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STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH TRANSITION

Lessons from Jhpiego and Copper Rose Zambia

Developed from:

YIELD Hub's Action Learning Cycle 8 on
Capacity Development for Youth Transition

Prepared by:

Dr. Mable Kipenda, Meghan Greeley, Nedah C. Musonda, Dr. Natasha S. Kaoma, Faith Kaoma, Lastina Lwatula, Dr. Christopher Mazimba, David Burrows, Francis Kaira, Richard Dzikunu, Somila Mjekula

A Collaboration by

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Introduction

Jhpiego and Copper Rose Zambia (CRZ) have partnered on multiple projects over several years. In 2024, they joined Action Learning Cycle 8 hosted by the YIELD Hub, which focused on, ‘Capacity Development for Youth Transition.’

Through an exploration of the relationship between these two partners, learnings emerged on how partnerships can be designed to do more than just complete work together. This document summarizes the recommendations coming from the action learning cycle and is designed to support organisations seeking to build stronger and more equitable partnerships between INGOs and youth-led organisations.

Context & Process

How the Recommendations Were Developed

The YIELD Hub uses learning action cycles to bring together diverse actors in the Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRHR) space to explore a particular topic. The group of participants from different backgrounds and organisations work together to identify challenges and then create and implement potential solutions.

Jhpiego and CRZ worked jointly to explore how the partnership itself can be a challenge to or support the growth of young people as professionals. To better understand their particular partnership, the Jhpiego and CRZ team participating in the action learning process conducted five key informant interviews with staff who played different roles within the two organizations. The findings from these interviews helped inform a lessons learned workshop, held in December 2024. During this workshop, CRZ and Jhpiego staff co-facilitated a discussion using participatory methods to discuss the partnership, covering various technical/programmatic aspects as well as practice matters such as program, administrative, finance, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) considerations.

Development of Recommendations Process

01 Internal Org Reflection

Jhpiego and CRZ met separately within their own organizations to create safe spaces for sharing insights about their partnership. Participants discussed experiences related to youth capacity development for transition, focusing on supporting young people to "age up and not age out" of responsibilities.

02 Cross-Org Role-Based Discussion

Staff from both organizations were grouped according to their roles (programmatic, technical, operational, management). These groups reflected on internal and external factors affecting youth professional growth within the partnership.

03 Data Review

The action learning team gathered to review all the data collected from the previous sessions. This involved examining qualitative feedback, identifying recurring themes, and evaluating the significance of various insights shared.

04 Recommendations Development

Based on the collected insights and analysis, the team developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for future implementation.



Key Challenges

Through this learning exercise, Jhpiego and CRZ identified several challenges that often go unaddressed in INGO–YLO partnerships:

Lack of Institutionalization:

Positive practices were often informal and driven by individuals rather than embedded in systems or structures.

Personnel Dependency:

Success sometimes depended on who was in the role, rather than institutionalized support.

Partnership Model Mismatch:

INGO–YLO partnerships require distinct approaches compared to traditional INGO–INGO models.

Undefined Mentorship:

Staff frequently assumed mentor–mentee roles without clear guidance or structure.

Knowledge Gaps:

In large, multi-partner projects, not all team members understood how to work effectively with YLOs or youth leaders.

Staff Retention Issues:

YLOs experience higher staff turnover, which can create disruption or knowledge gaps.

Professional Experience Limitations:

Young professionals may have limited experience navigating institutional structures.

Cross-Functional Integration:

YLOs often serve cross-cutting functions, requiring strong integration across project teams.

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"Working with team members from different objectives and locations who share both similar and different project management experiences instills greater confidence in tackling planned activities."

– Gloria Ziba Silondwa, Workshop Participant –

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Recommendations

Based on a collaborative learning process, Jhpiego and Copper Rose Zambia have developed seven key recommendation areas to strengthen INGO-YLO partnerships. These practical suggestions address the identified challenges and build on successful practices observed throughout our partnership.



1. Mentorship Structures

Well-defined mentorship benefits program implementation and staff development. Establish systematic mentorship structures where mentors and mentees learn each other's work cultures.

2. Leadership Development and Onboarding

Identify new YLO recruits early to build leadership skills. Establish common learning platforms and continuous onboarding processes to address higher YLO turnover. Include leadership development in agreements, workplans and budgets.



3. Navigating Organisational Policies

Address differing organizational policies by deciding which to follow or how to integrate both, accommodating YLO perspectives and needs.

4. Defining the Partnership

Set clear objectives that recognize each partner's expertise. Elevate youth issues and leverage youth expertise in all work. Clarify INGO-YLO partnership roles and ensure all team members uphold these throughout the project. Create collaboration pathways from senior management to junior staff. Cross-organizational pairing strengthens partnerships at all levels.





5. Youth Inclusion Across Projects

Systematically engage youth partners throughout project activities to apply a youth lens to all relevant work. Involve young people in program design, implementation and evaluation to leverage insights and create skill-building opportunities. Prioritize youth perspectives and incorporate their expertise into all aspects of the work.

6. Youth inclusion in MEL and Dissemination

Intentionally include YLOs in monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes. Foster equality in decision-making, provide skills mentorship, and create opportunities for YLOs to lead data collection, analysis, and presentation. Support peer-led results sharing and incorporate YLO feedback to refine tools.



7. Recognising Additional Organisational Contributions

Regularly evaluate how YLOs can contribute beyond initial project parameters. Share work outside project-specific partnerships to identify new collaboration opportunities. Include these activities in workplans and budgets, and use them as platforms for learning exchange.

Practical Applications

Strong partnerships between INGOs and YLOs deliver programs as well as build capacity and leadership.

These recommendations can guide organizations to co-design partnership structures, workplans, and budgets that center youth inclusion and long-term development. By implementing these approaches, organizations can create environments where young leaders thrive, institutional knowledge is effectively transferred, and program outcomes are enhanced through authentic youth engagement.

The collaborative process of working through each recommendation together serves as a powerful first step toward transformational change in how organizations approach youth partnership. This process itself builds trust and mutual understanding that forms the foundation for sustainable collaboration. We invite INGOs, donors, and YLOs to use and adapt these recommendation, and to co-create tools and frameworks that ensure equity is embedded in practice.

Acknowledgements



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Finally, we acknowledge the staff members who went above and beyond by capturing photos during the workshop. These images help document the collective energy and collaborative spirit that shaped this work.