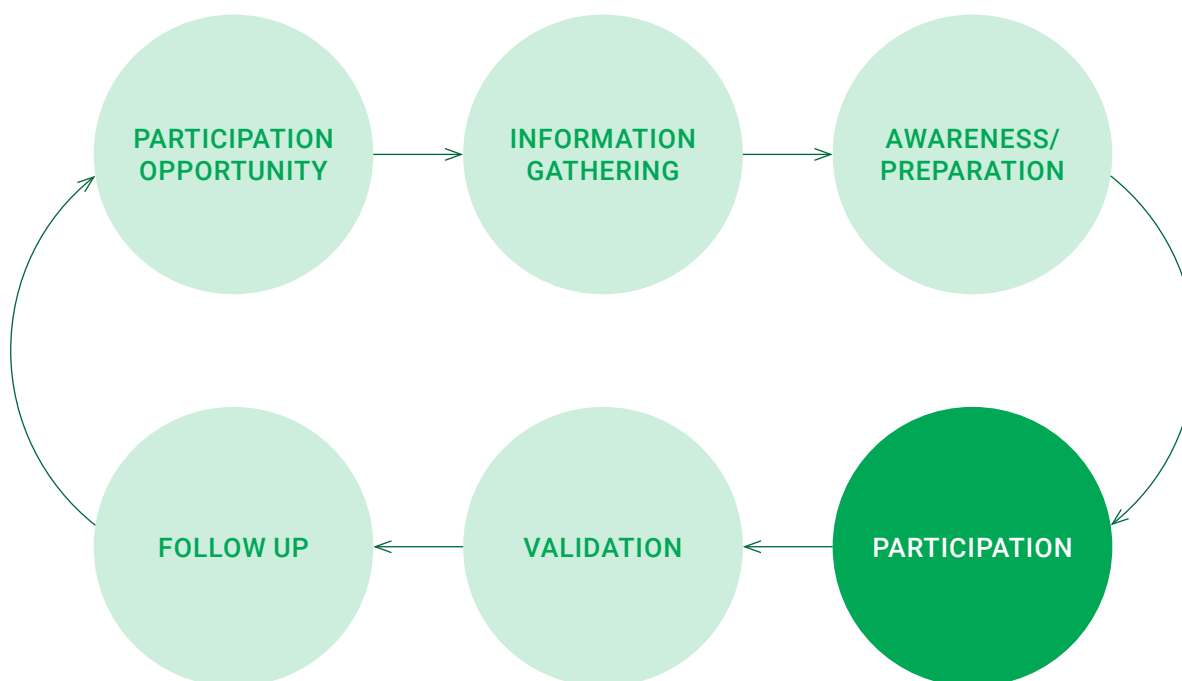
Youth dialogue and representation in formal processes and mechanisms rests on many other forms of participation at the individual and community level. So it is important to support the more-visible forms of participation through long-term investments in capacity-building, community engagement, an enabling environment, youth-adult partnerships and good governance at the local level. These structural investments can also help avoid the pitfalls of tokenism and manipulation (see p. 13).



Source: Adapted from Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010).

3. Participation is a cycle.

The participatory process is a cycle, and each step, beginning with the opportunity to participate, is connected to community-level engagement. Ensuring that participants are aware of and follow these steps will make participation more effective for them, their peers and communities, and help give rise to further opportunities for participation.



4. Avoid tokenism and manipulation at all costs!

Youth participation is shaped by larger power structures, and discriminatory patterns like ageism, elitism and sexism can have a negative effect on the effectiveness of youth engagement. These power dynamics often lead to tokenism and manipulation.

- *Tokenism* means that young people are invited to participate but are not allowed to contribute much beyond their presence, and have little or no opportunity to formulate and express their own opinions. In effect, they are treated as “window-dressing” to make the decision-making process appear inclusive.
- *Manipulation* means using young people to lend legitimacy to a cause without allowing them any voice, control or responsibility. Their presence is used to make the issue seem more urgent or attractive, without a genuine interest in their needs or opinions.

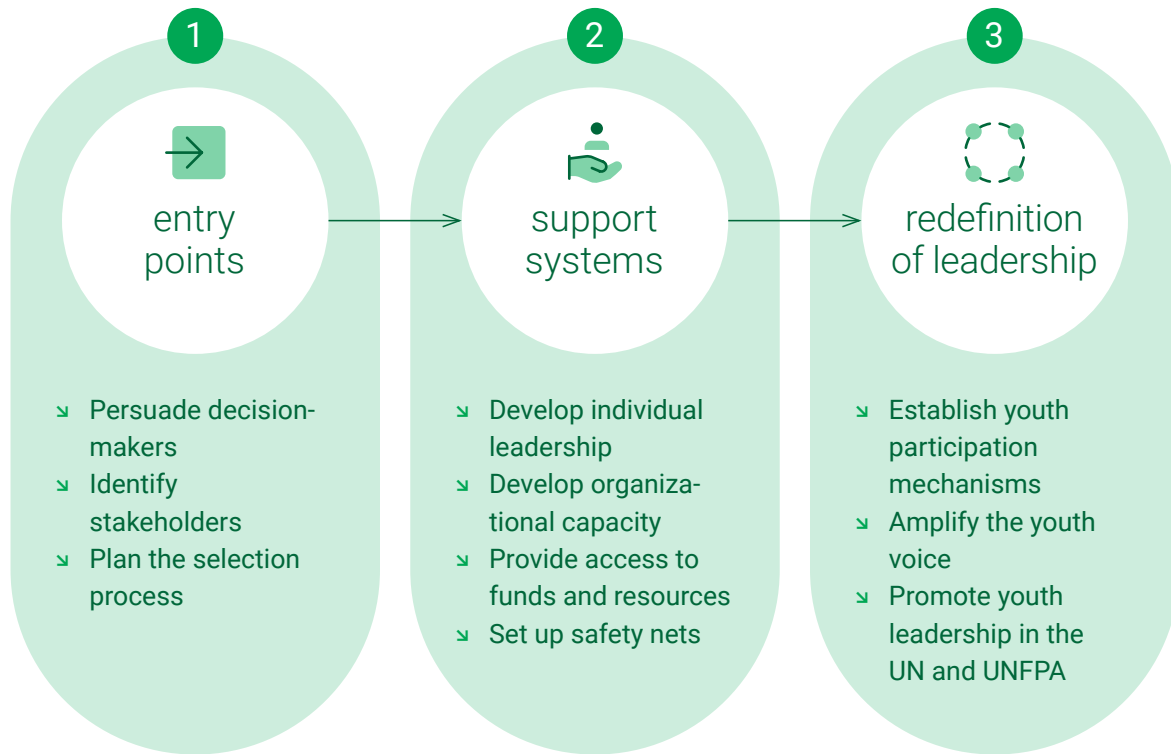
Tokenism and manipulation may occur despite the best of intentions on the part of adults. However, they perpetuate exclusionary power structures, corrode meaningful participation, and can cause alienation and mistrust on the part of young people. A rights-based, supportive approach to youth participation is key to avoiding this outcome. See the section on Support Systems (p. 27) for recommendations and best practices, and read more about forms of meaningful and non-meaningful youth participation on the [Youth Do It!](#) website.





HOW TO PLAN AND IMPLEMENT YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES

Each of the three stages below has several steps, which can take place sequentially or simultaneously.





entry points

The most important prerequisite for youth leadership and participation is for adolescents and youth to have access to decision-making spaces. This can be at any level – from a community decision to an international human rights mechanism. UNFPA's role is to push for and create such entry points where they don't exist, and to ensure inclusivity, transparency and coherence in who accesses them. Whenever entry points are created, young people should be engaged meaningfully, putting their agency at the centre. In many instances, this involves supporting young people to overcome barriers that prevent participation in institutional processes, such as procedures and mechanisms that are not youth-friendly, or limited financial capacity.

There are several steps to creating entry points. First, it may be necessary to persuade decision-makers of the value of youth participation. Once there is a receptive environment for this, it is crucial to identify stakeholders and map how they are networked to get a clear picture of the youth space. Lastly, considerations for selection ensure that those who make use of entry points to participation are diverse and representative of young people's realities.



HOW YOUTH CAN PARTICIPATE

Youth engagement and participation is not just about formal governmental processes. It can happen in many ways, and at many levels:

- ✎ participation in surveys and consultations
- ✎ participation in programme design and implementation
- ✎ involvement in the community
- ✎ participation in international forums
- ✎ membership in youth advisory bodies
- ✎ advocacy in the media or on other platforms
- ✎ human rights advocacy
- ✎ participation in sports, arts and faith organizations
- ✎ participating in non-formal education.



YOUTH-CENTRED PROGRAMME DESIGN

Youth-centred programme design draws from the concept of human-centred design and sets out practical steps to design services and programmes that put young people first. You can learn more about this approach in the [YCD Toolkit](#) (One Youth, UNICEF Canada). To see an example of youth-centred programme design, see [Tuneme.org](#) (Praekelt Foundation), which was conceptualized, developed, monitored and evaluated by young people for young people.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Creating youth platforms and amplifying youth voices on these platforms is an important way in which UNFPA has supported youth participation and leadership in the COVID-19 response. Cultivating meaningful relationships with youth groups and youth opinion leaders was a practical approach to allow the effective, consistent and timely sharing of information on young people's needs.

Egypt: Close to 30 young people were added to the regional population councils to contribute to decision-making processes on sexual and reproductive health, including for young people.

Iraq: UNFPA helped establish youth participation platforms with decision-makers by providing technical support to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for setting up youth advisory boards in three main regions – Diyala, Najaf and Basra.

Kenya: The country office, in collaboration with the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, launched a youth engagement and advocacy platform dubbed the #KenyaNiMimi campaign during a youth summit presided over by the country's president. This platform aimed to amplify young people's voices and promote their active participation in leadership, innovation, social cohesion and entrepreneurship.

Uruguay: As part of the implementation of the socioeducational initiative A RODAR!, carried out with the participation of more than 120 adolescents and young people, 12 videos were scripted, acted out and filmed by the adolescents based on their own needs and contributions. These audiovisual creations for social advocacy were launched in March 2021, involving the national authorities, as part of the presentation of results of the initiative on the rights of people with disabilities in the recovery from COVID-19.

Source: #YouthAgainstCOVID19: examples of youth leadership and participation in a pandemic (UNFPA, 2022)



→ PERSUADE DECISION-MAKERS



Receptiveness to youth participation may vary greatly across contexts, depending on the demographic, social, cultural, economic and political environment. In some regions, societal beliefs that young people have no stake in decision-making at any level can affect attitudes towards youth participation. In these cases, interventions for youth leadership and participation should focus on creating entry points by transforming social norms and cultural beliefs around young people’s right to participate in their communities. In other contexts, youth access to decision-making spaces may already be open, and interventions can focus on strengthening this through inclusion and capacity-building.

When advocating for increased youth leadership and participation, tailor your narrative to the decision-makers’ context and priorities. You can present youth leadership and participation in varied ways.

Overall approach: Youth participation is...	Emphasize	Frame youth participation as...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A means for positive youth development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Life skills development, educational gains and positive behavioural outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Non-formal education and a way to build human capital and reap the benefits of the demographic dividend
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A way for young people to become active citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The importance of hearing the voice of youth, and of fulfilling young people’s human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Helping young people develop their engagement in decision-making and their investment in positive social outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A way to foster belonging and care in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Social inclusion, support and resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Helping young people feel more connected to their communities and each other and to build social capital and trust

These narratives are not mutually exclusive, so mix and match them! The important thing is to avoid being adult-centred: always centre your approach on the recognition of young people as rights holders and citizens.

→ IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

Whom should you invite to participate? Are you looking for an individual, an organization or a network? And once you've chosen among those categories, which specific person or group should you approach?

There are many different stakeholders in the youth space, with important but differing roles to play in ensuring meaningful youth engagement. First, think clearly about what you are trying to achieve with a particular engagement activity, and determine what type of stakeholder would be best suited to accomplish this goal. The diagram will help you distinguish between individuals, organizations and networks. (Note that "organization" can include any form of organized youth – such as a student body or informal youth group – regardless of its legal status or mandate.)



individuals

Youth leaders, speakers, committee members that engage or fulfill a role in their personal capacity, not on behalf of a constituency



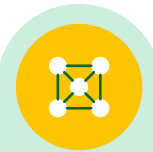
organizations

Youth-led organizations

- Staff/volunteers are largely made up of young people
- Focus on issues that are important for young people
- Promote youth participation through their working modalities

Youth-focused organizations

- Not youth-led in terms of staffing structure
- Have a focus on advancing the rights and issues of young people



networks

Networks of youth-led and/or youth-serving organizations

.....

There might be instances where an individual from a youth-led or youth-serving organization is appointed to fulfill a role on behalf of the constituency. This still falls under organizational representation.

.....

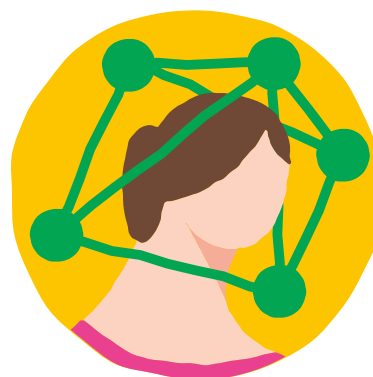
other stakeholders (philanthropy, government)

For example:

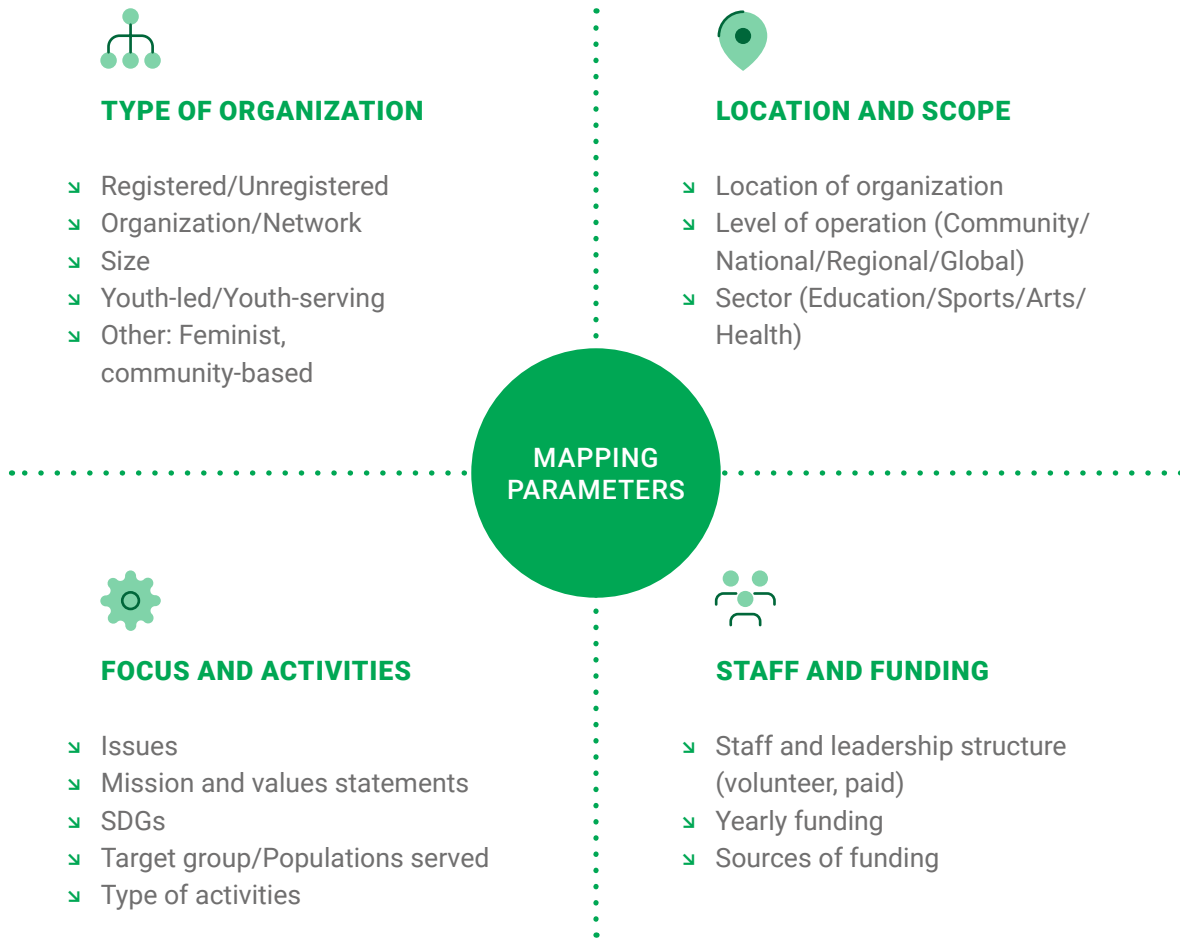
- A strong **youth leader** or **influencer** might be the best choice for a high-visibility advocacy engagement.
- For any opportunity that requires representation on behalf of a constituency, **youth-led organizations** should be prioritized.
- **Youth-focused organizations** can be key partners for a joint implementation activity, as long as they are working with their own youth-led partners in programme design and delivery.
- **Youth networks** are often the most representative, especially for global opportunities, but they can lack depth of engagement and relationships at the community level.
- **Other stakeholders** are organizations that are not youth-led or youth-focused but that can still play an important role as facilitators and enablers. Examples are **broader philanthropic organizations** that can enable programmes financially and include young people in their own programming through youth-led components; other **intergovernmental organizations** that can be partners; **governmental agencies** that develop youth-related policies and programmes; and **women-led or feminist organizations**.

Once you know the type of stakeholder you're looking for, the next step is to identify them. Since organizations will be the appropriate type of stakeholder for many youth leadership and participation opportunities, a **mapping exercise** to identify youth-led and youth-focused organizations is important. Your mapping exercise should also cover non-youth organizations or institutions that affect youth issues (whether positively or negatively) and even any influential individuals who could be considered stakeholders. Mapping has several positive outcomes:

- It gives a thorough understanding of youth engagement that already exists, and helps develop more effective strategies.
- It avoids duplication of work and/or structures.
- It allows for more partnerships with existing youth-led organizations and networks.
- It gives a clearer picture of the roles and interests of non-youth-focused organizations that influence young people's lives.



The diagram below shows some of the parameters you can use in a mapping exercise. It's based on exercises carried out by partners and UNFPA offices.



Also collect the following information (when possible) to better understand the reach and characteristics of the actors:

- contact information
- website information
- social-media handles.

For an overview of a survey-based mapping exercise, refer to *Mapping a Sector: Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peacebuilding* (UNOY Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground, 2017).

It is important to be aware that youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks can be as prone to sexism, ageism and racism as other stakeholder organizations, and attention should be paid in this regard to the mission and values statements, as well as staff and volunteer profiles.

Once you have gathered this information on the profiles of youth organizations, the next step is to understand the relationships among them.

Network mapping captures how organizations interact with each other, which common networks they are part of, and so on. Try to include all the stakeholders you have identified. A network map can be useful in understanding funding and support relationships and identifying coalitions around different issues.

How you carry out mapping depends on your time frame and resources. It can be done by UNFPA staff or a consultant, but a better approach is a **youth-led mapping process**, which can ensure better outreach and also be empowering for the youth involved. Youth-led mapping can be done in several ways:

- by a small group of youth leaders
- by a small group of youth leaders who train a larger group of youth to conduct the mapping process
- in partnership with one or several youth-led organizations.



SOME EXAMPLES OF MAPPING

Y-Map: The Asia-Pacific Interagency Network on Youth (APINY) has created the Y-Map, a comprehensive regional mapping tool. It is complemented by a stories section which showcases examples of organizations that are in the mapping.

ESA and Restless Development Project: UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office and Restless Development, as part of the youth-led accountability framework, have developed a mapping tool and conducted a preliminary mapping exercise that has identified youth-led and youth-focused organizations in the ESA region. To read more about this exercise, refer to pp. 8-10 in the Part 1 report.

For a step-by-step guide to conducting a mapping exercise, click [here](#).



For a step-by-step overview of a youth-led mapping process using the second method, refer to the [Mapping Youth Leaders for Peacebuilding Toolkit](#) by Search for Common Ground.

→ PLAN THE SELECTION PROCESS

You've laid the groundwork for participation, you've decided what kind of youth representation would be most effective, and you've mapped the networks to understand which organizations are the most likely candidates. Now it's time to zero in and select the best person to participate. How should you do that?

First, remember that UNFPA's principles of being inclusive, intentional and transparent must be at the forefront when selecting young people to participate in different opportunities.

- Plan enough **time**: rushed selections open the door to tokenism.
- Set **clear expectations** about the outcome and reach of the participation opportunity.
- Draw up a set of **guiding criteria** for selection. For an example, see the [guiding criteria for youth selection for the IDPD25 Nairobi Summit](#).
- Be **transparent** about the opportunity, selection process and selection outcomes.
- Have **systems** in place to keep track of applications, selection process documents and outcomes.

The two principal ways of structuring a selection process are shown below. They can be combined to complement each other, for example by making an open call but setting a requirement for applicants to provide a nominating entity.

NOMINATION-BASED

Partners are asked to nominate potential candidates.

PROS

- ✓ Individual has already been endorsed.
- ✓ Nominating organization shares accountability.
- ✓ Often faster and easier due to the lower number of candidates.
- ✓ Can facilitate outreach to hard-to-reach young people who have difficulty applying for open calls (young people in rural settings without access to the Internet, in humanitarian settings, Indigenous youth, those with disabilities).

CONS

- ✗ May end up with the “usual suspects” and open the door to favouritism.
- ✗ Tends to focus on individuals, instead of organizational representation.

OPEN CALLS

Any interested candidate who meets the specified profile can apply.

PROS

- ✓ If you have connectivity across the country or area in question, and sufficient social-media presence and networks to disseminate, you have the greatest diversity.
- ✓ Often facilitates the participation of youth who represent organizations and networks (especially when this is a criterion in the call).
- ✓ Gives opportunities for participation to a broader selection of youth leaders, organizations and networks.
- ✓ Makes it possible to discover new young leaders and organizations that can become partners in the future.

CONS

- ✗ More time and effort, especially to put vetting mechanisms into place.
- ✗ Success is reliant on having networks that can widely disseminate the call.



REPRESENTATION IN ACTION

The East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) has some pointers on working to recognize the diversity of youth in their youth programming.

Challenge: Sometimes the same young people are continually invited to be a part of youth-focused events, but reaching out to the most obvious group means that you may not bring much diversity into the team.

Strategy: ESARO identified priority areas of engagement with the greatest potential to foster inclusiveness. These included youth:

- ✎ with different levels of education, including no formal education
- ✎ in school and out of school
- ✎ with different marital statuses, i.e. unmarried/married/divorced
- ✎ in prisons
- ✎ in religious institutions and faith-based organizations
- ✎ in sports and cultural settings
- ✎ in refugee camps or humanitarian settings
- ✎ from marginalized groups, e.g. LGBTQ+, sex workers or the disabled
- ✎ from remote areas
- ✎ affected by conflict and humanitarian situations
- ✎ from diverse cultural backgrounds
- ✎ living with HIV/AIDS or other health issues.

Tip: Considering diversity within the youth population is best done early on in the process, for example through a baseline study for a programme, a review of secondary literature to understand the context in which youth live – or simply by talking to different constituencies to better understand their concerns, motivations, barriers and needs.

CLARIFYING VALUES

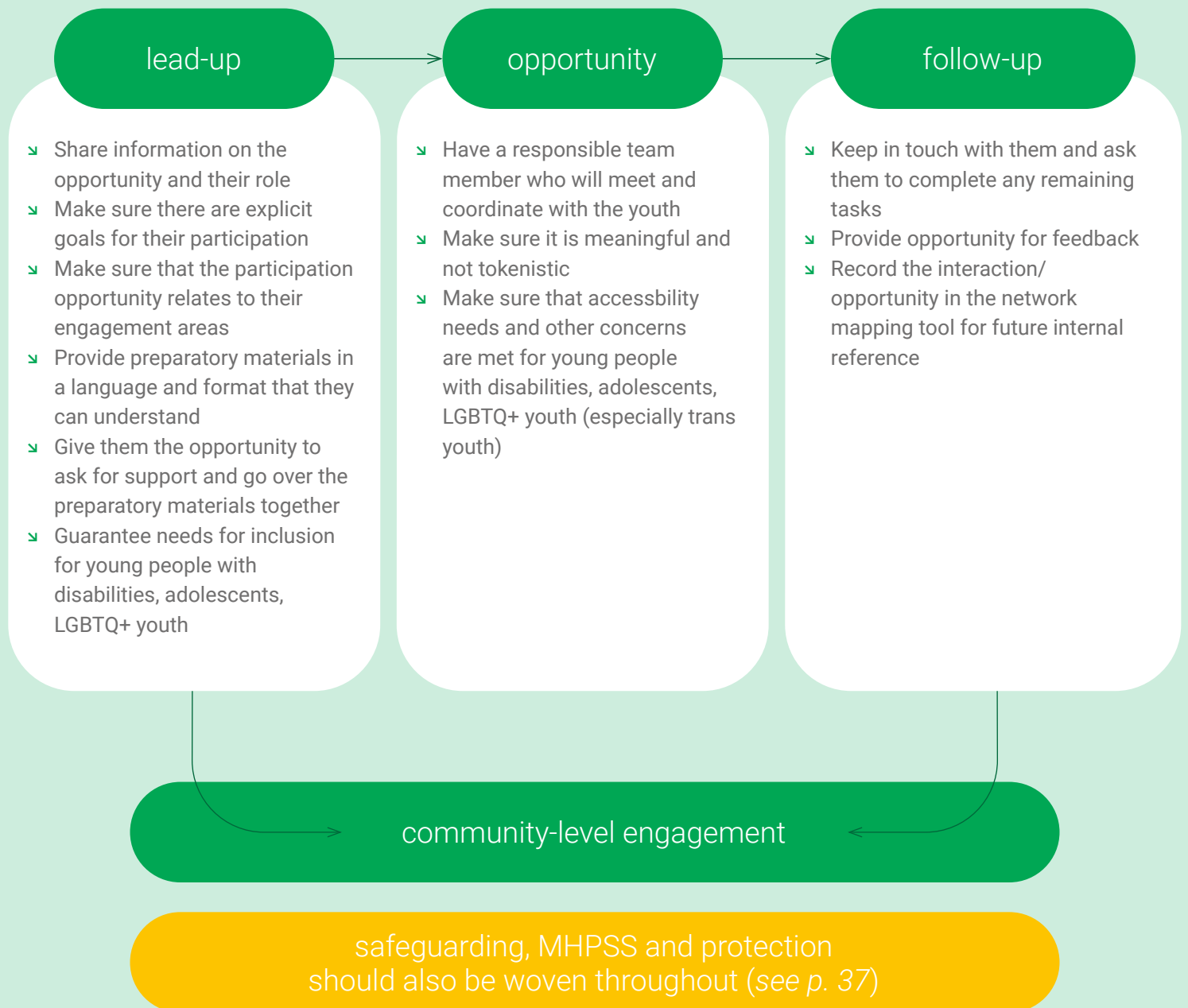
When selecting youth partners, you will need to ascertain whether the individuals and their organizations support the values of the UN. Young people may come from diverse movements (such as environment, Indigenous rights, persons of African descent), and it is important that all our partners share a vision in favour of human rights and gender equality, especially in relation to UNFPA's mandate, but this issue should not become a ground for exclusion.

Effective approaches to values clarification include putting simple expressions of adherence to UNFPA's values in terms of reference (ToRs) or application processes, or requiring the participating organization to sign a letter of commitment to those values. For examples of how other organizations do this, see the [Major Group for Children and Youth](#) and the [Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action](#).

Values clarification is not just part of the selection process, but a thread that runs through the participation cycle. In designing programmes and interacting with youth partners, it is important to have the capacity to run values clarification exercises and make use of human rights instruments and data to clarify UNFPA's positions on key mandate issues.

PLANNING SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE CYCLE OF PARTICIPATION

For optimal results, there should be careful planning and strong support in the lead-up to the opportunity, as well as in the follow-up, to ensure continued involvement in the future. A sense of continuity and purpose ensures that the engagement is coherent, intentional and human rights-based.







support
systems

Youth leadership is not about “creating” leaders, but rather about recognizing, enhancing and supporting the already existing leadership of young people. Young people are well aware of their needs, and they already have much of the capacity and vision to shape the world that they want. Support systems can further existing leadership through:

- leadership development of individuals
- capacity development of youth-led organizations
- funding and resourcing
- providing safety nets.

→ DEVELOP INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP

Leadership development means supporting the capacity of young people to take action, self-organize and take leadership roles. Youth participation activities have many benefits for young people, and leadership development strengthens these:

- increased competencies, self-esteem, skills and knowledge
- enhanced individual development
- increased self-discipline and time management
- enhanced sense of connectedness, empathy, belonging and being of value
- greater ability to make connections between their personal and professional experiences and human rights
- positive impact on their life plan, with increased focus on social change
- increased recognition within their community
- connections with other young leaders and youth organizations
- increased exposure to opportunities for networking, study, and economic or other development opportunities.

UNFPA’s leadership development approach is **values-based** and **transformational**. This means aligning external actions for social change with an internal values base and acknowledging that “to change the world one needs to start from within”. This approach combines personal development with the skills needed for social change, making connections between the individual’s competencies, well-being and values and external-facing leadership skills such as systems thinking, innovation, and programme design and implementation. All these are rooted in the competencies for sustainable development set out by UNESCO.



For more information on the current state of youth civil society and recommended actions, see *Towards a Thriving, Credible, and Sustainable Civil Society* (Development Alternative, 2019) and *Shifting the Power: What Will It Take to Do Development Differently?* (Development Alternative, 2020).

To learn more about education for sustainable development and the competencies for sustainability, refer to *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* (UNESCO, 2017).

Among the numerous tools and methodologies that can be used to develop these competencies, *Step Up! A Pocket Guide to Social Change for Young Leaders* is available to UNFPA offices and is aligned with values-based, transformational leadership development. The toolkit's four sections and 17 activities provide young leaders with the fundamental skills and knowledge they need to create change:



AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Value-driven
- Aware of their identity
- Aware of their rights
- Understanding the biopsychosocial factors that affect them
- With a clear vision



IN WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Active listener
- Effective communicator
- Able to function across cultures (including generational and organizational cultures)
- Able to understand interpersonal relations and build a well-functioning team



IN DESIGNING FOR CHANGE

- Able to understand the root causes of a problem
- Able to engage their creativity to generate new ideas
- Able to develop an idea and plan activities and results
- Able to identify and manage the resources needed to implement activities
- Able to identify and engage with stakeholders strategically
- Able to develop alliances with other young leaders and organizations



IN MAKING IT LAST

- Able to instil accountability in a team, with personal integrity and responsibility
- Able to navigate moments of being overwhelmed or overloaded
- Able to steer through breakdowns in a way that strengthens commitment and action
- Able to catalyse the spread of new ideas to wider audiences
- Able to build support systems that ensure the lasting success of a team
- Able to nurture the next generation of leaders in their team and have healthy succession systems



This overview of the [Step Up! Youth Leadership Toolkit](#) (UNFPA, 2020) will give you more information.



YOUTH NOW! UNFPA LACRO REGIONAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION STRATEGY AND YOUTH CAMPS

Youth NOW! is the regional youth participation strategy of UNFPA's Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO). It promotes the participation and leadership of young leaders and youth organizations from across the LAC region in follow-up mechanisms to the 2030 Agenda, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and Montevideo Consensus, at national and regional levels. One of the main Youth NOW! activities is youth camps – inclusive spaces for diverse young leaders to strengthen capacities for advocacy and recognition and to bring together young leaders and youth organizations from different identities and causes. More than 850 of the region's adolescent and youth leaders are part of the strategy, including youth with disabilities, Indigenous, youth of African descent, LGBTQ+ and youth living with HIV. More information is available on the [Youth NOW! website](#).

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES



- **Every youth participation opportunity is also a leadership development opportunity.** Leadership development can be a stand-alone programmatic approach (through mentoring, camps, workshops, training), but any contact with young people can be used as an opportunity to support them in leadership development.
- **Leadership development is a form of non-formal education.** Taking part in youth leadership and participation activities (or being active in youth-led and youth-focused organizations) provides young people with non-formal education.
- **Leadership development builds competencies for sustainable development,** which are relevant to people of all ages.
- **Leadership development is intrinsically linked to power structures in a system.** When planning leadership development activities, focus on leadership as a function of teams and organizations. Promoting the idea of a singular “leader” can perpetuate elitism and inaccessibility. Encourage healthier power dynamics by emphasizing inclusion, mentorship and succession planning, and supporting leadership journeys within organizations, so that all team members get to experience different roles and capacities.
- **When the opportunity is in an intergenerational space, be sure that the participation takes place in an atmosphere of respect,** and that the experiences and voices of young people are adequately recognized.



To learn more about non-formal education and how it relates to UNFPA's programming, refer to [Brief: UNFPA's Approach to Non-formal Education](#) and the [Rio Declaration on Non-Formal Education](#) (2019).

GENDER AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Youth leadership and participation takes place within the broader social context. Young women are often at a power disadvantage and face gender-specific challenges:

- They often face disparities in educational opportunities, mobility, care responsibilities and employment prospects.
- They may struggle to leverage their leadership experience to access additional training, professional opportunities and equitable pay, especially compared with their male counterparts.
- They are more likely to face safety and security risks, including sexual harassment and abuse, especially due to the additional stigma associated with speaking openly about sexuality or sexual health.



📖 For a recent study on these issues, see *When the Gap is a Chasm: The Gendered Experience of Youth Participation and Leadership in Sexual and Reproductive Health* (YIELD Project, 2020).

Here are some ways to empower and support young women in their leadership journeys:

- Be aware of how gender inequality impacts young women’s leadership, especially in particular local contexts. Focus on transforming gender norms and gender equity when designing and implementing youth programmes and leadership opportunities.
- Involve young women from diverse backgrounds in participation opportunities, and take their concerns into account as you support them in developing their leadership and prospects for professional advancement.
- Implement safeguarding measures which account for power imbalances faced by young women (see the Protection section on p. 40 for recommendations). Think about protection concerns if young women are at risk of community backlash for their leadership activities and advocacy.
- Consider gender dynamics around leadership opportunities: for example, it may be more difficult for adolescent girls and young women to participate if an opportunity requires travel or overnight stays in a mixed-gender group.
- Compensate and resource young women and their organizations adequately, taking into account the additional burden of caregiving that young women may have.
- Connect young women to each other and other support networks for opportunities to share their concerns and receive support. Supporting and cultivating female support networks and young feminist spaces can be a good starting point.



FACILITATING ACCESS

An important consideration for leadership development opportunities is young people’s access to participatory processes. Particularly in the case of youth in rural or hard-to-reach areas, getting to the venue to participate in an opportunity may be challenging or resource-intensive. Set aside resources to facilitate their access, especially in the lead-up to an opportunity. Remember that fast-paced selection and lead-up processes can lead to the exclusion of such youth if it is hard for them to be present for meetings. Applying the principle of “leaving no one behind”, be sure to design and implement processes that give special consideration to the needs of all groups of young people, including those who may be harder to reach.

→ DEVELOP ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Sustained capacity development support to youth-led organizations is an essential way to support youth participation. It builds their capacities to exercise leadership, implement activities, advocate for their rights and keep decision-makers accountable. You can offer capacity development in several ways:



- leadership development support for the members of the organization
- financial support to cover capacity development activities
- arranging for capacity development activities to be provided by an external organization or donor.

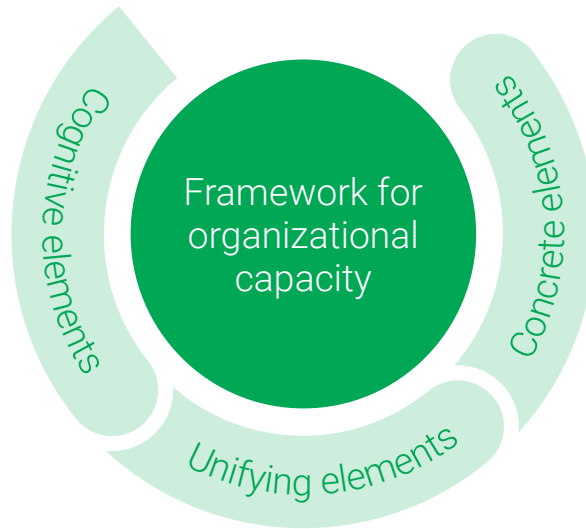
Sustained capacity development support to youth-led organizations is an essential way to support youth participation.

Capacity development, just like leadership development, should be transformational and go beyond the operational requirements of a donor or programme. In part, this means supporting youth-led organizations to become learning- and development-focused, with effective mechanisms for knowledge management and internal learning, so that they can reduce their dependence on external capacity-building.

Effective capacity development starts with a detailed needs assessment, followed by prioritization of support based on the youth-led organization's specific work area and context. One-size-fits-all approaches that do not pay attention to the organization's needs from the start often fail to produce the desired results.

The framework below can be used to understand an organization's needs for capacity development.

- Sense of purpose and mission
- Strategy
- Innovation and adaptability
- Organizational skills (cumulative ability to carry out critical tasks, such as budgeting, relationship management)



- Human resources (skills and capabilities of members, healthy succession)
- Systems and infrastructure (physical resources, technology)
- Organizational structure (structures that determine the day-to-day activities of the organization)
- Fundraising
- Financial management
- Project management
- Monitoring and evaluation

- Organizational culture
- Organizational values

DEVELOPING ADVOCACY CAPACITY



A significant portion of youth activities around UNFPA's mandate and the SDGs revolve around issue-based advocacy. This means that developing advocacy capacity is an important way of supporting youth-led organizations. Assessing needs for advocacy capacity-building is difficult because of the complex and non-linear nature of advocacy: unlike other interventions, it is not easy to establish direct links between resources and outcomes. Don't view capacity development support only in terms of the organization's immediate activities, but focus too on the overall value created. (See also Module 9).

As the table below shows, there are many areas which will increase the strategic advocacy capacity of the organization and its members.

ADVOCACY CAPACITY COMPONENTS

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▾ Analytical thinking, interpersonal skills (leadership, communication, creativity, teamwork, public speaking), problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, adaptability
TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE/ STRATEGIC LEARNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▾ Knowledge of subject matter and policy environment ▾ Advocacy strategy development, implementation and evaluation ▾ Gathering and using evidence
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▾ Community mobilization and empowerment ▾ Outreach and engagement
NETWORK AND INFLUENCE/ STRATEGIC CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▾ Partnerships and coalition-building ▾ Advocacy communications and outreach ▾ Networking and negotiation with decision-makers and other stakeholders

BUILDING NETWORKS OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

One of UNFPA's most important contributions to youth leadership and participation has been its support in starting youth networks in the SRHR space, such as Y-PEER, the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights ([REDLAC](#)), the Latin America and Caribbean Youth Alliance ([#JuventudesLAC](#)) and the African Youth and Adolescents Network ([AfriYan](#)). There are several takeaways from this work:

- ▾ **Provide sustained capacity-building as the key to youth leadership.** Y-PEER's beginnings were characterized by significant ongoing investments in volunteers and organizations that make up the network. It also has regional learning and training centres in Thailand, Jordan and Bulgaria which provide constant support to the network. Through this investment, Y-PEER was able to cultivate youth leadership at the national level, making its impact deeper and more long-term than just its activities.
- ▾ **Ensure that the components of a network, and the network itself, are youth-led.** Y-PEER is effective because it is youth-led. Through more than 450 national focal points in 52 countries, and seven international coordinators, Y-PEER's strategic direction and activities are determined

and steered by young people. Y-PEER's volunteer youth-to-youth approach supports meaningful youth participation, ensures ownership by volunteers in its network and develops effective interventions.

- **Balance support for new networks with partnerships with existing networks.** According to the *Evaluation of UNFPA Support to Adolescents and Youth* (UNFPA, 2016), while the investment in these networks was remarkable, they also resulted in “potential partnerships with existing national youth-led organisations [being] underexplored” (p. 62).
- **Work to ensure healthy turnover and strong ties to other youth networks.** The perception that certain networks are preferred by UNFPA can lead to backlash in the broader youth space. Support healthy turnover of youth advocates from the start of network-building, and ensure they have ties (independently of UNFPA) to other youth organizations, networks and civil society coalitions.
- **Support youth networks in establishing and strengthening ties with professional or advocacy-related networks.** Being part of broader networks can support the professional growth of network members, such as through mentorships, while also helping the network access knowledge and expertise that can be used in its activities. Mentors and advisors are often instrumental in helping the network access funding and support opportunities.

→ PROVIDE ACCESS TO FUNDS AND RESOURCES

Having adequate and sustainable access to funds is an important concern for youth-led organizations. In addition to being imperatives for their long-term existence and success, funding and resourcing also deeply impact how organizations deliver their work, and their autonomy in deciding what to focus on and how to carry out their operations.



- **Provide long-term and flexible funding:** Funding for youth-led organizations is usually short-term and project-based, which limits their ability to continue their operations and have long-term staff retention and capacity development. One of the most effective ways to support youth leadership is to provide long-term core funding.
- **Support youth organizations to diversify their funding:** Youth-led organizations can become less dependent on donors if they are able to diversify their funding sources and become more self-sustaining, such as through social entrepreneurship. Provide support for organizations to explore such pathways.

- **Build a strong relationship with funding recipients:** Relationship-building with youth-led organizations is as important as providing them with funding and resources. Ongoing capacity development, assistance in setting priorities and positioning their work, and linking the organizations to broader networks are some of the ways to deepen the relationship. Ensure that roles and expectations are clearly defined from the outset, and formalize partnerships on the basis of shared goals.
- **Adequately compensate young people for their work:** Youth leaders and youth-led organizations should be adequately compensated for their time and efforts, especially when they are offering their expertise or services.
- **Move towards innovative modalities of funding and resourcing:** Large-scale micro-grants and participatory grant-making can shift power dynamics around funding and resourcing, opening up space for young people to be more meaningfully involved.
- **Leverage experienced partners to provide support to funding recipients:** UNFPA's due-diligence requirements for funding implementing partners can often be a barrier for youth-led organizations that may not be sufficiently professionalized or institutionalized. Working with partners that can manage funds and provide capacity development support to youth-led organizations can be a way to broaden funding access for youth-led organizations. UNFPA can also play a brokering role in connecting youth-led organizations to their national governments, other donors or the private sector for funds and resources.



For more information on how to fund and resource youth CSOs differently, refer to *Shifting the Power: What Will It Take to Do Development Differently?* (Development Alternative, 2020) and *Young People Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health: Toward a New Normal* (YIELD Project, 2019), especially p. 39.

→ SET UP SAFETY NETS

Youth leadership and participation gives rise to many interactions where there is a power differential, for example between older adults and young people, more powerful individuals and less powerful young people, males and females, members of a majority group and members of disadvantaged groups. Even when such interactions are not present, young people taking on leadership and advocacy positions may need psychosocial support or protection because of the heightened responsibility and adversity they may face. The following three “safety nets” can be used or adapted to help ensure meaningful and safe youth participation.

SAFEGUARDING

In any process or gathering where a lot of young people come together (or meet older adults), adolescent and youth participants are vulnerable because of the power differential between them and other participants. Protection measures are therefore important – above all for the security of the young people, but also to lower the risk of potential sexual harassment cases.

For in-person events, safeguarding measures need to be in place to provide a protective and positive environment for all participants, and to ensure that they are aware of differences in power and privilege among them. The *Code of Conduct: To Prevent Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment, at UNFPA Events* (UNFPA, 2019) applies to all UNFPA events and forms the basis of such measures. Additional systems, such as safety monitors or an incident reporting system, can also be used to build on the measures in the Code of Conduct.

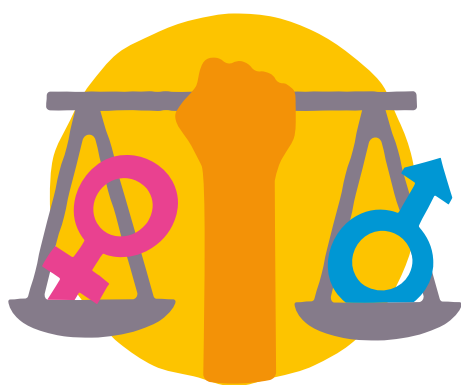


For in-person events, safeguarding measures need to be in place to provide a protective and positive environment for all participants.

Safeguarding concerns apply to digital platforms as well, since harassment can take place in webinars and online meetings, or on group-messaging or social-media platforms. For webinars and other online events hosted or moderated by UNFPA, have a code of conduct, and make sure that someone is specifically tasked with moderating the space and addressing any concerns that arise. Consider reminding participants that what they may perceive as friendly behaviour may be perceived by someone else as unwanted flirting or inappropriate sexual harassment. Always keep such online spaces focused on the relevant topics, and refrain from introducing personal questions or topics.

In the case of **minors** (youth under the age of 18), it is important to make the necessary arrangements with their parents/legal guardians:

- Minors should be accompanied by a chaperone or chaperones for in-person events, and supervised by a chaperone for digital engagements.
- Ensure there is documentation clearly setting out responsibilities and expectations around the participation of minors. If a partner organization is supporting the engagement of a minor participant, it should sign a form detailing its responsibilities.
- If a minor is being engaged without support from a partner organization, you must obtain the appropriate consent/release from their parents/legal guardian. Ensure that the parents/legal guardian(s) are well informed about the participation opportunity and their own responsibilities.
- Additional restrictions around disseminating recordings/photos/videos of minors may apply, so discuss this with parents/legal guardians, and either limit such documentation or obtain the necessary authorizations, depending on the context.



Safeguarding measures should also address gender inequalities. Young women leaders face particular challenges, particularly when they interact with older and male officials. They are at greater risk of sexual harassment and often do not receive adequate support in reporting such incidents. Safeguarding measures should be developed, communicated and implemented in a way that takes into account such disparities and acknowledges the increased risks and specific needs. A similar approach should apply to power imbalances and risks that might arise from sexual orientation, disabilities or other intersecting identities.



SAFEGUARDING AT THE ICPD25 NAIROBI SUMMIT

When preparing for the Nairobi Summit, it was a priority to create an inclusive, respectful and safe environment for all participants. A comprehensive safeguarding approach was developed in consultation with the Youth Reference Group and through a review of partners' approaches to safeguarding. The following resources on safeguarding measure were produced and disseminated in the lead-up to the Summit:

- All UNFPA staff and partner organizations received a [briefing](#) informing them of the safeguarding measures in place and their role in ensuring the well-being of youth participants. Safeguarding measures were also covered at in-person UNFPA staff briefings in New York and Nairobi.
- All participants received a system-generated message with [Safeguarding Guidelines for Youth Participants](#), which clearly explained expectations from all sides and how incidents may be reported. Guidelines contained tips on how to network safely and respectfully, with particular emphasis on cultural differences and digital communication.
- A safeguarding webinar was held, open to all partners and youth participants (see [presentation and recording](#)).
- A team of 25 dedicated safety monitors were trained to use a streamlined incident-reporting system.

For more information on UNFPA's safeguarding procedures, refer to [Youth Front and Center: An Overview of Youth Engagement @ICPD25](#) (UNFPA, 2020).

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) can be needed when supporting young people through leadership development. Some ways to incorporate this component in leadership development approaches include:

- providing training and materials on mental health and psychosocial well-being
- incorporating MHPSS into trainings or materials focusing on leadership development
- implementing peer-to-peer support or mentoring as part of leadership development programmes
- offering MHPSS support on an on-demand basis to young people participating in leadership development opportunities.



For examples of MHPSS support, see [Young People Trying to Save the World: A Well-being Workbook for Youth Activists](#) (Amnesty International, 2021), and refer to the framework and exercise focusing on bio-psychosocial well-being in [Step Up! A Pocket Guide to Social Change for Young Leaders](#) (UNFPA, 2021).

PROTECTION

Protection is an important concern for many young people, depending on the context. Some marginalized young people, such as immigrants, LGBTQ+ or transgender youth, may be endangered by sharing this aspect of their identity. Being active in civil society as an advocate or spokesperson can lead to retaliation in some contexts. For example, young women often face significant risk of community backlash or violence for talking about sexuality and/or advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Youth engagement should never result in young people putting themselves at risk. When promoting youth leadership and participation opportunities, pay attention to the specific context, make decisions based on a risk analysis, and put mitigating measures in place where needed.

The following recommendations on protection were made in *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in the Civic Space* by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (2021):

- Provide information about existing protection mechanisms before engaging with young people in public events and undertaking joint activities with them.
- Raise awareness among young people of their rights so they can assess the legality of their actions.
- Before the engagement, introduce and provide contact details for a focal point whom young people can contact if they are exposed to threats.
- Disseminate information on regional and international mechanisms that can be used to better prevent threats and violations against young people in the civic space, including early-warning procedures.
- Allocate sufficient resources (financial and otherwise) for protection-related capacity-building, specifically tailored to young people's needs and experiences. This should be implemented through collaboration with young people, civil society and educational institutions.

For more information on young people and human rights, see Module 8.





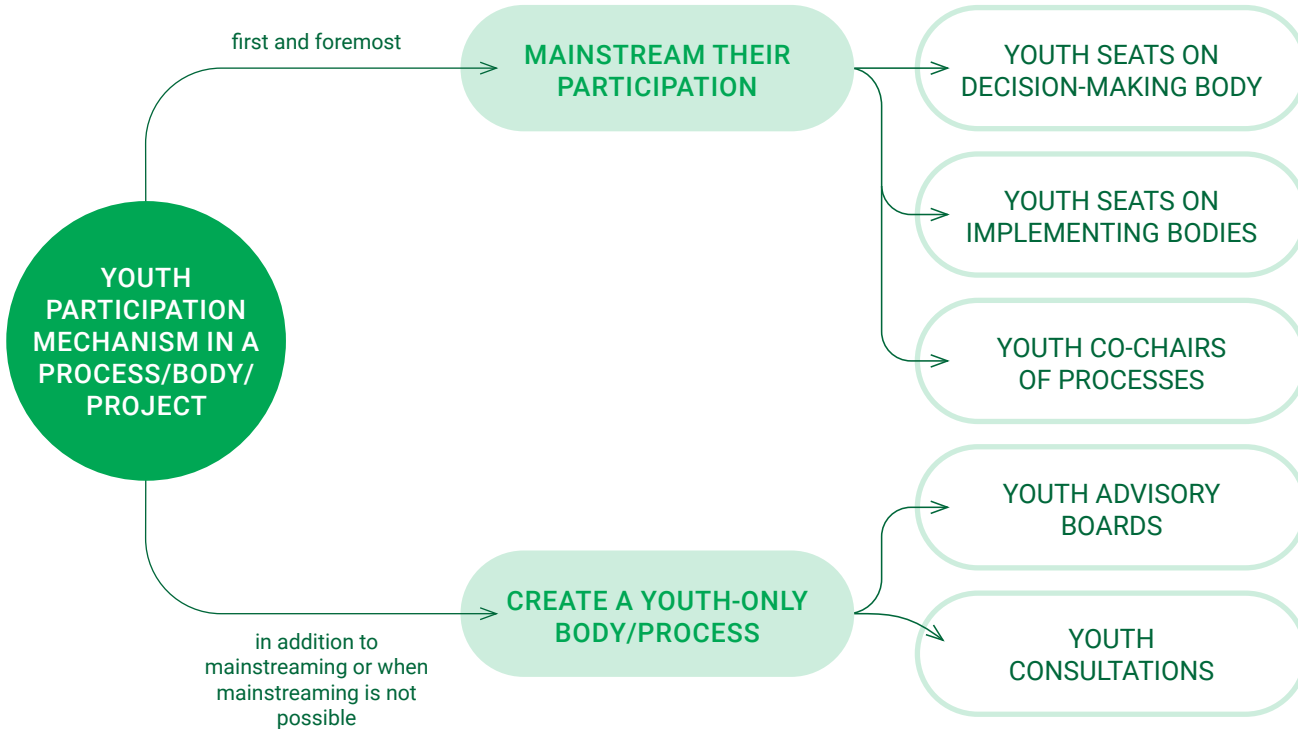
redefinition
of leadership

The transformative impact of youth leadership and participation is a redefinition of leadership and participation to encompass young people and be more inclusive, co-creative and intergenerational. This transformation actualizes the right of adolescents and youth to participate in all levels of decision-making, from local to global. UNFPA's work with young people and youth-led organizations must therefore be complemented by systematic support for:

- The creation of **youth participation mechanisms** that facilitate meaningful youth engagement
- Amplifying the **youth voice** in policymaking
- Actualizing **youth leadership within UNFPA** and in the UN system.

→ ESTABLISH YOUTH PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS

Youth participation mechanisms are relevant for any process, initiative or body (commission, board) that involves decision-making, and implementation can incorporate youth participation mechanisms, whether these are driven by UNFPA or already exist within a government or other body that UNFPA is supporting. The decision tree below outlines the main possibilities:



- In all these scenarios, the “youth seats” should be constituency-based and allocated to youth organizations and networks.
- As there is a representative role involved, it is important to avoid engaging individuals without active constituencies.

Since meaningful youth engagement is an “inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between adolescents, youth, and adults whereby power is shared” (see Introduction), the preferred approach should be to **mainstream young people’s participation**. This means having positions filled by young people as part of the regular decision-making and implementation mechanisms.

Youth-only bodies and processes may be a good option when:

- It is impossible to mainstream youth participation, due to the nature of the work or lack of acceptance by the government or other body.
- It would be safer or better for young people to come together only with their peers.

Youth-only bodies can always be created in addition to mainstreaming.

This can increase the depth and breadth of youth participation.

TIPS FOR MAINSTREAMING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- Organize youth participation in accordance with principles of inclusivity and transparency.
- Have a clear ToR for youth representatives, and provide them with preparation and technical support.
- Always have more than one youth representative so that they are not isolated.
- Have a discussion with the position-holders to ensure consultation with their constituency and coordination with other youth actors. Support these processes as necessary.
- Make chairs or coordinators of the bodies or processes aware of the principles and practices of meaningful youth engagement.
- Have safeguarding and MHPSS measures in place to deal with any problems that might arise in the process.
- Provide remuneration for young people’s efforts, and be cognizant that their participation might involve a greater personal cost than for some of their professional counterparts.

TIPS FOR CREATING AND SUPPORTING YOUTH-ONLY BODIES

- Ensure the diversity of the body.
- Have a clear ToR with defined structure and decision-making mechanisms, developed and finalized with the body’s members.
- Give the youth-only body decision-making capacity and resources for the area it is responsible for.
- Provide tools and spaces for training and capacity-building among peers.
- Develop a clear internal and external communication mechanism or channel.
- Have transparent and clearly defined ways for the body to interact with other decision-makers in the system.
- Consider having at least two representatives from the youth-only body present in other decision-making mechanisms.
- Promote and amplify the work of the body.



For a case study on mainstreaming youth participation, refer to [Youth Front and Center: An Overview of Youth Engagement @ICPD25](#).

→ AMPLIFY THE YOUTH VOICE

Amplifying the youth voice in all platforms is an important way in which UNFPA supports youth participation and leadership.

YOUTH SPEAKERS

Principles of meaningful youth engagement should be applied to every step of the process:

- **Ensure transparency and inclusivity** in the criteria and process for selection.
- **Consider the specific needs** of the youth speaker when preparing them to participate.
- **Structure the event** in a way that respects and amplifies the input of young people.
- **Provide concrete follow-up** after the speaking opportunity.

For more information, refer to the [guidance on the preparation of youth speakers](#) for the Nairobi Summit.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations are an important way for young people to influence the outcomes of processes. They can be online or offline surveys, workshops, events, dialogues, research programmes or the development of a knowledge base. Keep the following points in mind:



- **Clarify your goals.** There is often a tension between reaching the highest number of young people (e.g. through a survey) and having a deep, substantive engagement (e.g. through participatory research or a workshop). Determine what fits the context better, and if possible combine different methodologies.
- **Ensure that the consultation process is a mechanism for participation.** Inform participants at every step of the process, set clear expectations on how their inputs will affect the outcome, and communicate the outcomes to further their engagement and advocacy. Do not consult for the sake of consulting – make it rights-based and purposeful.
- **Make events empowering and meaningful.** In dialogues with policymakers, sensitize them about how to listen to young people. Use the principles of meaningful youth engagement; the tips above about youth speakers also apply to participants in a consultation.

- **For online consultations, think about Internet access, translation and accessibility.** Do what is needed to ensure that underrepresented groups of young people can access the consultation. Make sure you have technical support on hand for any problems with using the digital platform.



REGIONAL EXAMPLES

- The Asia-Pacific Regional Office is initiating a multi-country participatory study on pathways to adolescent pregnancy, with young people involved at all stages of the research.
- The Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office has formed a Youth Advisory Council to develop a regional study on youth of African descent. The council contributes to research as well as being a mechanism of participation.

CAMPAIGNS

Communication campaigns targeting or focusing on young people are an effective way of amplifying the youth voice and driving advocacy. In supporting these campaigns, make sure that the youth voice is at the forefront and young people are involved in every step of the process. Better still is co-creating campaigns, with youth-led planning, execution and dissemination.

- **Tone:** Campaigns should strike the right tone and avoid reinforcing stereotypes or problematic narratives about young people. The best way to ensure this is to provide space for youth partners to shape the key messages and tone of the campaign.
- **Technology and social media:** Different technological tools and social-media platforms can be used to create and disseminate campaigns. Collaborate with media and communications colleagues as well as youth partners to help pick the right platforms and tools.
- **Outreach and inclusion:** Outreach is essential for the success of the campaign, so bringing on board youth partners with wide networks is one of the best ways to increase outreach. If the campaign takes place online, be sure to consider the digital divide and develop strategies to make the content adaptable to offline or mobile platforms (radio, TV, text message).





FROM START TO FINISH: #YOUTHAGAINSTCOVID19 PARTNERSHIP MODEL

#YouthAgainstCOVID19 was a campaign to teach young people around the world about COVID-19 and what they can do to keep their friends, families and communities safe. Designed as a six-part video series, the campaign featured young people sharing their views on how COVID-19 affected them, how to protect their sexual and mental health, and ways to support each other. Using the platform Prezi Video, the campaign allowed videos made by young people and youth partners around the world to be easily reused.

The campaign was collaborative from the beginning, functioning through a broad participatory platform of youth-led and youth-focused partners for content creation and dissemination. It leveraged Prezi's technology to customize and translate the information to fit the contexts and needs of different groups of young people.

The campaign's success, not only as a communication tool but also as a youth engagement platform, showed the importance of working with youth-led partners at every stage of an initiative, from conception to implementation. It should be noted that the approach also required time and effort from UNFPA to coordinate and facilitate the exchange.

For more information on the campaign, refer to the technical brief on [#YouthAgainstCOVID19](#) (UNFPA, 2020).

→ PROMOTE YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN THE UN AND IN UNFPA

In addition to supporting youth leadership and participation externally, UNFPA walks the talk by supporting youth leadership internally. This means creating an organizational culture that encourages young people to contribute and lead at all levels.

- UNFPA has **fellowships** and other programmes to bring young talent to UNFPA. This is a strategic investment in youth leadership in the broader SRHR space and also creates an entry point for young people who may not meet the formal educational and experience requirements or who otherwise face barriers to employment in the UN system. Many UN leaders and staff entered international development work through such UNFPA programmes.
- The **Young Professionals of African Descent programme**, launched in 2021, aims to hire talented people of African descent aged 32 or younger.
- **Tangerine**, UNFPA's young professionals network, is a dedicated and independent space for young staff. Join the [Tangerine community](#) on MyUNFPA to learn more.
- **Culture change and emphasis on intergenerational leadership:** Through conscious emphasis on intergenerational dialogue and collaboration, UNFPA ensures that young people are empowered within the organization as well as outside.



LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

At the 14th Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2021, UNFPA endorsed and supported the launch of a Global Network of Young Persons with Disabilities to encourage meaningful participation and leadership for young persons with disabilities across the United Nations, anchored in the Youth Strategy 2030 and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The network was launched in partnership with the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of Finland, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Antigua and Barbuda, and with the United Nations secretary-general's envoy on youth, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the UN secretary-general's Disability Inclusion Team.

The Global Network of Young Persons with Disabilities aims to increase the access of young persons with disabilities to the United Nations system, to bridge the gap in participation of young persons with disabilities at all levels of youth and disability-rights advocacy. UNFPA is steering this UN interagency partnership and co-chairs the network. The network is working with UNFPA and its youth networks, such as the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, to ensure that the rights of young persons with disabilities are effectively represented and addressed at regional, national and local levels. The Global Network secretariat is collaborating with the UNFPA Disability Inclusion Team to build the capacity of young persons with disabilities to advocate on critical issues such as access to health and to SRHR, gender-based violence, bodily autonomy, access to technology, the right to work, peacebuilding and humanitarian action.

The Global Network of Young Persons with Disabilities has obtained significant leadership opportunities through partnerships with the UN, such as highlighting the youth with disabilities agenda at the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General through direct dialogue with the DSG, and collaborating with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to include youth in its normative work.





STRENGTHENING YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITHIN UNFPA: WALK THE TALK TRAINING PROGRAMME

Walk the Talk is a training course on youth participation and multi-generational leadership which will also be made available to the wider UN system with reference to the UN Leadership Framework and the 2030 Youth Strategy.

By completing Walk the Talk, UNFPA staff will be able to increase their understanding of meaningful youth participation and inclusivity, both as a programmatic approach and an organizational culture, while also strengthening efficiency and innovation in teamwork as a result of better intergenerational collaboration.



REGIONAL AND COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF YOUNG PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES

The Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECARO) Youth Partner programme builds on the idea of secondment. The youth partner is selected by EECARO's partner youth organizations and develops a programme for a period of 6-11 months, based on their network and personal strengths. The youth partner is selected based on their network with the regional youth community, not their educational attainment or history of employment, so that the potential opportunity is available to any young person from the age of 18.

The Youth Partner programme creates synergies by increasing UNFPA's partnerships and ties with regional youth communities, while providing youth organizations and networks with easy access to the regional office. After each term, the youth partner takes back new ideas and an expanded network, while UNFPA increases reach and engagement with a broader spectrum of organizations.

