

Action Learning Group Cycle #5

Collective Priority Area Topic

Finding, Engaging, and Sustaining New Generations of Youth Leaders in Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR)

February 2023

(Source: YIELD research findings and YIELD Theory of Change)

Young people want to be engaged and contribute to the Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR) field. They are experts in their own lives and have unique insights into the daily realities of their peers and communities. Many are motivated to improve their communities, connect with like-minded peers, or disrupt what they see as broken, unworkable health systems. Yet, evidence shows that not all young people have a voice on issues concerning their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

A YIELD project report on young people advancing sexual and reproductive health: toward new normal reveals how AYSRHR initiatives struggle to recruit young leaders outside of an elite few, typically educated, urban, and economically better off. Demand-led recruitment is the current norm, particularly at the global level, where the field invests heavily in a relatively small number of global champions, allowing for the same individuals to participate in multiple initiatives.

The relative lack of diversity among youth contributors limits the effectiveness of national and global AYSRHR efforts as the few engaged young people may begin to operate primarily at the national and global levels without active contributions and sustained programming in the communities they serve or leave behind.

(YIELD Project Report)

Even the mechanisms for recruiting youth leaders require some form of experience, often making those already engaged in the space have the advantage of selection over others with little exposure. This leaves behind huge groups of strategically positioned young people who need to be engaged and mobilized, and thus the need for the AYSRHR field to become significantly more inclusive, in terms of which adolescents and youth are afforded opportunities to participate in AYSRHR decision-making.

At the YIELD Hub, we believe that for youth partnerships* to be effective, meaningful, and representative of all young people, stakeholders within the AYSRHR field must be willing to identify and engage youth in all their diversity in AYSRHR efforts. This will require the intentional recruitment of youth across diverse identity groups and sociocultural contexts. Youth leaders from the most underserved communities are urgently needed to expand participation in and benefits of youth AYSRHR.

“To engage a diversity of young people, you need to get out of the capital and out of your comfort zone. The same youth leaders get all the opportunities. We intentionally go out into the middle of nowhere to find more local efforts where important change is and can be made. We fail a lot, but we have to keep trying.”

(Young female informant from YIELD project)

Join this collective action learning group to reflect, discuss and learn how stakeholders within the AYSRHR field can strengthen their approach to engage a diverse cross-section of young people, prioritizing the most underserved. The cycle will further explore how to build more sensitive systems for diverse young people and sustain them in programmes.

* The YIELD Hub is using the term “partnership” to reflect the nature of relationships between all actors, including young people. It connotes equitable, mutually respectful, and beneficial relationships that allow stakeholders to work together and make complementary contributions to processes that lead to achieving the Hub’s shared vision.