



HCD EXCHANGE



YIELD Hub

Blending Action Learning and HCD

Presenting a Use Case from Yield
Hub and HCDExchange



The YIELD Hub enhances young people's engagement in Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR) by facilitating action learning processes and influencing norm change. It builds on five years of research and broad stakeholder engagement on adolescent and youth partnerships in SRHR. The YIELD Project (2017-2021) was initially established as Youth Investment, Engagement, Leadership, and Development. It was part of a global research effort that synthesized evidence and insights from youth advocates, young leaders, non-youth practitioners, implementers, researchers, and funders. Since 2022, the YIELD Hub has applied 'action learning,' a problem-solving approach that generates innovative solutions to complex challenges, to develop meaningful ways for adolescents and youth to engage in AYSRHR. Communication and outreach efforts, partner convenings, and advocacy initiatives support this work.



Action Learning is a reflection-based problem-solving approach in which small groups collaborate to address real, complex challenges while emphasizing continuous learning and development. It involves two key dimensions of learning: programmed knowledge and insightful questioning. Programmed knowledge refers to existing information or expertise, which may come from books, experts, or other sources. Insightful questioning involves posing thought-provoking questions that challenge assumptions and encourage deeper exploration. By integrating these elements with action-oriented problem-solving, action learning strengthens decision-making while fostering individual and team growth through reflection, inquiry, and iterative action.

The HCDEXchange is JSI's technical hub for human-centered design (HCD), advancing locally-led HCD in public health in Africa and Asia. The HCDEXchange worked with the YIELD Hub to support the organizations participating in Yield Hub's Action Learning Cycle by integrating HCD methods, processes, and skills-building activities within the Action Learning Cycle.



HCD is a methodical and collaborative process used to integrate human needs, perspectives, and preferences into every problem-solving stage. It is used to design products, systems, services, or other solutions usable and desirable for the people they are intended to serve. The HCD process consists of specific steps, tools, and mindsets that guide participants in co-creating solutions with those most affected by the challenge. It also considers other stakeholders and contextual factors that may influence the success of a solution

Combining **Action Learning** and **HCD** creates a powerful, structured approach to problem-solving, particularly for addressing complex challenges that involve people, processes, and systems. These challenges are rarely straightforward, requiring iterative learning and adaptability to generate meaningful solutions.

Action Learning emphasizes reflective learning through action, allowing teams to solve real problems while simultaneously developing skills and knowledge. **HCD**, on the other hand, employs an iterative, user-centered approach that ensures solutions are continuously tested, evaluated, and refined based on feedback from those who will use them. When integrated, these approaches enhance each other: Action Learning strengthens HCD by fostering deeper reflection, exploration, and iteration, while HCD enhances Action Learning by providing structured tools to bring in user perspectives and encourage more insightful questioning.

While HCD focuses on designing solutions that fit specific user contexts, Action Learning promotes responsiveness by embedding reflection into the process. This allows practitioners to adapt dynamically to emerging challenges. Together, these methods enable teams to remain agile, assess the impact of their actions, and refine their approaches based on real-time user feedback.

Diagram 1: Value additions of Action Learning and HCD to the problem-solving process

How do Action Learning and HCD contribute to problem-solving?

ACTION LEARNING Unpack, Reflect, Clarify

Facilitates thinking with people who may be addressing similar challenges

Provides a process to unpack, reflect, plan

Creates space to share and reflect on the challenge and thereby unpack the problem.

Reflection-based thinking is encouraged through questions posed by like-minded individuals facing similar challenges.

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN Understand, Engage, Iterate

Facilitates thinking with the humans most impacted by the challenge

Provides tools and methods to be more human-centered

Provides methods to learn together with relevant stakeholders impacted by the challenge or impacting the challenge.

Iterative learning is facilitated by taking action in the real context and improving the solutions through learnings that emerge

Moreover, Action Learning’s emphasis on team-based learning - drawing from diverse perspectives to address challenges collectively - aligns well with HCD’s collaborative design techniques, such as co-creation and brainstorming. Integrating HCD within Action Learning ensures teams remain user-focused while strengthening internal teamwork and problem-solving capacity.

In addition, Action Learning’s cyclical process of action, feedback, and reflection closely mirrors HCD’s design cycle of empathizing, prototyping, and testing. By integrating reflection into iterative design, teams can accelerate learning, make insights immediately actionable, and drive continuous innovation. This synergy not only strengthens problem-solving quality but also enhances solutions' adaptability and sustainability in dynamic contexts.

An integrated approach to problem solving - Action Learning + HCD

Action Learning Initiation

Starting the reflective process



Collaborative Reflection

Engaging with peers for diverse insights



Stakeholder Engagement

Involving relevant parties for comprehensive understanding



Problem Unpacking

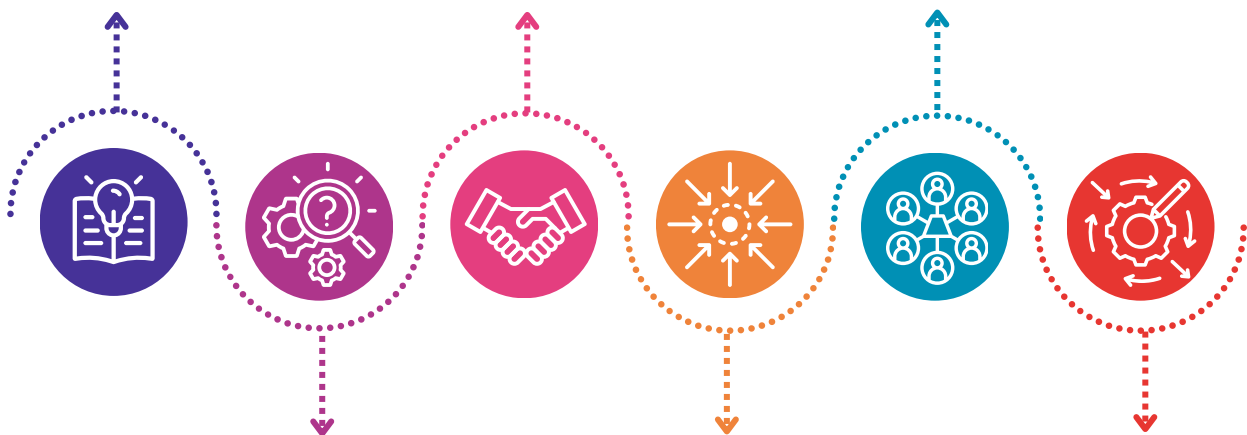
Analyzing and breaking down the challenge

Human-Centered Design Initiation

Focusing on the needs of impacted individuals

Iterative Learning

Adapting solutions based on real-world feedback



Please note that while the process diagram is linear, the integration of Action Learning and HCD may not always be linear. More often than not, processes will be customized to the use case.

The YIELD Hub x HCDEExchange Case

Action Learning Groups (ALGs) follow a structured five-stage cycle over seven months, beginning with orientation and observation to explore broader challenges and their relevance to participants' work. In the assessment and design phase, members refine problem statements, develop actionable goals, and assign responsibilities while integrating feedback from peers and stakeholders. The implementation phase spans three months, during which organizations put their plans into action with ongoing support and capacity-building to navigate real-time challenges.

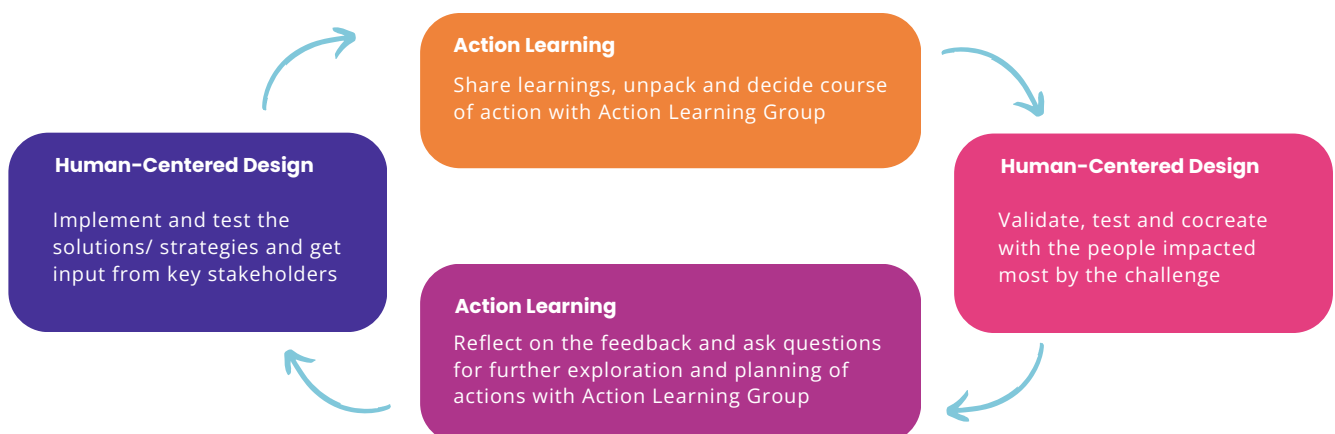
A core objective of Action Learning is to foster reflective learning and continuous improvement. Throughout the cycle, participants engage in regular reflection - from identifying problems to evaluating the outcomes of their actions. The final stage, capture and closing, focuses on consolidating lessons learned, identifying successes and challenges, and co-creating resources such as toolkits, policy recommendations, and advocacy strategies. By integrating collaborative problem-solving, capacity-building, and iterative learning, Action Learning strengthens the ability of individuals and institutions to drive sustainable, impactful solutions that advance AYSRHR goals.

Integrating HCD into the Action Learning Process

The HCDEExchange enhances the Action Learning cycle by equipping participants with HCD tools and frameworks that help integrate perspectives from key stakeholders within their organizations. This allows cycle members to co-create problem statements, action learning goals, and implementation plans in a participatory manner. They then bring these insights back to their Action Learning Groups to share, reflect, and refine their approaches through deeper questioning and exploration.

While Action Learning encourages participants to reflect on shared challenges with their peers collectively, HCD enables them to take action within their organizations, ensuring they are not working in silos. This dynamic interplay between structured group reflection and active stakeholder engagement creates a continuous cycle of action, feedback, and refinement. This approach enhances the development and implementation of strategies and solutions, ensuring they are grounded in user needs while remaining adaptive and responsive to evolving challenges.

Diagram 2: Action Learning Cycle and HCD process as implemented for Yield Hub



Testimonials/Stories from Action Learning Cycle



YouthKommunity is a membership-based organization dedicated to inspiring young people, building their capacities, and fostering community development. Rooted in the belief that youth and their communities are deeply interconnected, the organization focuses on harnessing the natural drive of young people to create meaningful change in their environments. By providing opportunities for and with youth, YouthKommunity cultivates leadership, collaboration, and innovation.

Youth Kommunity's goal was to develop a youth-led organization with functional governance, financial, and communication systems that support their staff to provide them with appropriate compensation and opportunities for growth. They planned to execute this in a year and a half (18 months). They wanted this to enable the organization to create strong internal structures to enhance the quality delivery of all programs/initiatives, promote the well-being of their staff, and strengthen values of humanity and empowerment, ultimately leading to the sustainable financing of the organization.

Through the Action Learning Cycle, Youth Kommunity identified its problem statement, which hinged on the lack of core funding for the organization, resources to build on the governance, and internal structures, which led to dependence on and undervaluation of youth volunteers. Through reflection-based support during the Action Learning Cycle and design support sessions, Youth Kommunity concluded that the first step to addressing their problem statement would be to implement internal governance and financing systems to support their volunteers effectively and sustain financing for their programs.



"As a Youth Development Specialist, my work centers on meaningful adolescents and youth engagement. Ensuring that young people are adequately compensated for their time, skills, and efforts to improve their wellbeing beyond engaging them in all aspects of programming. The Action Learning Group session was timely. It allowed my team and I to engage and shape the organizational governance system and develop guidelines and strategies. We were introduced to new learnings through a design support team (HCDEXchange) to further shape our engagements with young people in all aspects of programming and establishing partnerships that center on meaningfully engaging young people to co-create solutions on SRHR, education, climate action, gender equality and beyond."

**Francis Oko Armah, Co-Founder & Executive Director,
YouthKommunity.Org.**



Grassroot Soccer is an adolescent health organization that leverages the power of soccer to equip young people with the life-saving information, services, and mentorship they need to live healthier lives.

Grassroot Soccer's (GRS) goal was to promote a sustainable model for Coach recruitment and training to ensure that GRS Coaches develop personally and professionally. This, coupled with an ideal Coach journey, would see them utilizing optimal time within GRS to prepare them for future employability opportunities. If GRS can do this, coaches will be motivated, retained, and able to level up and transition within and beyond the GRS system.

Through reflections on the Action Learning Cycle and HCD support, the GRS team engaged in discussions with their coaches to better understand their challenges. They found that the monthly stipend often barely covered essential needs, leading to frustration and high attrition rates, particularly among coaches with broader networks or higher educational qualifications. As a result, the organization had to repeatedly invest in re-training new volunteers while overburdening the remaining coaches to fill the gaps. To address this, GRS set out to design an ideal coach journey that incorporated meaningful opportunities for growth and learning. This included access to short online courses, shadowing opportunities within GRS to gain deeper insights and support for abstract submissions and applications for sponsorships or fellowships.



"Grassroot Soccer was honored to participate in YIELD Hub's Action Learning Cycle 8 in 2024. At Grassroot Soccer, our Coaches who implement our programs and serve as trusted mentors to young people are at the center of everything we do. In taking lessons on youth transition from the YIELD Hub, we have intentionally devoted time and resources to heightening meaningful Coach involvement in all our interventions. This helps us promote a sustainable coach recruitment and training model to ensure our coaches' personal and professional growth. As a result of this model, our Coaches will be better skilled, more employable, and ready to transition within and beyond Grassroot Soccer."

**Blessed Bukhosi Gumbi,
Program Support Manager, Grassroot Soccer.**



YoSHAN is a young feminist organization protecting the right to bodily autonomy of all people through discourses and actions on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights.

YoSHAN's goal was to secure sustainable funding of \$10,000 through partnerships, grants, fundraising events, and donations by October 2025 to ensure members' compensation and the organization's effective operation. They aimed to enhance members' fundraising capacity, motivation, and engagement with youth champions in SRHR movement building through this.

Through the Action Learning Cycle, Yoshan engaged with other cycle members to explore the challenge of sustainable funding and its impact on youth participation and overall organizational efficiency. In developing their action plan, they identified the need for a structured outreach strategy and capacity-building efforts to strengthen team members' fundraising skills. YoSHAN aims to secure sustainable funding and enhance long-term organizational stability by establishing essential systems and processes for effective fundraising.



"Engaging with the Action Learning Groups at YIELD Hub has been an enriching experience, especially for gaining valuable insights into youth's structural challenges in the AYSRHR field, particularly around fair compensation and developing compensation models for youth. The discussions allowed me to learn from diverse perspectives and critically engage with issues surrounding equitable compensation, power dynamics, and inclusion. I'm especially motivated to implement sustainable funding strategies within Yoshan to secure resources that ensure fair compensation for youths, fostering their engagement, capacity-building, and long-term commitment to SRHR advocacy."

Pushpa Joshi,
Cofounder/BOD, YoSHAN (Youth-Led Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Advocacy Nepal)

What are future areas of work this methodology could contribute to?

Integrating Action Learning and HCD offers significant opportunities to address complex challenges beyond AYSRH. These methodologies promote participatory learning, problem-solving, and solution development, making them applicable across sectors where young people and communities play a central role.

1. Exploring the Intersection of AYSRHR and Other Development Issues

Action Learning and HCD can provide new insights and solutions in areas where AYSRHR intersects with other pressing issues:

- ➔ **Climate Change and AYSRHR** - Exploring how environmental changes affect access to SRHR services and shape young people's reproductive choices.
- ➔ **Youth Employment and AYSRHR** - Understanding how access to comprehensive SRHR information and services enables young people to make informed health decisions, plan for their futures, and participate fully in economic opportunities.
- ➔ **Mental Health and Well-being** - Examining the link between psychosocial well-being and SRHR outcomes and designing integrated solutions that support young people's mental health.

These methodologies are particularly valuable in emerging or complex issue areas, where structured reflection and iterative learning help organizations identify challenges and develop innovative, context-driven solutions.

2. Research and co-design for programming in communities

A combined Action Learning and HCD approach can serve as an effective research and co-design methodology for community-driven programming by:

- ➔ **Promoting Collaborative Innovation** - Engaging community members in co-designing and testing solutions ensures that interventions are practical, relevant, and sustainable.
- ➔ **Embedding Continuous Improvement** - Iterative cycles of Action Learning (reflection) and HCD (innovation) enable ongoing feedback, adaptation, and refinement.
- ➔ **Strengthening Community Ownership** - Deep stakeholder engagement in learning and design fosters long-term adoption and local solutions leadership.

3. Strengthening Virtual and In-Person Convenings

Action Learning and HCD can enhance engagement and problem-solving in various convening formats:

- ➔ **Conferences and Workshops**
Facilitating structured analysis, co-creation, and action planning among stakeholders.
- ➔ **Peer Learning Sessions**
Supporting organizations refining strategies based on shared experiences and real-time problem-solving.

By embedding interactive methodologies, convenings can move beyond discussion to generate practical, implementable solutions.

4. Capacity-building for Organizations and Youth Networks

Organizations can apply Action Learning and HCD in training programs to:

- ➔ **Develop problem-solving and leadership skills among youth-led organizations.**
- ➔ **Strengthen participatory learning models that equip communities with tools to drive their change.**
- ➔ **Ensure training is action-oriented and adaptive, integrating iterative learning and reflection to address real-world challenges.**

This structured approach moves beyond traditional training methods, fostering dynamic learning that is responsive, applied, and participatory.

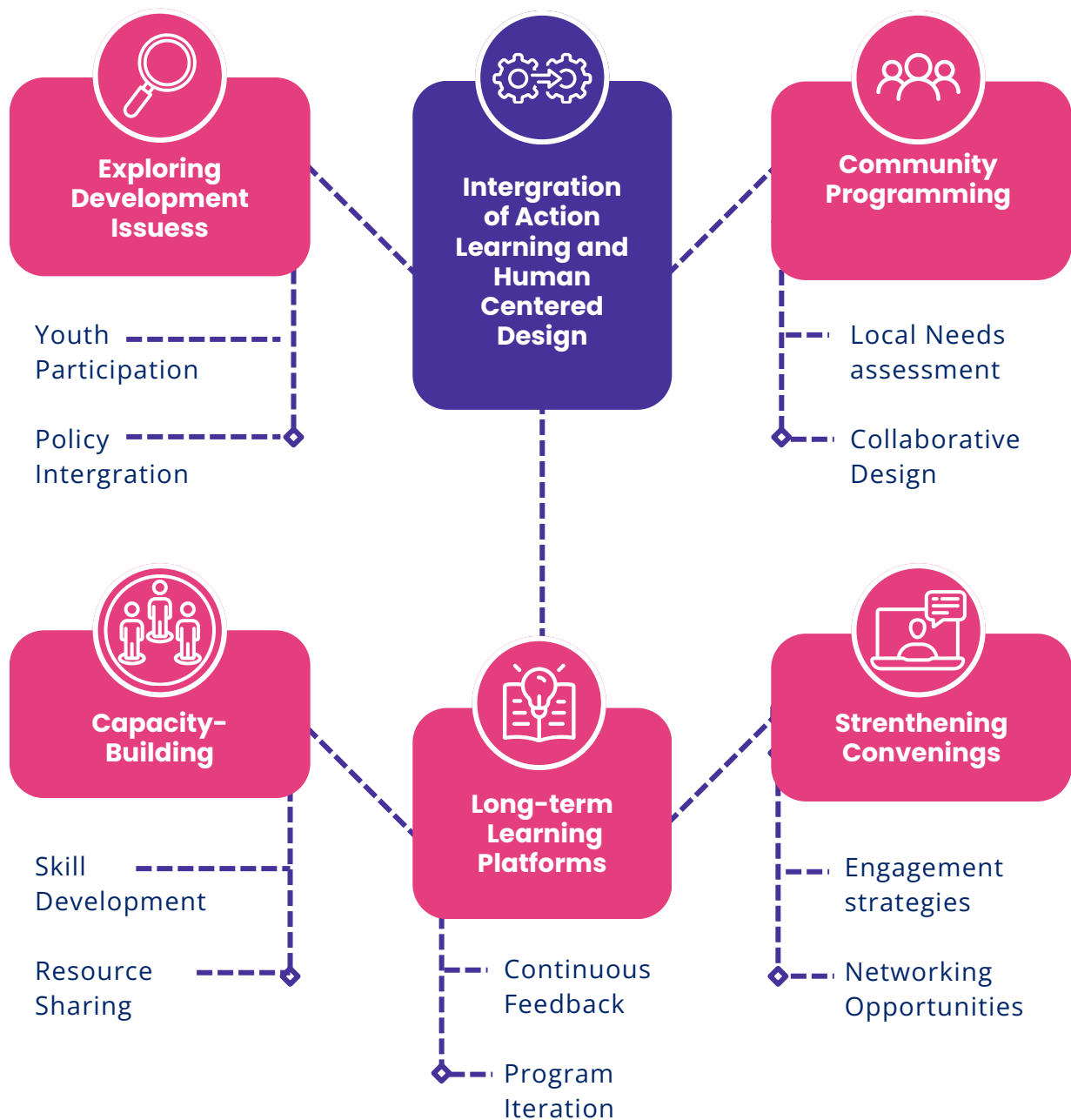
5. Enhancing Long-term Learning Platforms and Adaptive Program Design

HCD and Action Learning can support ongoing learning and adaptation within long-term projects and multi-year initiatives by:

- ➔ **Providing a framework for continuous reflection, feedback, and knowledge-sharing.**
- ➔ **Creating spaces for practitioners, funders, and implementers to refine strategies based on emerging insights.**
- ➔ **Supporting funders and INGOs in embedding adaptive learning cycles to ensure programs remain relevant and practical.**

By integrating these methodologies into broader contexts, organizations can foster innovation, strengthen collaboration, and increase the impact of programs designed for young people and their communities.

Future Applications of Intergrated Methodologies



Conclusion

The increasing complexity of SRH challenges underscores the transformative potential of combining HCD and Action Learning. This collaboration between YIELD Hub and HCDEExchange demonstrates how integrating these approaches fosters deep reflection, adaptability, and solutions that are truly centered on young people's needs and aspirations. By embedding empathy, inclusivity, and iterative learning, this method offers a fresh perspective and renewed optimism for SRH initiatives.

This integration sets a new standard for SRH programming, ensuring that solutions are designed with tact, creativity, and flexibility to address young people's diverse and evolving needs. By combining Action Learning's emphasis on reflection and iterative progress with HCD's focus on co-creation and user-driven insights, we have developed a practical, real-time model that responds effectively to the complexities of SRH. More importantly, it empowers young people and their communities to co-create solutions that reflect their lived experiences, drive meaningful, lasting change, and inspire hope for a more equitable future.

Beyond refining approaches, this vision represents a shift toward sustainable, responsive, and scalable SRH solutions. By amplifying youth voices and supporting their active participation in shaping health systems and services, this methodology creates a clear blueprint for addressing evolving SRH challenges. Its adaptability ensures that future generations will benefit from inclusive, impactful solutions that continue to evolve alongside their needs.