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Introduction

In October 2025, ahead of the International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP), YIELD Hub convened a pre-conference consultation with youth-led organisations and advocates from across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. The purpose was simple yet urgent: to listen.

The conversation brought together participants from Nepal, South Africa, Myanmar, Thailand, Benin, Colombia, and the Netherlands, representing movements including YUWA Nepal, Restless Development, ARROW, and various feminist and LGBTQI+ collectives. Together, they unpacked the shrinking funding landscape for youth-led organisations, the barriers that persist, and the systemic shifts required to reclaim youth power in global development.

This report captures what emerged: honest reflections on exclusion and resilience, lived experiences of navigating complex funding systems, and practical ideas to reshape how youth-led work is resourced. The insights shared will inform YIELD Hub's ICFP 2025 side event, Reclaiming Youth Power: A Global Convening to Respond to ODA Cuts and Sustain the Youth Movement, and guide our continued advocacy for equitable, inclusive funding ecosystems.

As Richard Dzikunu, Action Learning Lead at YIELD Hub, noted in opening the session:



We don't want to have another meeting that says, 'here's what we think.' We want to hear what you know, what you're facing, and how we can amplify what's already working.



Key Themes and Insights



Gatekeeping and the Concentration of Power

Participants spoke candidly about how the same organisations repeatedly access the same pools of funding, creating cycles of exclusion and disempowerment.

"It has always been the same old groups banking on resources... Funding doesn't trickle down to communities. When it doesn't respond to community needs, change becomes superficial."

Riju Dhakal, Youth Advocate, Nepal / ARROW



This pattern, described by several contributors, is compounded by intermediaries that impose additional restrictions beyond funder requirements. These structures, they said, not only prevent equitable access but also erode solidarity among youth-led organisations.



Barriers to Access and Representation

Participants described application processes that favour elite, English-speaking, or formally registered organisations, leaving many grassroots and marginalised groups excluded.



"If I don't understand English, I can't apply. The barrier of language closes the door before we start."

Roselvet Prystill FAGNISSE, President, National Coalition of New Sexual Minorities, Benin

Complex eligibility criteria, legal restrictions on registration (particularly for LGBTQI+ and feminist groups), and inaccessible digital systems reinforce these divides. The result: young leaders spend disproportionate energy applying for grants instead of implementing transformative work.

"Young people spend more time applying for grants than doing the actual work they care about. Application forms should be bridges, not barriers."

Christal Tchotcho, Youth Advocate, Restless Development



Funding that Fails to Fund the Work

A recurring theme was the absence of flexible, long-term, and core funding. Participants described project-specific grants that neglect essential costs, namely rent, connectivity, transport, and stipends for volunteers, making organisational sustainability impossible.

"Funding should also cover rent, furniture, internet. You can't support an organisation's mission if you won't support its foundation."

Participant reflection



Several contributors noted that competitive funding models discourage collaboration and solidarity, while short-term grants leave youth-led organisations trapped in cycles of survival rather than growth.



The Weight of Intermediaries and the Language of Power

Dina Chaerani, Programme Associate at YIELD Hub, highlighted how development funding, particularly within the EU, often fails to reach youthled groups due to heavy bureaucracy and technical jargon:

"The language of financing is so jargonal. Even for me, I had to read documents ten times to understand them. Imagine youth groups trying to access millions in global funds with no support."

She pointed to mechanisms like the EU's Global Gateway, a €300 billion initiative, which theoretically supports youth participation but remains inaccessible to smaller or unregistered organisations.

"The structures exist, but the execution is still at a Dplus level. We need transparency, simpler language, and fixed percentages of budgets that go directly to youth-led partners with full decision-making power."

Dina Chaerani, YIELD Hub





Intersectionality and Structural Exclusion

Participants stressed that funding barriers intersect with geography, gender, ability, and identity. Urban-centric funding models overlook rural communities. Disability inclusion remains largely performative. And in many countries, LGBTQI+ groups cannot legally register, making direct access to funding impossible.

"We are fighting for SRHR, for dignity, for survival, but we can't even register our organisations legally. How are we meant to access funding in systems that deny our existence?"

Roselvet Prystill FAGNISSE, President, National Coalition of New Sexual Minorities, Benin



Christal Kihm and others emphasised the emotional toll of exclusion, pointing to the need for rest and fair compensation.

"Burnout in this space is so common. We work every day, every month, often unpaid. We need grants that also help us rest."



Policy and Age Gaps

Juan Pablo, representing Colombia's youth movement, raised an oftenoverlooked policy barrier: the legal definition of "youth."

"In Colombia, the youth law defines youth as 14 to 28. But in many parts of the world, it's up to 35. Once you turn 29, you're suddenly too old to access opportunities or leadership spaces."

Juan Pablo Rincón, ProFAMILIA Youth Network, Colombia



Such policy inconsistencies limit access to education, grants, and representation. Participants urged funders and governments to harmonise age frameworks that better reflect the realities of youth transitions across contexts.

Collective Calls for Change

From this conversation, several clear demands emerged which call for practical shifts grounded in lived experience.



Direct Access to Resources

Remove unnecessary intermediaries. Fund youth-led organisations directly, with mechanisms that trust and empower them to manage resources responsibly.



Flexible and Core Funding

Shift from short-term project grants to long-term, unrestricted funding that covers operational needs, volunteer compensation, and wellbeing. Funders must recognise that sustainable organisations require stable foundations.



Inclusive and Accessible Processes

Simplify application and reporting requirements. Translate materials into multiple languages. Design criteria that include unregistered and informal organisations, particularly in restrictive contexts.



Capacity Building Across the Cycle

Provide mentorship and training from proposal writing to financial reporting. As several participants noted, "capacity support should not end at the signing of the grant."



Co-Created Monitoring and Evaluation

Develop impact frameworks with youth organisations to capture qualitative and community-level change, not only numeric results.



Intersectional and Decolonial Approaches

Reform funding systems that perpetuate exclusion based on geography, gender, disability, or identity. Embed intersectionality as a funding principle, not an afterthought.



Equity, Rest, and Recognition

Integrate wellbeing into funding models. Support rest, mental health, and fair compensation as non-negotiable dimensions of sustainability.



Moving Forward: From Insight to Action

This convening reaffirmed that sustainable youth financing is not about inventing new models; it is about transforming existing systems. Participants voiced a collective vision for a more equitable funding ecosystem, one that is inclusive, multilingual, flexible, and anchored in trust.

As we move towards ICFP 2025, these insights will directly inform YIELD Hub's side event, Reclaiming Youth Power, and guide ongoing advocacy with funders, INGOs, and partners. Post-conference, we will continue engaging participants to co-develop a Youth Financing for Systemic Change resource and integrate these findings into future collective learning cycles.

"We don't want to repeat what's already been said, we want to amplify what's already being done."

Richard Dzikunu, YIELD Hub

We invite funders, practitioners, and partners to join us in turning these insights into shared action. Together, we can build an ecosystem where youth-led organisations are not competing for scraps, but shaping sustainable futures.



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