

Sustainable Financing for Youth-led Organisations: Exploring the Challenges and Possibilities

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When provided with sustainable funding support, young people can challenge harmful norms, advocate for institutional and legislative reforms, and drive positive transformations in the field of Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Despite this potential, many youth-led organisations encounter substantial barriers to fair access and distribution of funding, both globally and nationally. This funding barrier restricts the possibilities for young people to innovate new ideas and expand successful initiatives.

The situation is even worse for youth-led organisations and initiatives based in the Global South, which often have limited financial resources and face legislative and institutional barriers to exist. Findings of the Global Survey of Youth-Led Organisations revealed that **an overwhelming portion of the funds available for development and activism in the Global South go to long-established Northern organisations, while the majority of youth-led organisations in the Global South operate with under USD 5,000 annually.***

"If we make youth-led and youth-serving organisations sustainable and youth workers free of constant fundraising worries, we'd make the youth work sector more resilient to global challenges, free to innovate and follow young people's needs"

Action Learning Groups Lead at YIELD Hub

Key Barriers to Accessing Youth Funding**

1. Global funding for youth engagement and youth programming, which includes support for youth-led organizations and initiatives, is significantly inadequate. This leads to a persistent lack of resources for young people to achieve long-term impact. Where funding is made available, it is often seed funding, which prevents these organizations from scaling up their work.
2. Youth-led organisations operating in the Global South have limited domestic funding from governments and non-state actors, including the private sector, to support youth engagement in programs and initiatives.
3. Funding practices for youth-led organisations are often problematic. They tend to be tokenistic, rooted in a lack of trust for youth leaders and founders, and based on power imbalances and administrative processes that are harmful and not realistic for youth.
4. Youth-led organisations often struggle to meet strict eligibility criteria and requirements set by funders, which further limits their access to financial support. These may include having a certain number of years of operation, a specific legal structure, or extensive reporting and evaluation mechanisms.

At the YIELD Hub, we are dedicated to improving youth partnership*** in Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). This involves advancing practical cross-stakeholder learning to ensure that stakeholders (donors, governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and other key partners) in the SRHR field, have access to knowledge, resources, and a platform for learning the best ways to secure funding for youth.

We extend an invitation to youth-led organisations, youth-serving organisations, international non-governmental organisations, researchers, and donors to participate in our upcoming collective action learning cycle. Together, we will learn, reflect, review existing resources and collaborate with other stakeholders in the field to design practical solutions for addressing institutional and field-wide challenges to secure sustainable financing for youth-led and youth-serving organisations.

* Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peacebuilding, The Hague.

** Barriers to accessing funding: <https://womendeliver.org/eyecl/books/wd/chap03/>

*** 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.