Unleashing the Power of Action Learning

A practical guide for enhancing youth partnership in Adolescent and Youth SRHR.

YIELD Hub

Introduction

This document is a practical resource that explains how **Collective Action Learning** is implemented at the **YIELD Hub**. Our aim is to help other institutions understand the process of action learning and potentially adapt and/or apply some of its elements and processes to support their own work. By sharing our knowledge and experiences, we hope to inspire and enable others to enhance their practices in improving youth partnership in Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

YIELD Hub Mission

The YIELD Hub improves young people's partnership in **Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** by facilitating action learning processes and influencing norm change. We use action learning to generate innovative solutions to complex problems and to develop new ways for adolescents and youth to get involved in SRHR. We convene and engage SRHR stakeholders to reflect and change practices in ways that support the partnership.

Contents

Defining Collective Action Learning

Action learning is a **collaborative problem-solving process** where people with diverse skill sets work together to analyse problems or goals and develop solutions to those challenges. The group continues to meet as actions are implemented, learning from the implementation and making course corrections based on reflection and learning. Action learning processes can help develop leaders, build teams, solve problems and transform institutions and processes.

Action Learning Principles

Organisational members who join the diverse Action Learning Group (ALG) should be willing and able to share their knowledge, experience, ideas and new learning generated through the collective action learning process with the broader ecosystem of AYSRHR actors. They must also apply new learning in processes of institutional change and progress toward genuinely partnering with youth in implementing AYSRHR efforts.

Only with the agency and power to drive change can group members test the action plans developed and generate knowledge and new solutions that can benefit the field of AYSRHR. Preconditions for effective action learning include:

- Commitment to a spirit of inquiry, honest communication and the group process.

- Humility so that members of groups see each other as equals and can establish trusting relationships.

- Empowerment so that group members have the autonomy and confidence to act on their decisions.

Action Learning Benefits

- A safe space for individual reflective learning.
- Translating learning into action in the workplace.
- Support from peers to learn and unlearn.
- A chance to find creative ways to bring about change.
- Personal, as well as professional, learning and development.
- Insight into how others achieve different solutions and a chance to progress new opportunities and develop new ideas.

Collective Action Learning Approach

The Commitment

We request that the ALG members commit to an estimated time allocation of 6-8 hours/month over a period of **4-6 months**. Each session focuses on a stage of the **5-part cycle: Observe, Assess, Design, Implementation, and Capture.**

The Sessions

Once organisations join a specific cycle topic, the group of representatives meet in structured **90-minute sessions**. During these sessions, group members learn and unlearn from one another and set personal learning goals.

The sessions are designed in **open discussions and group work** format to foster trust building and willingness to collaborate, and share experiences. Organisations reflect on what works and what doesn't, allowing them to be responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of the individuals and communities they serve, especially, young people.

The Action Learning Diary

All the members are provided with a digital Action Learning diary at the beginning of the cycle. The diary guides **personal reflection and growth.**

As members progress through the action learning sessions, from Observe to Capture, the diary becomes a repository of their personal reflections of their journey. It allows them to document their thoughts after meetings, outline the actions they plan to take, record new learnings, determine steps for implementation, and identify key individuals within their institution for further engagement.

Action Learning Roles

Action Learning Facilitator

- Manages the overall process of action learning cycles.
- 'Holds the process' and ensures the focus remains on learning about the topic for the session.
- Defines the action learning meeting agenda, assists in scheduling meetings and structures the discussions.
- Provides one-on-one support for action learning members in-between sessions.
- Facilitates inclusive engagement and manages power dynamics across and between group members.

Content Capturer

- Participates in action learning meetings as a neutral contributor and note-taker.
- Supports distillation and packaging of new insights and learning that emerge from action learning cycles, and shares with group members after every stage of the cycle.

Pre-Action Learning Planning

1. Develop an **Action Learning brief** that describes the priority issue/topic and identifies specific action learning statements for a group to build on and refine.

2. Set clear criteria for the profile of learning cycle participants by developing detailed **Terms of Reference.**

3. Ensure the membership in the TOR is focused on institutional representatives, decision-makers, and field influencers.

4. Prepare a welcome kit including documents containing, a **summary paper on collective priority area topic**, '**ways of working**', **learning diaries**, and planning templates.

See marked '**guides**' below for samples of the highlighted documents.

Action Learning Group Cycle #4

Collective Priority Area Topic
Capacity Development For Youth Transition: How can organizations support youth leaders to age up and not out?

February 2023

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

> "I am growing tired of exclusively being seen and treated as a young person and only engaged on issues as they relate to youth. I have gained experience and expertise on a range of issues and want to transition to other kinds of roles."
>
> (Young male informant from YIELD project).

Any definition of "youth" is intrinsically inadequate, as the experience of adolescence and young adulthood is as varied and diverse as young people themselves. This experience is conditioned by power and dynamics related to gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and other shapers of personal identity.

However, young people who participate in Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR) efforts experience engagement limitations based on their age. Many questions abound for organizations on how to ensure that youth leaders have ongoing access to mentors and professional accompaniment to prepare them to better transition into diverse fields of work within the AYSRHR ecosystem. At the YIELD Hub, we believe in strengthening youth partnerships* in the AYSRHR for beneficial relationships. Thus, we must continue exploring how AYSRHR stakeholders can initiate support mechanisms and processes to build young people's capabilities to transition to professional roles.

To achieve this, stakeholders within the AYSRHR must have a broader view and perspective of what youth participation is about. That is, understanding that youth participation is not only about engaging young people as partners or leaders but necessarily develops from a broad, foundational base, including providing relevant skills (capabilities) and opportunities to apply them (agency). When young people have the relevant skills and opportunities, they age up into professional roles within the AYSRHR ecosystem and not age out.

Stakeholders within the AYSRHR must continue providing training to build youth knowledge, skills, and capabilities. However, they must move a step further by intentionally designing and fostering supportive environments that allow young people to exercise their agency and apply their knowledge, skills, and capabilities in more professional and paid roles, thus becoming genuine contributors to AYSRHR efforts in the long term. In the absence of such a transition, youth aging out affects the stability of youth-led organizations and their adult allies.

At the YIELD Hub, we researched this topic and had young people speak out about what they want. In our report on [young people advancing sexual and reproductive health: toward a new normal](#), the youth seek more answers on how they can transition into professional roles. They want to be more than "youth experts." Young people want to use their evolving skills to participate in AYSRHR efforts in more diverse ways, reinforcing the need to provide training that exposes young people to specialized competencies and allows them to build skills that prepare them to lead their own initiatives or assume influential organizational positions.

Join this collective action learning group to reflect, discuss and learn how stakeholders within the AYSRHR field can deliver ongoing layered approaches that build young people's personal, technical, and functional capabilities – and enable them to transition into professional opportunities. The group will understand, from other organizations' experiences, how to better support young people to take up leadership roles. What does the process look like? How do we usher the change in mindsets? How do we operationalize it?

* 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.

Action Learning Groups

Ways of Working

The YIELD Collective Action Learning Hub is committed to making Action Learning Group participation a safe space and mutually beneficial process for everyone, both online and offline. We ask that all Action Learning Group participants uphold these agreements during and after participation in Action LearningGroup-related activities.

Principles for Action Learning

Because our work is change-oriented, there is no doubt that tensions and disagreements may surface in the course of our work together.

In cases where disagreements arise, we agree to take care to,

- Critique the idea, not the person.
- Actively listen and understand before formulating a response.
- Not to advise in response to a dilemma. Instead, frame helpful questions to enable the other to come to their own solution.
- Speak for yourself and avoid generalizing.

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VALUES

BEHAVIOUR (Orientation & Attitude)

Power sharing

We are conscious of power and authority. Our structures and communication support meaningful involvement and decision-making to enhance mutual accountability. Every member of our action learning group has autonomy and equal rights. Their experiences, expertise, and agency is recognized and appreciated.

Co-creation & joint ownership

We work together to create new resources and encourage our members to share resources, policies, and other materials and tools to ensure effective action learning and collaborations.

Collaboration & Coordination

We actively encourage sharing new learnings and experiences, developing joint initiatives and activities as part of the outcomes of action learning cycles.

Mutual reflection & Learning support

We encourage learning from each other's work experiences and invite members to share what they can offer (e.g., knowledge, networks, skills, resources)

Diversity & Inclusion

We are conscious of diversity and inclusion. We work to ensure all our activities and structures are representative of our members and, in particular, ensure accessibility, inclusion, and participation of young people within our action learning cycles.

Communication & Feedback

We believe that clear communication is vital. Thus, we work to ensure transparency across all platforms and encourage our members to respond to communications and share feedback for continuous improvement.

No Harassment

Our online and offline work is a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, race, ethnicity, religion (or lack thereof), or technology choices.

Action Learning Diary

This diary is for individual members to use as a guide for their work between moments of engagement with the collective action learning group.

OBSERVE		
Guiding questions to explore before and between moments of engagement with ALG.	**What actions do you want to take before the next meeting?**	**What are you learning or what changes are you seeing as a result of your actions?**
How does what we are coming together to address show up in my work? Who within my organisation/partners can play a role in addressing this? Who else do I need to engage to address this within my work? What do my colleagues and I think are the most important learnings/ problems we wish to address and take action on?		

Action Learning Diary

ASSESS		
Guiding questions to explore before and between moments of engagement with ALG.	**What actions do you want to take before the next meeting?**	**What are you learning or what changes are you seeing as a result of your actions?**
Who, what, and how might I go about addressing this within my sphere of influence? What do I need from others? What does success look like from my vantage point?		

DESIGN		
Guiding questions to explore before and between moments of engagement with ALG.	**What actions do you want to take before the next meeting?**	**What are you learning or what changes are you seeing as a result of your actions?**
Who has direct control or influence on what I want to do AND when do I want to do it or take action? Where will I get the resources if I need any? How long do I think it will take to see change/outcome? Is this short or long-term?		

The Action Learning Process

Orientation
For introductions, overview, logistics & preparation.

Observe
To identify problem & reflect on relevance to work context.

Assess
To assess problem and understand causes & implications.

Capture
To capture and share findings for feedback and further support.

Implement
To take action and address the issue in real-time.

Design
To co-design action plans, set goals & assign responsibilities.

Orientation

Before the cycle begins, we conduct an orientation session to familiarise ALG members with each other, **introduce them to the YIELD Hub and team, and provide information about the ALG's ways of working and meeting logistics.** During this session, we facilitate brief discussions to help group members understand how their individual work is connected to the action learning topic and emphasise the importance of their commitment to the process.

It is crucial for ALG members to recognise that Action Learning is both a methodology and a disciplined process. Throughout the journey, they are encouraged to ask meaningful questions, actively listen, refrain from giving advice, create space for individuals to express themselves, and remain dedicated to the process.

The ultimate goal for orientation is to make sure ALG members are ready and committed to the process and journey that will contribute effectively to the work they aim to deliver for young people, their institutions, and the broader field of AYSRHR.

Observe

The cycle's first step is identifying the problem or issue. This involves recognising the complexities and nuances within the organisations' work and understanding how the action learning topic shows up in their work and within the broader field of AYSRHR.

The ALG members are expected to come prepared to be open, reflective and engaging during the session discussions, with guidance from the facilitator.

Guiding questions:

- What are we coming together to address?
- How does this show up in the AYSRHR field?
- How does this show up in your work?
- What does the field need to do/learn more about?
- What areas would you like to address through collective action learning?

Assess

The second step is to assess or analyse the issue. The group analyses the identified problem from different cross-stakeholder perspectives. This involves gathering relevant data, reflecting on current contextual practices, and examining the root causes and underlying factors contributing to the problem.

The group is then introduced to how they can begin to develop **action learning statements** or what we call problem statements to give them clarity on what specific challenges within the action learning topic they want to address. By defining a problem statement, members of an action learning group can identify what they want to learn about the problem and what actions they want to take during and after action learning.

Guiding questions:

- What is the issue or challenge?
- How is it relevant to our work?
- Could you tell us a little more about it?
- How is the issue important to your organisation?
- What have you done in the past about this?
- What happens if you do nothing?
- Who else would like to see progress on this issue?
- Who would benefit if you solved this problem?
- What time frame can this be done?

Note* The facilitator does not give advice or present solutions to people's thinking and only helps them to reflect and asks clarifying questions.

Design Support

Framing Action Learning goals is a vital part of the action-learning process. It involves defining the desired progress or change an institution wants to achieve, focusing on its learning goals and the activities required to implement them. To assist in this process, we collaborate with our partners at the **HCDExchange**, a Knowledge Hub dedicated to utilising human-centered design (HCD) to enhance sexual and reproductive health needs and rights for youth.

The HCDExchange team works closely with our action learning group members, conducting group workshops and individual follow-ups to help them effectively formulate their action-learning goals. Their support helps:

- To embed human-centered mindsets and approaches to support the action learning cycle Design phase.

- To share templates and approaches for identifying your challenge, generating and prioritising ideas, and validating them with your team/ stakeholders to gain organizational/institutional buy-in of your learning goals/ activities.

- For group members to outline their process of defining achievable and focused learning goals and activities.

HCD EXCHANGE

The HCD Team listen attentively to the ALG members, understand their needs and challenges, and provide guidance and tools to frame goals that effectively help members address institutional and broader challenges within the AYSRHR field. This support involves analysing the current state of the issues the group wants to address, identifying specific areas of challenge, and envisioning the desired outcome (success).

The members then proceed to develop their action learning goals using the "How Might We" approach, which involves framing statements like **"How might we... [describe the action we want to pursue] + [identify the area we want to address] + to [state the goal] + for [specify the target users]?"**

YIELD Hub's Action Learning Cycle
Design Phase

Action Learning is a method that brings small groups of people together to meet over time and address challenges they are facing as individuals or at an organisational level. It is a space for learning, sharing and reflecting with the objective to create tangible change.

Action Learning Objectives

1

The YIELD Hub aims to explore learning topics to develop new and creative ways for adolescents and youth to get involved in AYSRHR by bringing together a group of individuals that can learn and reflect to create tangible change within their own organisations.
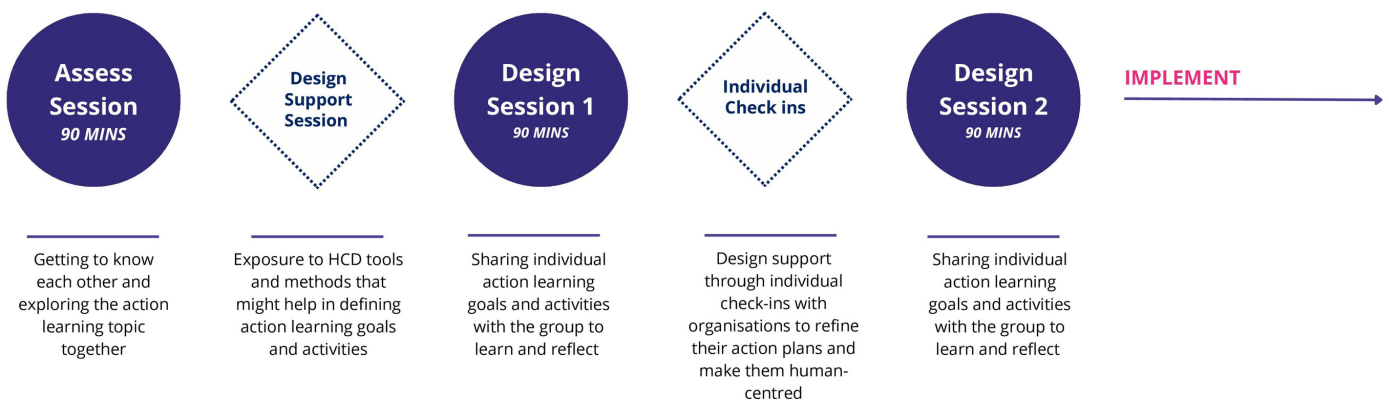
As individuals learn so does the group and they engage with each other to not only refine their own understanding and action plans but also contribute to others in the group
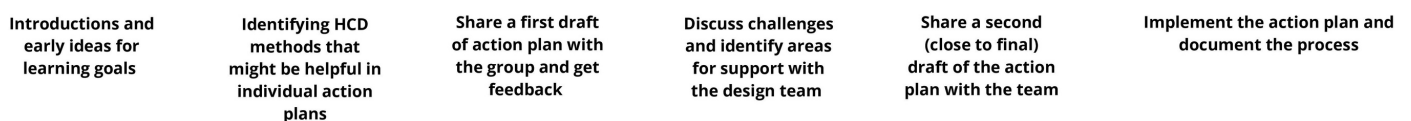
2

Each organisation will work on individual action plans through the course of the action learning cycle. The hope is that these action plans are ready to be implemented within organisations to address challenges related to the topic being explored.

Design Phase Process & Outcomes

PROCESS

Assess Session *90 MINS*	**Design Support Session**	**Design Session 1** *90 MINS*	**Individual Check ins**	**Design Session 2** *90 MINS*	**IMPLEMENT**
Getting to know each other and exploring the action learning topic together	Exposure to HCD tools and methods that might help in defining action learning goals and activities	Sharing individual action learning goals and activities with the group to learn and reflect	Design support through individual check-ins with organisations to refine their action plans and make them human-centred	Sharing individual action learning goals and activities with the group to learn and reflect	

OUTCOMES

Introductions and early ideas for learning goals	Identifying HCD methods that might be helpful in individual action plans	Share a first draft of action plan with the group and get feedback	Discuss challenges and identify areas for support with the design team	Share a second (close to final) draft of the action plan with the team	Implement the action plan and document the process

YIELD Hub

HCD EXCHANGE

Design

Each ALG member develops or co-designs an action plan to address the issue from their organisation's perspective, through 2 Design sessions.

DESIGN I

Each organisation presents an overview of their action learning statements and rationale (how does this fit into the work they are doing/want to do?). Based on the analysis, a plan of action is developed to address the problem. This usually involves **setting specific goals, determining strategies, and assigning responsibilities to individuals or teams within the organisation.** Through this step, the organisations can begin to take concrete steps towards resolving the issue, and the group help each other refine their action learning plans.

Questions for open discussion:

- Do you (presenting org) have any questions for the group about your goals/plans?

- What is the current situation?

- What does change look like?

- How is Human Centred Design integrated in your work?

- What might prevent you from taking action?

Questions to consider:
- Have any other group members done something like this in their organisation/work? What kinds of experiences, lessons, and learning can you share?
- Can you suggest others in your networks who are doing this kind of work - or who have done it?
- Do you know of specific resources - technical, human, etc. that could be helpful to the presenter's process?

Through these considerations, we determine;
1. Where the complementarities are in the group-shared action learning plans/processes and consider opportunities for learning exchange among members and, where necessary, external experts.
2. How can the group help support each organisation in the process?

DESIGN II

This session takes place 4 weeks after the first, to give the members time to explore how to **operationalise their implementation plans, identify opportunities and barriers**, etc.

During this session, we also look at what group and YIELD Hub support will look like during the three-month period of implementation.

Questions for open discussion:

- What questions/issues do members need to address in their own organisations to be able to move forward with plans?
- What are the opportunities and barriers?
- How to address barriers (at the org level and through the collective process)?
- Which piece(s) is each core member organisation holding and how do they come together to address the collective action learning problem/issue?
- How does the change in my work promote change in the system/field?

Implementation

ALG members begin to address issues in real time according to their respective action plans. Beyond implementation, this involves monitoring and evaluating the progress and impact of the actions taken, with support from the YIELD Hub team and other ALG members with available resources. This also allows organisations to assess whether the implemented strategies are effective or if adjustments need to be made.

In this 2-4 month period, the following is offered;
- Regular 1:1 calls to review progress and support (every 3-4 weeks by Action Learning facilitator).
- Regular (per request) optional troubleshooting, sharing, and reflection sessions for members to meet and discuss progress.
- Opportunities for the group to identify, share, and address Implementation Phase actions, learning, challenges, changes including co-hosting webinars with YIELD Hub, and co-writing blogs with us.
- One-on-one interviews for content development (two interviews where we focus on action learning experience and implementation experience).

Capture & Closing

The final step is to learn from the outcomes. Group members capture and share their findings with the ALG members for feedback and further analysis. Through reflection and discussion, the organisation identifies key lessons learned from the actions taken. This step helps organisations to understand what worked, what did not, and why. It enables them to build knowledge and develop insights to inform future actions and decision-making. Members also define individually and together if/what/how they will continue to build on what they started through their individual and collective cycle processes.

Post-Cycle Activities

We know that not every institution will have the time and capacity to join our action-learning process, but that does not prevent them from gaining knowledge and benefiting from the experiences and outcomes of the action-learning process. That is why we have an activation process that ensures that all the YIELD Hub staff, Advisory Board, action learning group members, and other relevant stakeholders, including our donors, extensively share the various learnings and experiences that are packaged from our action learning process.

We also use various means such as webinars, learning forums, submitting abstracts for conferences, co-organizing or hosting events, and podcast to ensure learning outcomes are being shared across the broader ecosystem of AYSRHR work.

Contact Us

Want to learn more about this resource?

Contact us: **info@yieldhub.global** OR check out our website: **www.yieldhub.global** for other useful resources.

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