

What's the **evidence?**

Youth engagement and the
Sustainable Development Goals



Plan International UK

ADB



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On the cover: Nurul, 18, is an advocate against child marriage in her community.
(Photo by Plan International)



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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARO	Plan International Asia Regional Office
ASRH	Adolescent sexual and reproductive health
CBO	Community-based organisation
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil society organisation
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, and Intersexed
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NEETs	Not in employment, education, or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NGOC	NGO and Civil Society Center
NO	Plan International National Office
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of change
ToR	Terms of reference
VfM	Value for money
YA	Youth ambassadors
YfA	Youth for Asia
YID	Yes I Do
YP	Young people
YPE	Youth peer educators
YSC	Youth Steering Committee

Glossary of Terms

AIIESEC:	A global platform for young people to explore and develop their leadership potential. They are a non-political, independent, not-for-profit organisation led by youth between 18–30 years of age.
SDGs:	On 25 September 2015, countries adopted a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years.
Youth:	The term “youth” and its definition are discussed in more detail in Section 3: The Context for Youth in Asia and the Pacific.
Youth for Asia:	A program, managed by ADB’s NGOC to mainstream youth participation in ADB operations as it believes that empowered youth are innovative and are able to support and contribute to effective development.

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Executive Summary

This study represents an encouraging body of evidence, both primary and secondary, which will inform future practice and policymaking with regard to young women and men's contributions towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The learnings provide important insight that will support the design and implementation of youth programming.

It examines five programs across three youth-focused or youth-led organisations: Plan International UK, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and AIESEC.

The study addressed three research questions:

1. **Understanding roles:** What meaningful roles do young people identify with in order to help achieve the SDGs? To what extent are these roles influenced by gender or any other identity?
2. **Capturing "value add":** What evidence can we find to demonstrate how young people "add value"—or their efficacy—and contribute towards achieving the SDGs? To what extent is this mediated by gender or any other identity?
3. **Recommendations:** What are the strategic recommendations that will enhance how young people can contribute towards the SDGs?

The findings show that the first step in effectively harnessing young women and men's contributions is to actively listen, acknowledge and act upon information learned—supporting the roles that young people want to assume and cultivate. We found that initiatives often do not fully identify or support the emerging roles that young people self-define. While young women and men often want to be peer educators, some also express aspirations to go far beyond

this. They may want to be educators; or leaders engaged in changing negative social norms; or citizens with status, striving to reduce inequality and social differences within their broader and intergenerational social networks, which may include parents, community leaders, project staff and governments. This means it is imperative to explore and acknowledge, at the start of any initiative, how young people want to contribute in terms, for example, of their roles and how these may be redefined over time.

We found that young people, parents, non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, government officials, and decision-makers use and understand the concept of "value" in several ways. While this may sometimes be consistent and overlapping, it is at other times divergent. We found that measuring these different aspects of "added value" remains challenging, especially given the absence of systematic methods to first identify and then track magnitude and direction of change. The challenge is compounded by difficulties in establishing a valid counterfactual case for comparison. This means that many important contributions that young people are making towards achieving the SDGs are undervalued, or not acknowledged at all.

How are young people contributing to the SDGs?

This research shows that young women and men are already contributing substantially towards the SDGs in the following ways:

- 1 Helping deliver programs which are responsive and attuned to real needs and often in ways that benefit in terms of economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity and sustainability. Yet much more needs to be done to track and



monitor this, including purposively designed comparative studies.

Marshalling hidden assets and sometimes unexpected contributions, including:

- 2 The ability of young women and men to seek out partnerships, network and build alliances, both within and between generations. They identify with and act as connectors or “mobilisers”—in person, online and in public and private spheres. There is an untapped role that young people may identify with in terms of communicating the message of the SDGs, contributing towards their monitoring and holding governments to account, as well as mobilising others to contribute as active citizens. This has big implications for SDG 17 on Partnerships, as well as the “Leave no one behind” agenda.
- 3 Their ability to influence their parents, their communities and local and national government. Young people don’t just want to be peer educators—they can be highly effective educators, advisors, and managers across generations. For example, in terms of achieving SDG 5 on Gender, young people are already influencing the views of their parents, their teachers, and the wider community. But this is not always acknowledged, let alone tracked.
- 4 Their capabilities to contribute towards development policies or legislation that supports the achievement of all 17 SDGs—with particular regard to imagining what might happen in the future (Diagram 3) and envisioning how national policy development, implementation and tracking might be done differently.

Young people involved.

Youth are part the Safer Cities program in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. (Photo by Plan International)



Smiles and hope.
Emergency Assistance programs support young people following Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines. (Photo by ADB)

5 As co-designers of initiatives and as “provocateurs” (in program design) across all 17 SDGs, but especially those directly impacting them such as education, gender and employment.

By engaging youth in these under-acknowledged and hidden roles much more directly, visibly and respectfully, the SDGs could receive a strong and much needed pulse of youthful energy towards their achievement.

Where should governments and development partners invest to optimise the youth “dividend”?

- Encourage innovation, creativity and risk taking. To really unleash the creativity and energy often cited as the key attributes of young people, agencies need to step up towards the “next practice”. In other words, up to the foresight or “outsight” level. The current “comfort level” seems to principally be to give young people a role in activities that are more-or-less mapped out by the project in advance. This seems to be linked to perception of risk. But minimising risk can be counter-intuitive to “next

practice”, so how can this be resolved? We suggest some further research and design of examples where there is less emphasis on defining the inputs or outputs expected from youth engagement and more “risk brokering” to help neutralise or reduce the risks for other stakeholders might liberate young people to take programming to the foresight and “outsight” levels and lead to some “next” level gains. (Diagram 2, Policy Analytics ladder)

Letting go of control also means making internal changes or developing the mechanisms to work with youth organisations or groups of young people as partners, not in a “service provider” or contributor basis. This would challenge ideas of hierarchy and top-down culture that is prevalent in big development organisations. Most youth-led or youth organisations tend to have more horizontal, participative and less bureaucratic organisational structures.

- Build the evidence base. Our research suggests that there is a lot of promising work that young people are already contributing to and in

some cases spear-heading, but that existing monitoring and evaluation learning systems are not always able to capture these contributions. There is a need for more targeted data to fully comprehend what works and what does not. This data should cover the areas identified in the “Building Blocks” text box in the conclusion of this report. There is also a need to critique and share experiences of both successful and less successful policies and programs, from local to national levels, as well as across countries.

- Give young people a seat at spaces and places of influence. Our findings suggest that a very wide range of young people are ready, willing and able to be a part of bigger conversations about their lives and their futures. Achievement of the SDGs will be accelerated if there is a strong commitment to listen to, act upon and respect the voices of young women and men of different classes, ages, socio-economic conditions and abilities. This is especially so thanks to youth skills and capabilities in network and movement building, both within and between generations. Policymakers must therefore ensure that young women and men are brought within the inner circles of decision-making, including with governments, the private sector and civil society.
- Strengthen programs that safeguard civic space and improve institutional good governance and accountability.

Young people who participated in the research frequently cited violence in its many forms, including corruption and the misuse of power, as an issue of concern to them. Some, but not all, of the interventions in the study included an accountability component, however many of the young people we interviewed were clearly poised to take on a “bigger role” in relation to decision-making—with the caveat that they wanted support to do so.

For youth to be effective active citizens, they need to understand how political and economic decisions are made and recognise the huge part that they, individually and collectively, can play in contributing to improving accountability at all levels. By taking an informed and active role in accountability mechanisms, young people’s current mistrust of politics, private-sector operations and civic institutions can be reduced. Given the opportunity, young people—especially youth-led groups and organisations operating at the grassroots—can be a powerful force in safeguarding transparency and accountability. Such groups are more likely to be responsive to the needs of the youth cohort they represent and offer greater possibilities to unleash the creativity and innovation of youth. It’s time for forward thinking.

Section 1: Introduction

The report starts with a brief introductory background in Section 1, explaining the research and the approach taken; this is followed by Section 2 on the methodology; and subsequently Section 3, which looks at the context for young people in Asia and the Pacific. The report then moves on to present the findings on “roles” in Section 4 and the findings on “value add” in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 presents the conclusion—responding to the research questions and outlining the main recommendations drawn from the findings.

Framing the study: reaching beyond youth instrumentalism

Governments, private institutions and development agencies are often told by youth-focused¹ and youth-led organisations that young people have “a role to play” in contributing towards the achievement of the SDGs.² For example, “Asia and the Pacific includes over 700 million 15–24 year-olds whose needs, skills and ambitions hold unprecedented potential for economic, social and environmental progress”.³ Yet what is the evidence for this?

The literature review shows that supporting strong roles for young people—in all their diversity—so that they can be involved in creating and delivering local and national development priorities, is often cited as important for three main reasons⁴:

- It is young people’s right to participate in the decisions that affect them.

Youth rights are human rights, as laid out in the United Nations Human Rights Declaration.⁵

- Consulting young people means that decisions are informed by their experiences and perspectives and so are likely to have a greater impact—often expressed as “nothing about us, without us”.⁶
- By including young people, they themselves are more likely to become active citizens—with skills, knowledge and motivation to contribute to their communities and countries throughout their lives.^{7,8}

Yet the evidence can be patchy or inconclusive. This research aims to explore what the “evidence” and “value add” of young people’s engagement in community development and ultimately towards the achievement of the SDGs, means and looks like. Not just from the viewpoint of those “in power”—NGO staff, managers and donors—but also from the perspective of a defined group of young people themselves.

Policymakers are in danger of overly instrumentalising youth and focusing only on how to capitalise on the “demographic dividend”. They may perceive young people one-dimensionally, as a huge untapped resource simply to be used. This policy narrative is counter-posed against another equally narrow discourse that sees “youth as threats”. Young men who are left to their own devices, who are not part of any policy or programmatic

1 ‘Youth’ and ‘young people’ are used interchangeably in the report.

2 Plan UK, (2015) ‘Global Agreements: Grassroots advocacy’.

3 ESCAP, (2001) ‘Review of the Human Resources Development Status of Youth in the Asian and Pacific Region’, United Nations, New York, ST/ESCAP/2135.

4 Plan UK, (2015) ‘Global Agreements: Grassroots advocacy’.

5 DFID-CSO YWG, (2010) ‘Youth participation in Development: A guide for policy makers’.

6 Oaktree et al., (2016) ‘Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development’.

7 Moore, K., (2005) ‘Thinking about youth poverty through the lenses of chronic poverty, life-course poverty and intergenerational poverty’. CPRC Working Paper 57.

8 ODI, (2013) ‘Investing in Youth in International Development Policy – Making the Case’.

Table 1: Policy and Delivery Lenses Used by Donors, Agencies, and Civil Society

Lens Approach	Overview and effects on results and impact
Capability and empowerment (assets-based)	Entitlements to services are often not delivered unless young people (YP) are active in transforming their own circumstances. “Youth voice”, co-creation, civil, political, collective and cultural rights are all synonymous with this approach. YP’s agency equates with an understanding of equity and welfare that is subject to change based on any given context. YP create, contribute and make a difference. ^a The practical effect of this approach is that the initiative will expand as youth inform and engage other peers beyond its intended scope.
Equity and welfare	An equity and welfare approach focuses on basic human needs or welfare and socio-economic rights. Often this is a cross-sectoral approach, so not only focused on attainment in formal education or employment, skills and jobs. It may also examine inequity, youth poverty and social safety nets. It is concerned with addressing structural barriers and may often involve a political-economy analysis. The practical effect of this approach is that broader contextual factors which may pose a risk to initiatives are often identified and managed in advance. For example, the lack of young women attending school may be the result of harassment on the way to school or lack of privacy in toilets.
Customer-service and product development	YP are consumers of youth services and services themselves represent products to deliver. This responds to a perceived quality gap and includes a lack of personalisation in terms of both service delivery and how YP are related to. The “services as products” approach has its own risks: it may undermine relationships and accountability is often weak or non-existent. The practical effect of this approach is that value is only placed on goods rather than the quality of social networks and relationships; it can undermine YPs own ability to create and shape their own identities.
Instrumentalist	The YP as “human resources” for growth approach prioritises cost-saving over quality and focuses less on YP’s need for sustainable livelihoods, self-empowerment and connectedness. It prioritises absorption into micro-structures such as training and employability rather than macro structures, such as economic and social empowerment. YP are viewed as assets in themselves, rather than citizens for whom assets are mobilised. The practical effect of this approach is a total disengagement of YP with other generations, and potential for breakdown in social cohesion.
Deficit or threat	Youth as a “problem” foregrounds the social problems that YP face, such as drug abuse, crime and illiteracy. It is less concerned with structural factors that cause these social problems and instead personalises failures. Therefore it significantly underplays YP’s agency as problem-solvers and creators of positive change. The practical effect of this approach is that YP are not consulted or only minimally engaged, and viewed merely as target beneficiaries. This is likely to result in a lack of ownership from YP, and ultimately a breakdown in sustainability.

Source:

^a British Council and SALTO Youth, (2017) ‘Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers’.



intervention, are assumed to pose a national security threat due to their perceived tendency towards civil disobedience.⁹ The evidence for both perspectives is patchy and controversial, especially among young people themselves, many of whom still feel marginalised.

Table 1 provides an overview of five common policy and delivery lenses used in youth engagement initiatives. The approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather serve to unpack the biases that each individual or organisational culture is promoting.

It is thus a useful analytical tool to enable an agency to take a step back and assess if and how policy and programs are being made, using these underlying assumptions. Furthermore, it also indicates what effects any given approach may have on achieving results. It aims to caution against an over-emphasis on deficit and instrumentalist approaches and move policymakers

towards using a capability, equity and welfare lens.

Guiding research questions

The guiding research questions were:

- 1 Understanding roles: What meaningful roles do young people identify with in order to help achieve the SDGs? To what extent are these roles influenced by gender or any other identity?
- 2 Capture “value add”: What evidence can we find to demonstrate how young people “add value” through their efficacy and contribute towards achieving the SDGs? To what extent is this mediated by gender or any other identity?
- 3 Recommendations: What are the strategic recommendations that will enhance how young people can contribute towards the SDGs?

Youth and preparedness.

Students are practicing as a search and rescue team during a safety drill in Yangon. (Photo by Plan International)

⁹ Hillker-McClean/SDD, (2009) ‘Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states’.

Three organisations worked together: ADB, Plan International UK and its Asia Regional Office (ARO), and AIESEC.¹⁰

How best to partner with youth?

In 2015, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific outlined four recommendations to facilitate better youth participation, engagement and development in SDG interventions:¹¹

- Prepare for impacts of inevitable demographic shifts in the region;
- Enhance institutional capacity promoting good governance;
- Encourage social dialogue and political action; and
- Increase institutional knowledge and evidence to enable better policymaking.

Harnessing the potential of youth participation, engagement and development requires a comprehensive understanding of young people's strengths, interests and capabilities while simultaneously providing genuine opportunities to become involved in institutional and systemic decision-making processes that affect their lives.¹² There are many models for youth engagement,¹³ most of which are based upon various degrees of participation, on a scale ranging from manipulation to shared decision-making with their adult colleagues.¹⁴ Although context influences the nature and extent of youth participation, the SDGs offer a great opportunity for development institutions to catalyse higher levels of youth participation and to potentially attain better development outcomes.

Yes, young people can contribute to the SDGs in ways they deem meaningful,

but they can also take us further. This is important at a national level and goes beyond the targets set in the SDGs.

Scope of the research

This study is not an in-depth or large-scale analysis of all programs in the region or those belonging to all three organisations. Rather it focuses on specific projects identified by in-country staff in Indonesia and the Philippines. Section 2 outlines the process for the selection of SDGs, countries and projects. The research represents a targeted study with indicative findings for how and if youth engagement contributes to program results and SDG targets. Time and resource availability did not allow for use of control samples—that is, comparisons with adult-only approaches.

What counts as “good” evidence?

We assume that decision-makers want to know if various practices and programs are effective – in other words, “what works”. But they will have complementary questions too: why, when and for whom something works; any unintended side effects; is it cost-effective; are there re-distributional effects; and what are the risks and consequences of failure? The Useful Evidence Alliance identifies four evidence levels:

- Good practice: “we’ve done it, we like it and it feels like we make an impact”;
- Promising approaches: some positive findings but evaluations not consistent or rigorous enough to be sure;
- Research-based program or practice based on sound theory informed by growing empirical research;
- Evidence-based: program or practice rigorously evaluated and consistently been shown to work.

Source: Cairney P., (2016) ‘The Science of Policy Making’.

¹⁰ Plan International Annual Report 2017; AIESEC Annual Report 2017-2018; and the ADB 2017 Annual Report.

¹¹ UNESCAP, (2015) ‘Switched On: Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific’.

¹² Andrea Cornwall/ EMpower, (2012) ‘Girls’ Voices, Girls’ Priorities: Participatory, Innovative Tools for Capturing Girls’ Realities and Understanding Changes in their Lives’.

¹³ Engagement and participation are used interchangeably in this report.

¹⁴ Whilst Hart’s (1992) model of ‘Genuine Youth Participation’ draws from the theoretical foundations of Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of citizen participation. There are many more nuanced models such as Treseder (1998), and DFID-CSO three lens approach (2010).



The recommendations section will pick up on future steps to build an evidence base from both a donor- and youth-centric perspective.

Understanding “evidence” and “value for money”

Evidence: The research assessed available evidence, linked to a subset of programs and interventions supported by the three partners, to understand the types of advantages that young people generate both for themselves and their wider community. In other words, how young people themselves articulate “adding value” and what types of evidence they consider valid and reliable in support of this. We looked briefly at this question from the perspective of those the work is intended to benefit, which may extend beyond youth to include governments

and other stakeholders. This perspective offers different opinions about the contributions young people bring, perhaps highlighting other aspects of “value” and “evidence”.

We also note that evidence may have several levels and that it may be the single most critical ingredient in decision-making by governments.

Decision-makers will ask other questions too. The literature suggests that “evidence” of what works is only one variable that affects how policymakers take decisions and that policymaking is in fact a rather messy business. “There is no ‘policy cycle’ in which to inject scientific evidence at the point of decision.”¹⁵

The package of projects presented offers a variety of types and quality of data as “evidence” of results and achievements as well as weaknesses and an opportunity to sift carefully

Girls lead.

Mishti, 18, is part of Plan International’s Girl Power Project in Bangladesh working to develop and empower self-dependent young women.

(Photo by Plan International)

15 Nutley, S. et al., (2013) ‘What counts as good evidence?’.

through this available evidence, and look at strengths and gaps within it. It is important to note that this is not a process of comparing programs with or without, or before and after youth engagement. But if stakeholders want to pursue this, the recommendations provide suggestions.

Value for Money: In order to assess impact, we can look at some widely recognised frameworks. The concepts of “value for money” (VfM) and “results” remain high on the political agenda and are a consistent priority for many donors and national governments. Aligned with scepticism about aid and its impact, decreasing public support and acute fiscal constraints in many “traditional” donor countries, the results agenda and focus on VfM can be viewed as a genuine attempt to challenge the “aid sceptics” and demonstrate that aid is a good investment yielding real impact. However, if results and VfM are interpreted and quantified in narrow terms, they fail to capture the complexity of development and the challenging contexts in which aid is and should be delivered. This can result in insufficient consideration or value given to harder-to-quantify aspects of development, such as, empowerment, gender equality, human rights, institutional reform and strengthening.

When considering “value add” and youth engagement we also need to consider that there are two pathways to impact:

- a) How young women and men’s engagement changes or adds to identified changes and outcomes, on either other young people as a target group—by, for example, reducing unwanted teenage pregnancy—or on another vulnerable target group such as indigenous or disabled people.
- b) Changes within the youth participants themselves, such as personal growth.

In this introductory chapter, we have reflected on the importance of examining what “good” evidence is and concluded that whilst normative definitions such as the VfM framework of the Department for International Development (DFID) offer a useful starting point, they cannot be the final definition. This is especially so when working with often marginalised groups, such as young women and men. We now turn to an overview of the methodology, in particular outlining the country and project selection and creation of the analytical framework.

Section 2: Methodology

The research started with a desk review of relevant literature and of documents provided by the three supporting partners. The overall approach was then qualitative, with an emphasis on participatory tools that would allow the research team to collect information from a range of stakeholders and most particularly the young people who had themselves been a part of the identified projects.

Roles, ethics, timeline

Broadly the researchers took responsibility for drafting and leading the research design. This included: leading the field trips and recording findings; and producing key deliverables such as the inception report, analytical framework for selection and comparison of interventions and SDGs and delivering the final report. A Youth Steering Committee (YSC) provided inputs as mutually agreed, including review and feedback on the desk review, inception reports, analytical framework and tools and the final report, as well as liaising with wider networks to support the logistics of the field trips.

Plan International UK took the role of overall project management and oversight and Plan International Asia Regional Office (ARO) identified a point person for in-region coordination. Terms of reference were agreed for Plan International Country Offices identified (Indonesia and the Philippines) covering mainly consent, logistics and administrative functions. The research adhered to Plan International's evaluation standards and ethical and protection protocols. The YSC were mobilised in early June 2017 and the researcher team started at the end of June. Field trips spanned late August to early September 2017.

Criteria for country, SDG and project selection

A key role for the YSC was to identify up to four countries in Asia where the research could take place based on criteria agreed with Plan International UK.¹⁶ In addition, the YSC helped identify potential interventions or projects within each identified country and proposed which SDGs to focus on.

Table 2: Field Visit overview

Country/City	Dates	Projects reviewed
Indonesia	28 August–1 September	Plan International's Urban Disaster and Risk Reduction, Yes I Do and AIESEC's Malala Project
Philippines	3–18 August	Plan International's RAISE, ADB's Safetipin, and AIESEC's International Exchange

¹⁶ Plan International, AIESEC, and ADB have a presence and strong capacity; strong youth programming track record by development agencies; youth positive/friendly governments; potential for implementing final research recommendations and scaling up youth programmatic work at a national level.



The YSC recommended that SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 5 on Gender Equality, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 17 on Partnerships should be the main focus. The researchers included a “wild card” category to allow for inclusion of interventions successfully engaging youth as actors, but outside of the above four SDGs—sexual health, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and climate change. Since most of the projects in the research were designed and started implementation before the SDGs were fully in place they were more aligned to the MDGs and the “fit” to specific SDGs or SDG targets is not always exact. However, in Table 3, which presents the final group of projects included in the research, we also show the SDGs that their intended results mapped on to most closely.

Country selection: The YSC agreed on the following countries to be the main focus for the research: the Philippines and Indonesia. Initially, the YSC members narrowed down the 48 countries in Asia

based on a matrix that compared the respective country’s youth population, youth civic participation and Global Youth Development Index ranking. YSC members expressed the importance of having a considerably large youth population in the selected countries. Once that was established, youth activity in those countries was monitored using the Global Youth Development Index Rating, which measures the overall wellbeing and status of youth across the countries. The YSC emphasised the inclusion of youth civic participation to ensure that youth in selected countries were not only able to contribute, but were also actively engaging with their communities.

The YSC was able to shortlist four countries: Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines.

One criterion was each organisation’s capacity to provide in-country support during the research study, determined after consultation with respective country teams. Plan International Nepal and Plan International Pakistan

Towards economic empowerment.

Trainees learn dressmaking at a training centre run by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporter.

(Photo by ADB)

showed an interest in participating in the research study but Youth for Asia (YfA), ADB, and AIESEC noted that their presence in both countries was not so strong and they had few or no projects available for the research. The Philippines and Indonesia were suitable due to the strong presence of ARO and YfA in the respective countries. Moreover, for the Philippines, having YSC members from both organisations based in country would make coordination and support for the research easier.

Project Selection: Projects were initially put forward by Plan International, ADB and AIESEC based on their demonstration of:

- 1 A solid chain of project documentation from inception through to reviews and evaluations;
- 2 Relevance to at least one of the four SDGs of the research and;
- 3 That they already show indications of value and contributions via youth engagement in any aspect of the intervention (project) cycle.

It was then an iterative process that consisted of YSC internal discussions, followed by joint discussions among the YSC, researchers and country focal points. It is important to recognise that each organisation is at a different stage in its trajectory with youth engagement, and has a different focus or avenue in exploring youth engagement. For AIESEC the emphasis is on the personal development of the international volunteer. For Plan International UK, the emphasis is on longer term development programs that work with young people to achieve community focused outcomes and in some instances personal outcomes too. Whereas ADB is as at the beginning of exploring youth engagement and so noted that there are new or nascent projects that didn't

yet have results to show. Hence each organisation did not have an equal number of projects to explore and review.

Projects were also selected based on practical motivations. (See Annex 1 for an overview of the projects and Table 3 for information on the target group of youth and the mechanisms for engagement in each of the five projects analysed.)

Analytical framework

The analytical framework ensured that the three research questions would be answered. The YSC and research partners were invited to comment on the researchers' initial draft and the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were designed to help populate the finally agreed framework. The framework was piloted and offers Plan International, ADB and other organisations a practical tool to help assess youth contributions and "value add" to SDG outcomes (Annex 2).

Desk review and field visits

A desk review of secondary data was carried out in June and July 2017 to situate this research in the broader thematic area and inform the methodology and tools. Additionally the YSC helped with sourcing background information and specific project documents, including evaluations and assessments.

The aim of the field visits was to fill the gaps in secondary data on programs in the country selection matrix; gather young women and men's own views of their contributions (or "value add") and to explore the notion of what "evidence" looks like from their perspectives. The field visits, over five working days, allowed for some validation and triangulation of data across different stakeholders including youth, project staff, national and local government officials and explored what did or did not work well.

Selection of the focus projects was an iterative process among researchers, Plan International UK staff, YfA and AIESEC representatives in country and with the identified point-person in each country. A number of relevant and interesting projects were identified and then scanned to determine the amount and quality of data and information available that would allow for some systematic feasibility analysis prior to the field trips. The researchers relied on Plan International Country Office (CO) focal points to facilitate meeting venues and other support services. The exact number of in-country FGDs and KIIs¹⁷ was based on the number of projects identified, their location and the availability of participants for FGDs or KIIs.

Focus groups: Guidelines for focus groups were developed and project staff were requested to identify a cross-section of five or six participants per session and encouraged to make the sessions sex specific. A separate, slightly amended set of focus group questions was used with AIESEC to reflect the nature of their work. In total, 13 FGDs were conducted across a number of countries with a total of 97 young participants of which 56 were female.

Key informant interviews: These were conducted with internal and external stakeholders including government officials, civil society representatives, ADB staff and consultants, Plan International National Office (NO) and Country Office (CO) staff, school officials, partner Community Based-Organisations (CBOs) and AIESEC alumni. Most interviews were in-person and if that was not possible then via Skype. Members of the YSC worked closely with the senior researchers to take notes, observe initial sessions and facilitate some sessions directly, including the focus group discussions with AIESEC in Indonesia.

In Section 3 we turn to the context. We look at some of the issues that affect and are of importance to all young people and then look in more detail at Asia and the Pacific which was the geographical focus for this research. We introduce the projects that were included in Indonesia and the Philippines and look briefly at the kinds of young people who participated in them.

¹⁷ Focus groups and key informant interviews were deemed the most appropriate methodology, in order to extract and collate a range of subjective findings, and pragmatically to fit the operational context of compressed timeframes.

Section 3: The Context for Youth in Asia and the Pacific

Asia and the Pacific covers a vast and varied area. In this section we identify some common issues that affect the lives of youth and look at some that may be more pertinent to the current Asia and the Pacific context and to the young people participating in the identified interventions. Members of the Youth Steering Committee helped to draft this section.

Rights for civic society and youth

Contextual factors are always crucial in determining what impact any development intervention has. Hence this was an important aspect of the analytical framework and in particular acknowledging the level of civic society space, as defined by CIVICUS as:

“the political and policy context within which civil society organisations (CSOs) operate, with particular interest paid to areas that can be controlled by the State and that relate to governance”.¹⁸

Is there freedom of access to information? Freedom of assembly and so on? These basic rights are fundamental enablers; if youth engagement is to be truly allowed to flourish and have an impact. In the countries studied, CIVICUS has ranked these rights as “being obstructed”. So there are some freedoms and liberties, but not all. Open societies are thus a broader contextual dynamic that must be encouraged and sought after if youth engagement can truly flourish in contributing towards the SDGs.

Modern women's work.
Participants in the Skills for Employment Investment Program in Thailand learn how to use a leather machine.
(Photo by ADB)



¹⁸ CIVICUS, (2013) 'Enabling Environment Index'.

Defining “youth”

There is no globally agreed definition of “youth” and “young people”. The United Nations defines “youth” as between 15 and 24 years inclusive, while Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines “children” as persons up to 18. Therefore there is an overlap for those aged 15–18 who are children, older adolescents and youth.¹⁹ Plan International uses “youth” for young people of all genders aged 15–24, AIESEC focuses on young leaders aged 18–30, which is also the focus group of youth for ADB.²⁰ But age alone does not define “youth”. For many young people and their societies it is a period of transition in the life cycle—a period when young people take on greater financial, family and communal responsibilities. But, youth are not simply adults in the making; rather it is a time in a person’s life cycle when they have specific roles, rights, needs and capabilities.

In Asia, as in other parts of the world, “young people create their own cultures, distinct from, embedded in, or in opposition to the dominant cultures”.²¹ Young people have their own conceptual understandings of who they are, what role they see for themselves in the world, as well as ascribed roles and structures and barriers that wider society construct around them. Young people often carry a burden, or experience a societal tension with adults and organisations that want to mould them in some way. It is no coincidence that as the world moves into a period of transition there is increased interest and focus on “youth development”; young people are often at the epicentre of societal angst—portrayed as either villains or saviours.

Diversity—gender, inclusion, and intersectionality

Gender and other axes of identity (e.g. disabilities) affect and limit young people’s choices and opportunities and require change in social norms, attitudes, behaviours at many levels—individual, family, community and institutional. Young people therefore find themselves in a rapidly evolving world, negotiating forms of personal and group identity and sub-cultures. For the purposes of this research we collected information on a variety of youth—diverse in terms of gender, age and background—from Indonesia and the Philippines.

Table 3 presents the five projects analysed, their goals, main target groups and SDGs addressed.

The concept of intersectionality helps us understand how power is unequally distributed. An intersectional lens means we recognise women and girls as diverse groups with distinct and varying needs. Originally the term described how race and gender intersect as forms of oppression, but use has broadened to encompass additional social factors. Many groups face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, or able-ism. The Association for Women’s Rights in Development describes intersectionality as an analytical tool for “studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. It is therefore an indispensable methodology for development and human rights work”.²²

19 Young people aged 15-18 enjoy specific protections under the CRC with evolving capacities a key area: having their views taken into account in accordance with age and maturity. This implies that social protection or safeguarding and young people’s own positive risk taking are brought into appropriate balance.

20 In the Philippines, youth is defined as being aged 15 to 30.

21 Nilan P. et al., (2006) ‘Global Youth: Hybrid Identities and Plural worlds’. Routledge.

22 AWID, (2004) ‘Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice’.

Table 3: Project Goals, Target Groups and SDG Addressed

Project	Place	Project Goal & Mechanism for youth engagement	Target Group for “Youth Engagement”	SDG Addressed
1. RAISE	Samar, The Philippines	<p>Marginalised children and adolescents (aged 10-19), especially girls, access and complete primary or transition to secondary school and access opportunities to enhance personal and social assets and make better life choices.</p> <p>Main mechanisms for engaging young people: First round Youth Peer Educators are identified by teachers and trained, especially on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH), to cascade knowledge and advice out to their peers in and out of school. A smaller cohort of youth focus on working in the community with their peers who are members of Barangay Youth Councils.</p>	Youth Peer Educators (in July 2017, 216 Female and 15 male)	SDG 3, SDG4 and SDG5
2. Safetipin	Manila, The Philippines	<p>Young people use a map-based mobile application to collect safety- and transport-related information from night urban audit “walks” and generate safety scores.</p> <p>Main mechanisms for engaging young people: YfA reached out to all volunteer networks in Manila to identify willing to participate over a short period in a series of safety audits in their localities using mobile phones.</p>	144 (89 Female and 55 Male) Youth Data Collectors, 15–25 years old	SDG11 and SDG5
3. Urban DRR	Jakarta, Indonesia	<p>Strengthen disaster resilience via community-based actions among urban poor. Engage youth, community, households, local and national government.</p> <p>Main mechanisms for engaging young people: Identified Youth Ambassadors receive extensive training on DRR and how to map risks and draw up contingency plans and are expected to interact with peers, families, local officials and at-</p>	150 youth ambassadors 48 Female and 102 Male; 21 youth facilitators (7 Female and 14 Male)	SDG 11 and SDG 13

Project	Place	Project Goal & Mechanism for youth engagement	Target Group for “Youth Engagement”	SDG Addressed
		risk households on preparedness and risk reduction and to take action in case of a local disaster.		
4. I Do	Java, Indonesia	<p>Reduce child marriage, unwanted pregnancy and complete high school.</p> <p>Main mechanisms for engaging young people: Young people identified mainly via the child protection fora at village level to act as youth peer facilitators to interact with and support the identified impact group—especially on ASRH and early marriage—across the three project objectives in school, in the home and the community.</p>	Vulnerable “impact group” (80 Female, 10–15 years old; 12 youth peer facilitators, 7 Male and 5 Female)	SDG 1, SDG 3 and SDG 4
5. Malala Project	Bandung, Indonesia	<p>Six-week effort to raise awareness on importance of education, teaching and motivating 75 children (in three orphanages), campaigns in schools and public areas.</p> <p>Main mechanisms for engaging young people: Indonesian AIESEC members and volunteers mobilised for five months to work alongside AIESEC international volunteers.</p>	9-member AIESEC Project Committee (8 Female and 1 Male)	SDG4

An overview of each intervention can be found in Annex 1.

ASRH = Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health; DRR = Disaster Risk Reduction; YfA = Youth for Asia

Challenges of youth in Asia and the Pacific

Asia and the Pacific has 2.2 billion individuals under the age of 30 and 60% of the global youth population, making it the most youthful region in the world.²³ People under 30 represent nearly 50% of the total population. In some countries they exceed 50% of the total.²⁴ Among ADB's member countries, 66% of youth live in low-middle-income and 12% in low-income countries.²⁵ Regional efforts are needed to create environments conducive to youth participation, engagement and development via education, health, employment and reduced exposure to negative activities.²⁶ A glaring challenge is equitable access to decent jobs. In 2017 youth unemployment in the region was 11%, almost three times that of adult unemployment. The proportion of employed youth who are living below the poverty threshold is 25% in Southeast Asia, 15% in East Asia. Gender inequality is a further challenge manifested over a range of life issues: incidence of and acceptability of intimate partner violence; disparities in access to and learning outcomes in secondary and tertiary education; incidence of child marriage; disparities in women's representation in government and persistent gender wage gaps.

Young people's development priorities largely depend on individual lived experiences. An educated, middle-class, male student will have different development priorities compared with a rural, young mother in the same country. But we can attempt to illustrate commonalities via two major themes:

one, challenges youth face in the region and two, motivations and priorities.

While the heterogeneity of young people is of critical importance, some large scale surveys have attempted to look at common themes and concerns of young people.

Key issues in Asia and the Pacific's fast-changing development landscape (ADB)

- Lower middle-income Asia constrained by poverty and growing inequality, especially gender
- Climate change-related and environmental vulnerability and fragility
- Young people are the world's largest group of migrants
- Rapid urbanisation and insufficient infrastructure
- Weak private sector development and skills, technology and productivity gaps
- Demographic change and youth unemployment^{a,b}
- Weak governance and poor quality of institutions^c

Sources:

- ^a Morris, E. / ILO (2006) 'Globalization and its effects on youth employment trends in Asia'.
- ^b Clarence, (2016), 'Istambay: A sociological analysis of youth inactivity in the Philippines'.
- ^c UNDP, (2014) 'Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia.'

The United Nations' "My World" survey (with 7 million voters) was conceived as a tool to capture citizen voices and ideally allow a range of different voices, priorities and views across various ages,

23 UNDESA, (2015) 'World Population Prospects' Population Division: Geneva.

24 Afghanistan: 73%; Timor-Leste: 69%; Pakistan: 64%; Philippines: 60%; Uzbekistan: 57%; Mongolia: 56%.

25 UN Population statistics, ILO World Bank estimations on income levels. Definition of youth here is 15–30 years old.

26 For example: Janssen, Ian, William F. Boyce, Kelly Simpson, and William Pickett. 'Influence of individual- and area-level measures of socioeconomic status on obesity, unhealthy eating, and physical inactivity in Canadian adolescents'. *The American journal of clinical nutrition* 83, no. 1 (2006): 139-145; De Coster, Stacy, Karen Heimer, and Stacy M. Wittrock. 'Neighbourhood disadvantage, social capital, street context, and youth violence'. *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2006): 723-753.



Voice on ink.
Maya shares her views during a session at her local Adolescent Friendly Space in Dolakha, Nepal. (Photo by Plan International)

genders and backgrounds, to be heard by leaders.²⁷ While education, better healthcare and jobs come across as overall priorities, globally all under-15s ranked job opportunities priority number two. However, in Asia, youth rated a secure job as only the sixth priority, while “protection against crime and violence” was rated higher in Asia than in any other region and “honest and responsive government” was young people’s second highest priority. AIESEC’s YouthSpeak survey, which asked 160,000 young people to say which SDGs they identified with the most, voted overwhelmingly for SDG 4: Quality education, followed by SDG 1: No poverty and SDG 3: Good health and well-being.

27 ODI Blog: My World January 2013 to September 2015; accessed 16 August 2017, <https://www.odi.org/projects/2638-my-world>

Section 4: The Research Findings on Understanding Roles

We now turn to the findings for the first research question on understanding roles—what meaningful roles do young people identify with in order to help achieve the SDGs?

This section will present findings with regard to young women and men’s emergent roles, identify promising examples of youth ownership and discuss the significance of parents’ roles. Finally it will discuss specific findings related to age, gender and diversity.

Working with young people means understanding that young people’s identities are continually being renewed and recreated. Young people are defining what they believe in, how they want to contribute, or not, to society and how they relate to others. This means it is imperative to acknowledge at the start of any initiative how young people want to contribute, find their roles and see how they may be redefined in the process.

A number of organisations have been looking at roles with or for youth in relation to the SDGs.²⁸ While some roles are aligned between staff and young participants, there are certainly collectively and self-defined roles that staff may not be aware of, or that existing projects are unable to fully explore or support.

“I remember seeing moments when young people, at the Urban DRR project specifically, showed some discontentment with the way power is distributed within the project—as if they wanted to work on more things and have more agency than what was ‘given’ by Plan and partners.”

Youth Steering Committee researcher

Younger age groups, across the sexes, identified with the role of being a “learner” whereas older-age cohorts generally saw their roles as being focused on |mentoring.” Acknowledging roles and how they may develop will ultimately have implications on sustainability, issues of ownership and effectiveness towards achieving the SDG targets.

Findings relating to age, gender and diversity

Age disaggregation

Age-cohort disaggregation data was not evident in the Philippines and Indonesia, nor is it often built into project design, both in terms of initiatives examined for this research and in the youth sector in general. This lack of age disaggregation to inform design and impact, is an identified weakness of the current SDG target indicators.

Selection and representation

Which young people are selected or identified to be included in project activities is an important consideration. Our findings show that a distinction is often made between those who need to benefit from the project— that is, the poor, vulnerable and marginalised — and those seen as having higher “potential” to contribute. All of the projects specified the number or proportion of male and female participants. This varied from female only, to more female than male, to a 50:50 split. Young women participated in the FGDs in roughly equal numbers as male youth and were seen to be as active as their male peers. While project design processes may give selection or target group due consideration, there was a notable gap

28 AIESEC’s YouthSpeak survey and ActionAid/OECD, (2015) ‘Beyond Smiling Faces’.

in terms of reviewing this intermittently throughout. Is an intervention reaching out or connecting to all those who may want to be a part of it?

Youth Ambassadors and youth leaders tend to be selected and identified by adults such as teachers, committees, staff. This selection process is usually based on unsystematic and rather opaque criteria such as “willingness”, “volunteerism”, “potential”, or “high achievement”. Potentially, then, we are excluding the very people who most need new opportunities and support. These are the young people who could help us reach others like them who are the stated focus of many projects. Further, we are increasing the gap between them and those who are participating.

A United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study notes that “the process by which youth are chosen to participate is an important factor in their legitimacy as youth representatives. The process of choosing members can be highly politicised. Often youth are appointed by government officials, not by their peers... selecting youth through a fair and transparent process is a promising practice for increasing representativeness in youth leadership.”²⁹

Gender and sexual identity

Those doing the selection may hold strong opinions about the role of different kinds of young people that influence the selection or nomination process. Adult selectors may also have preconceived notions of the young women who do participate, which in turn can affect how these young women are able to be involved and their levels of comfort about participating:

“For boys there is an expectation to have a job and girls are expected to support their family at home,”

in the words of a government official in Jakarta.

Social change takes time; traditional ways of thinking and acting are embedded and change slowly. Gender stereotypes, in particular, emerged in many of the mainly adult discussions. Most of the projects either identified only girls as the main focus or mentioned “especially girls” in planning documents. It is also noted that in execution the focus on girls may get lost. For example, the final Urban DRR report (July 2017) consistently disaggregates all data by gender and this suggests that, “for almost every training and activity, participation of young men was higher than for young women”. However, this apparently wide deviation from the original project intentions and an explanation for it, does not appear in the narrative report.

All of the projects in the research had a focus on the inclusion of young girls and women, but project documents paid less attention to some of the barriers to participation that young women specifically are likely to face. These may include existing or increased restrictions on young women’s mobility and increased demands on their time due to expectations that they take on more domestic burdens. Apart from the Urban DRR report, we did not find the issue of reduced opportunities for young women to engage with the projects, and to stay engaged with them to be strongly highlighted in project reporting.³⁰

It is vitally important to ensure that

29 USAID, (2014) ‘Youth Engagement in Development: Effective approaches and action orientated recommendations for the Field’.

30 Young women who took part in the FGDs did not specifically raise the issue of differences between themselves and their male peers as a barrier (but we need to bear in mind that these were the young women who were present – and that those who were absent would have a different experience to share). The research did not include home visits, which might have allowed the views of less active/visible youth participants (especially young women) to be included in the findings.



young women do not get left out, or if selected, that they continue to have the opportunity to participate in all activities. Moving into leadership or higher visibility roles would be an example. It is also important to keep checking that it is not only the relatively privileged young people, based on gender, education, class, location, who have opportunities to participate.

Exploring young people's emergent and adaptive roles

Several participants in programs, male and female, noted that at the start of joining a program they had not thought through how they would like to be involved. Interestingly, most said that while their responsibilities might have been outlined, no rights were discussed. Roles emerged and covered a variety of aspects: including being educators and

informants for adults or parents. This is an important learning: young people often want to be peer educators, but they can also be educators within their wider social networks, including for adults.

Young people who participated in FGDs perceive themselves as having broader and evolving roles, entwined with seeking higher status. These roles were not always conceived of by either project staff or the young people themselves in the initial stages.³¹ Equally, many in this research perceive themselves as an intrinsic part of society—as contributing in some way.

Furthermore, several programs resulted in challenging stereotypical roles and gendered norms, especially by young women.

Young women in the Philippines mentioned that after involvement with

Unshakable bond. *Girls play outside their damaged school in Dolakha, Nepal.* (Photo by Plan International)

³¹ During FGDs there were two questions – one to capture intended roles, and another to understand the actual roles that young people took on, and wanted to take on. FGD participants were not always clear of this distinction, or translation did not make this clear.

the project “their dreams had become bigger” and that they had changed their career aspirations. Previously they had not considered that women could have wider career goals.

“Before being a YPE, I thought I’d try to be a teacher; now I am planning to be a police woman.”

“I think I can be a good lawyer and maybe go into politics.”

Female focus group participants,
rural Philippines

The role of parents

In almost every focus group discussion or interview the topic of parents came up. Young people frequently told us that the first level of support they needed when getting involved in the projects and taking on new roles was from their parents.³² Project staff were also keenly aware of the importance of connecting with parents and ensuring that they were supportive of what their daughters and sons were doing, but also noted that this is a challenge. In conservative environments (for example the “Yes I Do” implementation areas in Central Java, Indonesia) religion and tradition influence social norms strongly. Both parents and young participants were aware that the issues the project is trying to address potentially opens up gaps between parents and children.

“No, definitely cannot talk with my parents about what I learned in the first sexual and reproductive health training. They would be very shocked.”

Female focus group discussion participant
with Yes I Do, Indonesia

“Older youth can have a role more similar to adults. They can be the bridge, youth make the communication between adult and children easier.”

Male community member, Indonesia

“I tell my parents a bit about what I am doing but just very simply. They just want me to do well in my university studies. They are not so interested in working for the rights of others.”

Male focus group discussion
participant, Indonesia

Just as young people are aware that there may be some dissonance between what they are learning in the projects and the “outside” prevailing ideas of what youth need to know, so are parents trying to make some internal adjustments to reconcile some of these perceived contradictions.

“Yes, I want my daughter to continue education, but there is a risk here in this community. What if she cannot find a husband? This is our culture too. If there is an unwanted pregnancy, this is shameful.”

Father, Yes I Do area, rural Indonesia

Table 4 outlines the myriad of futures roles young people foresee and the kinds of support they will need. Across both countries both young women and men expressed an aspiration to be connectors, to be “better citizens, parents and leaders” and to address social cohesion by “promoting an acceptance of all people” and to “work together on issues to reduce tensions”.

³² Parental support (Table 4) featured prominently for both young women and men in both countries.

Youth ownership—promising examples emerging

In many instances, young people do not compartmentalise the challenges and issues they or their communities face. Many of the projects demonstrated a solid understanding of ways to work towards gender mainstreaming, either via the focus group discussion responses, documentation or the interviews. It was exciting to see the projects are also exploring how to cater for different needs and approaches and beginning to show differential findings, starting from the gathering of baseline data. A strong sense of ownership was expressed from the AIESEC focus group discussion in Indonesia as they talked about their Malala 2 project in Bandung:

“I feel I built this project from scratch.”

“I think it was not MINE but all of OURS.”

The group learned from Malala 1 and modified most of the activities based on that learning.

Young people involved with RAISE, Safetipin and as volunteers with AIESEC in the Philippines, were almost unanimous in stating that while they were happy with what they had done, or were doing, and that they could also take on additional roles beyond those ascribed to them by the project. For example the Safetipin App training clearly raised the consciousness of many of those carrying out the night-time safety audits.

Participants said:

“[We] did not really know or ask or think about how the information would be used, but it was an eye-opener for us”.

Other comments were:

“Later it made me a bit angry and I realised governments should be taking responsibility and they are not.”

“...now that I think of it, we should have gone back six months later and done the audit again. I still have the app on my phone.”

The issue of accountability is discussed in more detail in Section 5. An AIESEC volunteer in the Philippines said:

“Community-based projects can and should be linked up to something bigger. That is why we are doing SDG needs-assessments now.”

In this section we have presented our findings in relation to what roles young people currently have, predominantly as peer educators; how they see their roles evolving in the future as educators, citizens, leaders; and the support they request. We examined challenges around inclusion, diversity and different identities—especially gender—and how this might influence or constrain the roles young people are ascribed or those they want to claim for themselves. We highlighted the role of parents and the need to acknowledge the challenges of internal dissonance as they navigate what they see as “best” for their children. Finally we presented adults’ perceptions.

Table 4: What kinds of support do young people need to fulfil their future roles?

	Indonesia	The Philippines
What can young people like you contribute to the development of your community or country in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take on responsibility - Work together on issues to reduce tensions between us - Address huge corruption issues - Be different leaders; firstly be honest to oneself - Address low quality education and gaps between rich and poor - YP have original idealisms and fewer responsibilities, so we can contribute more - Work on the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take a stand against corruption - Be better future leaders - Help others recognise their own strength and potential - Influence authorities towards positive decisions for youth - Be knowledgeable parents; better equip our own children - More socially aware; be the change - Go into government - YP must walk the talk
What kinds of support do YP need to make these contributions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support from adults - Parents' support is the first thing - Need government permission too - Brand projects (for credibility); this results in greater impact - Help with social research surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support of parents - Link to others with same passion - Link with NGOs where there is an info gap - Knowledge, expertise, finance - Appreciation (value our role) - Link to Plan International and ADB can result in giving YP voices additional credibility - More on results and accountability - "Break in" to support networks

Box 1. Adults' perceptions of the role of young people

The official student council relies much more on teachers to guide them but the Youth Peer Educators are more independent somehow. And if we include “naughty” boys and girls then it can turn them around a bit—we have seen that.

— Head teacher, rural Philippines

We thought boys have more time to spare and are more social so they'll be active in the group but we saw young women were also strong. Young people can collect risk information in “real time” from marginalised families; they are fast and get out there.

— Local authority, urban Jakarta

Boys are different; at 18 they are expected to be working and contributing income to the family. For girls, it is OK to get married at 18. This is tradition and an economic decision.

— Father, rural Indonesia

Young people can be agile and move fast but institutions move more slowly. We have to manage their high expectations within bureaucracies that move rather slowly.

— ADB HQ staff

Young people's problems are interconnected and it's hard for them to open up to parents or religious leaders, but youth facilitators can help with that connection.

— Youth-led NGO, rural Indonesia

Now, girls can tell their parents “I want to finish my education and then I can get married”. This is at least some progress.

— District regent's wife, Indonesia

Involving youth in the Community Child Protection committees will help with sustainability and they [young men and young women] are serious and very active.

— Local NGO partner, rural Indonesia

I was married young and I do not want my daughter to suffer as I did. If we break the traditional pattern then daughters, as well as sons, can do many things.

— Mother

Section 5: Research Findings on Capturing “Value Add”

In this section we turn to the second research question: what evidence can we find to demonstrate how young people “add value” and contribute towards achieving the SDGs?

We report our findings on “value add” from the perspective of young people involved in the projects themselves, from the perspective of those the work is intended to benefit. We also look at how other stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, government officials, accord value to the contributions of young people.

As noted in the introduction, there are two outcome and impact dimensions to be considered with regards to “value add” and youth engagement:

- i) Youth engagement that changes or adds value to a project’s identified changes or outcomes, which in turn contribute to the SDG goals and targets and;
- ii) Personal changes or growth within the youth participants themselves. In both countries and all five interventions there was recognition that both are important components.

“When you have a passion and then realise that others have it too and you can link up, doing something changes all of you. Most young people are just not aware of how much they can do, how much capability they actually have.”

Female focus group discussion participant,
Manila

Work with youth-led groups or organisations as partners.

The significance of working with youth-led organisations as implementing partners was noted by field practitioners as making a positive difference and in itself adding value:

“The difference is that in ARI (a youth-led partner of ‘Yes I Do’) we are living those experiences ourselves—in terms of sexual identity, struggles with employment. We are part of that reality in the villages.”

Male staff member of a youth-led
NGO, Indonesia

Furthermore, in the Plan International’s Urban Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) project, the lesson learned was that ideally the most appropriate partners should be those that are youth-led because they have a different mindset and orientation towards the whole endeavour. Youth organisations and programs that are run, developed and staffed by youth, offer advantages due to greater social proximity, familiarity and awareness of youth issues and tastes and hence ability to understand and relate to youth and design and implement programs that youth deem attractive and pertinent.³³

³³ Ontario Region, (2005) ‘YOUTH ON YOUTH Grassroots Youth Collaborative on Youth Led Organizing in the City of Toronto’.

“Developing the mechanisms to work with youth organisations as partners, not in a ‘service provider’ mode, challenges ideas of hierarchy and the top-down culture that is prevalent in big development organisations. In my experience with youth-led or youth organisations, I have seen a tendency for a more horizontal and participative and less bureaucratic organisational structures.”

Female Youth Steering Committee researcher

Track changes at the individual level

While there are a number of tools available to different projects for tracking changes in youth themselves,³⁴ this is still quite new to staff of organisations in this study, not yet fully confident in using them. Plan International projects recognise the importance of capturing the change in youth participants themselves, and are starting to use these tools. If information can be collected consistently, this represents a big opportunity for building up the evidence base systematically.^{35,36}

AIESEC emphasises building individual leadership capacity and supporting personal development but the data currently collected is not yet collated. Nor are the long-term trajectories of alumni systematically tracked, although there are plans to do so. Project staff,

the YfA team, and AIESEC volunteers across both countries were all keenly aware that a strong baseline, especially right at the start of interaction with young people, is important as it is critical for any later comparisons (Recommendations).

The focus group discussion findings were almost unanimous with regard to the questions of increased confidence and learning as a result of participating in the projects:

“Did participation in the project increase my confidence? Absolutely! I had to step up and out of my comfort zone.”

Female focus group discussion participant, Manila

“I would say what I learned is ‘life-long learning’. I asked myself at each point in the project: ‘Kaya ko bang gawin?’ which means ‘Can I do it?’ And then when I did do it, it was a great feeling of achievement.”

Female focus group discussion participant, Rural Philippines

Findings from the RAISE project in the Philippines suggest a substantial positive difference between trained and untrained secondary students and YPEs versus non-trained youth and non-YPEs. This may provide evidence that RAISE interventions around YPE and training children and adolescents contribute

34 Population Council, (2016) ‘Building Girls’ Protective Assets: A Collection of Tools for Program Design’. New York. And see Annex 5 for an assessment tool that includes tracking personal/social outcomes in Banking on Change.

35 For Yes I Do – individual personal growth is highlighted in the ToC and design documents, but the baseline tool on meaningful youth participation is yet to be adapted for Indonesia.

36 For Plan specifically, how these ‘new’ tools that are more youth-focused align with (or not?) the ‘child participation’ standards and tools from Plan Academy may be useful), and ultimately how they fit into the Learn, Lead, Decide and Thrive framework.

Table 5: Preliminary Data from the RAISE project (Plan International Philippines) September 2017

Secondary Students		Trained	Not Trained	YPE*	Not YPE*	Girls	Boys	Total
Improved social, personal and financial assets as perceived by targeted students TOTAL %	EL %	83%	69%	82%	74%	80%	77%	79%
	BL %	58%	61%	–	60%	62%	59%	61%
% of adolescents trained who can identify at least 3 key ASRH messages and practical application	EL %	86%	80%	86%	78%	90%	76%	83%
	BL %	62%	58%	–	58%	62%	53%	58%

YPE = Youth Peer Educators; ASRH = Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health; EL = endline; BL = baseline

*Number of YPEs in BL too small (≤5) to allow for meaningful comparisons to end line results for YPEs.

to the improvement of social, personal and financial assets, as perceived by secondary students. The largest changes relative to baseline have been in the personal assets of adolescents—especially around Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health (ASRH), health, and decision-making (Table 5). However, since the baseline study only had data on a very small cohort of YPEs, we cannot make a strong case for change around the youth peer educator activities specifically.

Youth pushing the paradigm from “presence” to “influence”

“We should learn from our CRC years how to go beyond ‘presence’ to real engagement.”

Project manager, Indonesia

The field research found a number of interesting examples of young people moving from having a “presence” towards having an influence and several of the young people in focus group discussions described how they had

worked to claim their space and to legitimise it:

“When we first started the peer education sessions in school, teachers would come in and say: ‘Why are you in this classroom? Why are you using this time? It is school time; it is our time, not yours’. We had to really prove to them that we should have that time in the school day—and that we could achieve something useful.”

Female focus group discussion participant with RAISE, the Philippines

Also from RAISE, one school principal described a big shift in his own attitude and that of others in the school faculty. He said:

“Polanyi High School is about to roll out the Open High School Model. Earlier we would not have thought to

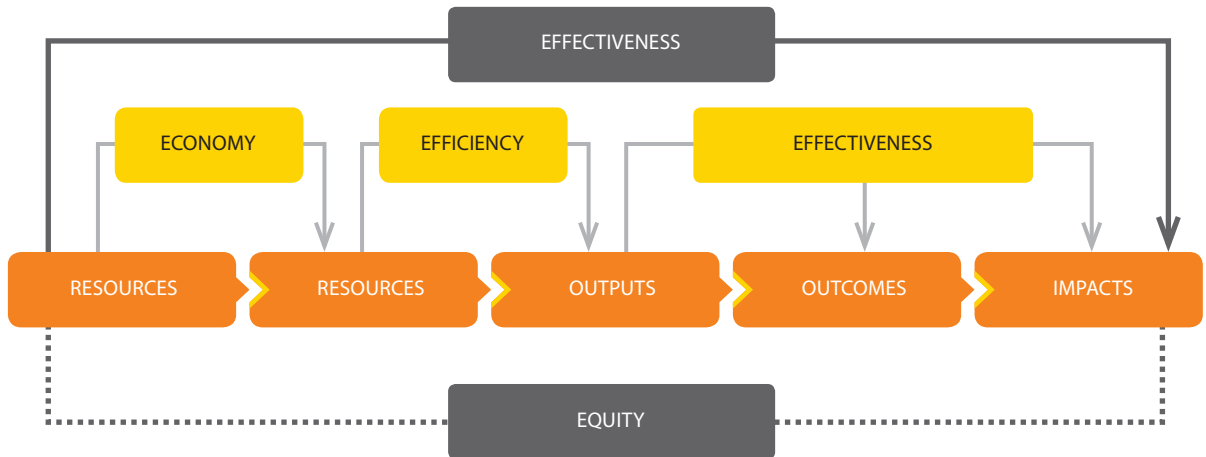


Diagram 1: The 4E Approach—DFID, 2011

bring students into our discussions and any planning meetings. Now we think it would be odd not to. They have so many insights as they know their friends and peers. Listening to young people in our school is like getting a proper diagnosis from the doctor—they have new ways to look at solutions, not just the old prescribed answers.”

There has been growing recognition and validation by government. This was a strong finding from Jakarta’s Urban DRR which disrupted “business as usual” in how it supported youth to work with local authorities which previously mobilised youth mainly as “free labour” for area clean-ups and rubbish collecting.

When Youth Ambassadors (YAs) presented detailed risk assessment documents,

“it was a paradigm shift. These officials had not seen, or even thought of, youth in the role of leaders,”

said an Urban DRR project manager in Indonesia. Now the Government’s Disaster Risk Management office in Jakarta has officially put the Youth Ambassadors on the government volunteer roster. Plan International also involved YAs in the selection process for new partner NGOs, recognising that youth-led NGOs with strong experience in supporting youth have a different mindset to bring to the process.

DFID’s “Value for Money” framework: findings using a normative approach

One existing way of assessing “value add” is to use a VfM framework, such as DFID’s which has four main components for analysis (outlined in Diagram 1). However, given the “value add” points discussed above, the question remains: can such a framework capture the totality of youth contributions towards the SDGs?

This conceptual framework encourages a programmer or policymaker to examine:

- 1 Economy or cost data: Major cost categories and how to control or optimise these. Safetipin, in 2016-17, mobilised 144 youth volunteers for around \$400 and generated almost 2,000 night-time safety audits in urban locations around Manila and Quezon City. So, on the face of it, these youth initiatives seem economical. However,



they would need to be compared and contrasted, and there is a scarcity of both comparative data within the organisations in this study and more broadly in the wider sector and literature.³⁷

Such findings should be compared to either other similar youth initiatives, or projects that seek the same goals but use a different approach, for example teacher-to-pupil via formal education. The text box in Recommendation 4 provides further suggestions.

- 2 Efficiency: What are the economies of scale? What is the beneficiary cost compared to others working with similar target groups? If the costs are much higher, is there a justification? Are targets and milestones met on time? Findings from this study show that the rolling out of second- and third-tier

YPEs in the RAISE program delivers economies of scale, compared with the first roll-out to Trainers of Trainers. There is a cascading out of information to many more youth.

- 3 Effectiveness: How well do activities undertaken on projects achieve their stated objectives at outcome level? Is positive long-term impact generated? Are negative disincentive effects avoided and how sustainable are interventions?

Findings from several of the projects included in this study indicate that youth participation produces a number of positive channels for making interventions more effective. These include their role as influencers of positive deviance, the catalysation of impacts beyond those captured in project documents, a unique ability to be both instigators and beneficiaries

Saving for tomorrow.

Young people participate in a Community Savings and Loan Group in Viet Nam. (Photo by Plan International)

³⁷ Even the most well analysed approach to youth engagement – peer education has limited comparative data, see: Price, N. et al., (2009) ‘How Effective is Peer Education in Addressing Young People’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs in Developing Countries?’ Children and Society Vol. 23, p.291–302.

of change, and the energy and creativity associated with youth voice.

- 4 Equity: Is the initiative reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised populations? If not, are there plausible justifications why not? This study found examples among the initiatives, including the Yes I Do Girl Roster Tool to identify girls experiencing multiple or overlapping exclusions and RAISE's focus on "breaking the silence" for young Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people in rural Philippines.

For each of the four components, analysis could go further and comparisons can be made with either a) other similar youth initiatives or b) projects that seek the same goals, but use a different approach. However, another way of looking at the evidence of "value add" is to take into account the research findings and what young people and others have expressed about value. All of our field findings have informed this analysis, but ideally we would have explored this more fully with young participants at the time of carrying out the field work.³⁸

Preliminary findings suggest that the previous normative conceptual approach is in danger of becoming overly instrumentalist. Rather than offering ways for young people to identify and create in ways they deem appropriate, it is somewhat restrictive. Young people can also claim what "value add" means.

Articulate results

All stakeholders involved in the programs reported that the meaningful involvement of youth in

the programs resulted in "value add"—having a significant impact on their lives and the wider community. However, there was a persistent issue with capturing these results.

The "plus factor" often seems to fall outside the framework of the original project design: if there is no accountability to report data upwards, it seems there is no systematic data collection on these changes. So, "evidence" of additional value is slipping away. Youth engagement is often confined within static pre-specified results and logical frameworks determined at design-phase that are not re-assessed. In practice the research found many examples of youth themselves identifying a range of other changes as a direct result of their efforts—but these fell outside the static project framework.

Overall a very strong finding from the field research is that significant "value add" is not being routinely captured. There were several other examples of results that were significant and valuable, but because they were unanticipated or because the staff and partners were not sure how to measure or capture the changes, they were not sufficiently highlighted. In the RAISE project in the Philippines, the Youth Peer Educator's "result" was principally limited to improving ASRH knowledge, which in turn was intended to positively influence the higher level impact of reducing unwanted teenage pregnancy. However, during all the focus group discussions and interviews, young people, head teachers, program staff and local government staff, identified other changes at school or community level. These included more tolerance for difference and less bullying, reduced smoking and drug use, and the formation of youth-

³⁸ To fully do this would mean taking the initial findings presented here, and co-creating and discussing further with the young people in the focus groups, and or taking it online/ to existing/ emerging national networks.

led savings groups. These significant changes and improvements could be traced back to the efforts of the youth peer educators, but they were not systematically captured by the monitoring and evaluation indicators.

Similarly in Indonesia, the original design for the Urban Disaster Risk Reduction project in Jakarta described the intended result accruing to the efforts of the Youth Ambassadors to be mainly evidenced by the completed risk assessments and preparedness plans. In fact, as with the example above, young participants, local authorities and project staff clearly identified several other positive, unanticipated outcomes. These included reduced anti-social behaviour and delinquency, reduced smoking and drug use and less youth-on-youth violence. There were also changes in young people's own concerns about education; some participants were motivated to keep studying, improve their grades or go back to get a degree.

In Phase 2 of a continuation project, implementers hope that collecting baseline data on a much broader range of "social problems" in the community and on key individual characteristics of the young participants themselves, will enable future monitoring and evaluation efforts to track and capture many of these additional value-added elements.

The project teams were aware of these changes and some were documented. Many of the projects have collected some qualitative information on these unanticipated changes— individual case studies, for example— and have shared these with donors and other stakeholders. However project staff were convinced that not only individuals featured in the case studies had experienced change; there were broader trends. Staff expressed some frustration that perhaps they had not collected or analysed the change stories, or other qualitative data, in a way that was systematic enough

to be able to draw out and evidence clear patterns of change. Similarly, for changes at the individual level, project managers and staff felt that more consistent attention to tracking changes systematically is required.

What next? Youth framings of "value add"

It would be worthwhile applying a youth lens, critique or framework to extrapolate youth meanings and alternatives. For example, preliminary findings from this research show that the young people we spoke with related to discussions around 'diversity' rather than 'equity' alone. Many young women and men seek ways to bring different groups into their networks as evidenced by statements like:

"YPEs are kind of a 'cool' group to be part of; if we accept those who are different [at school], they get bullied less."

This is what one participant said in a RAISE focus group discussion.

The section above discussed the research findings in relation to the concept of 'value' and 'value add'. Overall we found that young people, parents, NGO staff and government officers and decision-makers may use and understand the concept of value in several ways; these may be consistent and overlapping, or divergent. We found that measuring these different aspects of 'value add' remains challenging. In the absence of systematic methods to first identify and then track magnitude and direction of change, many important contributions that young people are making towards achieving the SDGs, are under-valued, or not acknowledged at all.

Amongst peers.

Young people from different ethnicities, cultures, religions and languages in Sri Lanka take part in a two-day youth sharing forum.

(Photo by Plan International)



Section 6: Recommendations

This section will now examine the strategic recommendations that will enhance how young people can contribute to the SDGs.

Our research examined a range of initiatives involving young people and asked them to tell us “how is it working for you?” This collective testimony therefore represents a nuanced body of evidence to inform future practice on youth engagement and the SDGs.

In summary, the findings show that the first step in effectively harnessing young women and men’s contributions should be to actively listen, acknowledge and act upon—supporting the roles that young people want to assume and cultivate. We found that initiatives often do not fully identify or support the emerging roles that young people self-define. While young women and men often want to be peer educators, some also express aspirations to go far beyond this. They may want to be educators; leaders—changing negative social norms; citizens with status—striving to reduce inequality and social differences within and between generational social networks. In other words: with their parents, teachers, community leaders, project staff and governments. This means it is imperative to explore and acknowledge at the start of any initiative how young people want to contribute, what they want their roles to be and how these may be redefined over time.

We also found that young people, parents, NGO staff and government officials and decision-makers may use and understand the concept of value in several ways. While this may sometimes be consistent and overlapping, it is at other times divergent. We found that measuring these different aspects of “value add” remains challenging. This is especially so due to the absence of systematic methods to first identify and

then track magnitude and direction of change, which is compounded by the difficulties of establishing a valid counter-factual case for comparison. This means that many important contributions that young people are making towards achieving the SDGs are under-valued, or not acknowledged at all.

How are young people contributing towards the SDGs?

Based on our findings, how are young people contributing towards the SDGs? This research shows that young women and men are already contributing substantially towards the SDGs in the following ways:

- 1 Helping deliver programs which are responsive and attuned to real needs and often in ways that benefit in terms of economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity and sustainability. Yet much more needs to be done to track and monitor this, including purposively designed comparative studies.

Marshalling hidden assets and sometimes unexpected contributions, including:

- 2 The ability of young women and men to seek out partnerships, network and build alliances, both within and between generations. They identify with and act as connectors or “mobilisers”—in person, online and in public and private spheres. There is an untapped role that young people may identify with in terms of communicating the message of the SDGs, contributing towards their monitoring and holding governments to account, as well as mobilising others to contribute as active citizens. This has big implications for SDG 17 on Partnerships, as well as the “Leave no one behind” agenda.

- 3 Their ability to influence their parents, their communities and local and national government. Young people don't just want to be peer educators—they can be highly effective educators, advisors, and managers across generations. For example, in terms of achieving SDG 5 on Gender, young people are already influencing the views of their parents, their teachers, and the wider community. But this is not always acknowledged, let alone tracked.
- 4 Their capabilities to contribute towards development policies or legislation that supports the achievement of all 17 SDGs—with particular regard to imagining what might happen in the future (Diagram 3) and envisioning how national policy development, implementation and tracking might be done differently.
- 5 As co-designers of initiatives and as “provocateurs” (in program design) across all 17 SDGs, but especially those directly impacting them such as education, gender and employment.

By engaging youth in these under-acknowledged and hidden roles much more directly, visibly and respectfully, the SDGs could receive a strong and much needed pulse of youthful energy towards their achievement.

Recommendation 1: Pursue innovation, creativity, and risk.

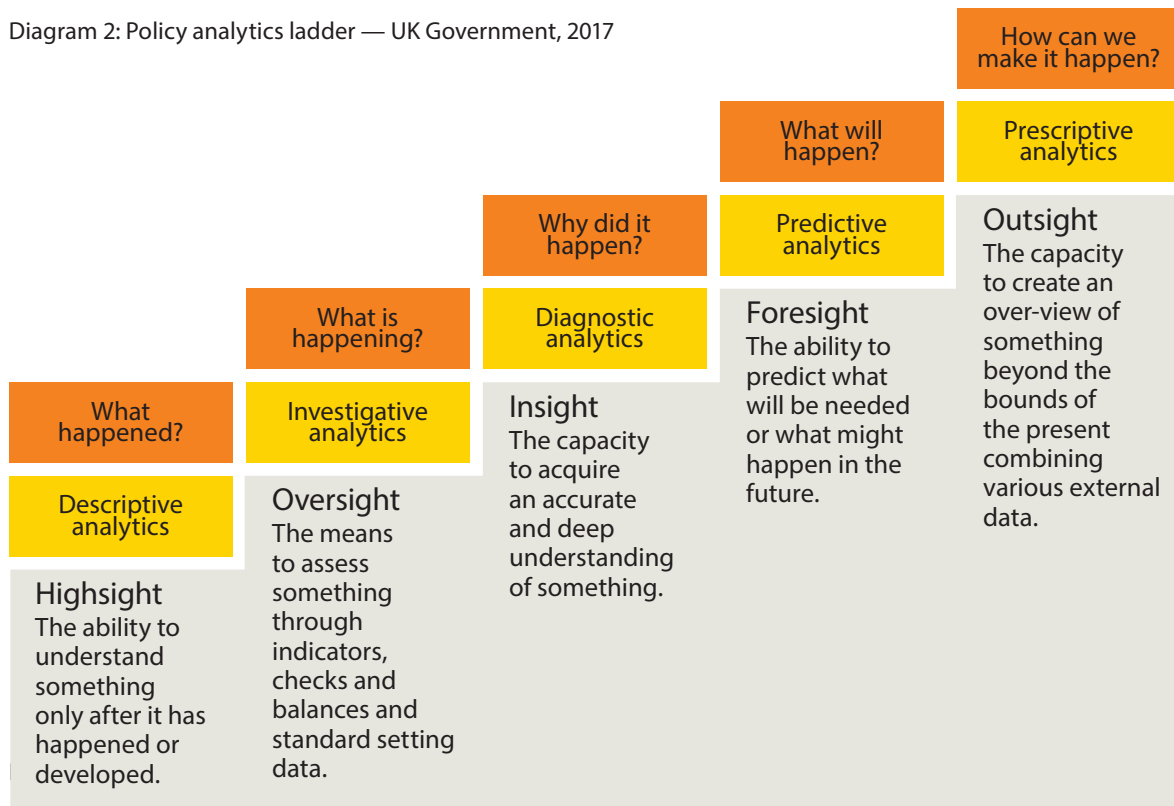
We will now turn to the final research question: what are the strategic recommendations that will enhance how young people can contribute towards the SDGs?

Essentially, these recommendations indicate where governments and development partners should invest to



By youth for youth. Young people participate in a Youth for Asia project in Lao People's Democratic Republic that is working to expand and strengthen the Higher Education system. (Photo by ADB)

Diagram 2: Policy analytics ladder — UK Government, 2017



optimise the youth “dividend”. There are four top-line recommendations, which each consist of contributory sub-recommendations. The first recommendation concerns innovation, creativity and risk—including how organisations need to change in order to maximise the unique contributions young people can make to SDG achievements. The second recommendation picks up on how to go about building the evidence base.

Here we offer some practical steps that are concerned with changing mind sets and how research and monitoring and evaluation processes might be improved. The third recommendation is concerned with ensuring that young women and men are able to move from “presence to influence”. And the last recommendation focuses on the need

to strengthen programs that safeguard civic space and improve institutional good governance and accountability opportunities for young people.

Embrace innovation and creativity

“Young women and men... will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.”

United Nations General Assembly, 2015

The importance of innovation in achievement of the ambitious SDG targets has been well documented and the specific role that young men and women can play as innovators and creative thinkers has been highlighted in many studies. Factors that impede youth innovation³⁹ include a relative lack of

39 “Innovation is fundamentally about the politics of contending hopes”: Annual Report of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser 2014. Innovation: Managing Risk, Not Avoiding It. Evidence and Case Studies.

financial resources, few capacity-building and mentorship support opportunities, lack of exposure and visibility and insufficient access to relevant networks—due to social determinants such as poverty, gender, illiteracy and isolation of marginalised groups.⁴⁰

The UK Government’s Policy Lab⁴¹ presents a way (Diagram 2) of looking at how policymakers and project design staff can release out-of-the-box thinking and creativity. It has an interesting application for our research findings around youth engagement. Plan International and ADB both highlight a desire to unleash “what young people can offer”. At the same time they are working within large organisations with varying degrees of risk aversion and a need for some predictability. Is giving more responsibility and agency to young people a risk?

The current dilemma is how can large agencies working with young people find better ways to discover “next practice” while at the same time contributing to the ever-expanding knowledge of “best practice”. The Policy Lab notes, that the difference between “best” practice and “next” practice might not be obvious, but the mindset is very distinct.

The research findings suggest that many of the interventions we looked at are at the level of “oversight”—assessing through means of indicators, checks and balances and setting standards. Furthermore, we found that a clear shortcoming of working with young people at this “oversight” level is that standard project frameworks and indicators for monitoring, evaluation and assessment are in fact failing to capture many of the contributions youth are making—the “value add”—and the

significant changes that many individual young participants report in terms of personal growth.

This research is an example, perhaps, of moving up to the next level, beyond “oversight” towards a deeper understanding or “insight” of the processes and changes that are in fact occurring. The pursuit of “best practice” seeks and explores what works by looking for examples where something has been done before—and is therefore successfully proven—and so is still at the “insight” level. However perhaps the most exciting contribution and value-add from young people is via “next practice”—“foresight” or “outsight”—which as the Policy Lab notes, “has no precedent, is future focused and therefore has many unknowns and ambiguities”. It likens moving to these higher levels on the ladder as “more like getting to the moon than crossing a street: it requires re-thinking the question at hand, rather than replicating against a benchmark”.⁴²

Question control and risk taking

In the literature review and during our field research, the notion that young people can make a major contribution to achieving the SDGs as they come up with new and more daring approaches to problem solve surfaced repeatedly.⁴³ What kinds of organisations and what forms of organisational support then are needed if these more daring solutions and contributions are to be realised and harnessed, and are they ready to cede some control and assume some risks too?

“At first, the donor was worried about the issues—bullying, sexual identity—being raised by young

40 SDSN, (2017), ‘Supporting Youth-led Innovation to Achieve the SDGs’. SDSN Youth Solutions Report Policy Brief No.1.

41 Policy Lab, (2017) ‘From best practice to next practice.’ UK Government.

42 Policy Lab, (2017) ‘From best practice to next practice.’ Blog accessed 2 August from: <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2017/07/24/from-best-practice-to-next-practice/>

43 SDG Action Campaign – MYWorld



Hands-on. Participants in the Vocational Education Strengthening Project in Indonesia learn how to use automobile plant equipment in a training centre. (Photo by ADB)

people because the project was initially supposed to be about teenage pregnancy.”

RAISE field staff, the Philippines

We found that—in terms of the five levels in Policy Analytics Ladder, Diagram 2—the programs included in this study are working somewhere in the “hindsight” or “oversight” areas. But to really unleash the creativity and energy often cited as the key attributes of young people, the projects need to step up towards the next practice, the “foresight” or “outsight” level. The current “comfort level” seems to be principally to give young people a role in activities that are more or less mapped out by the project in advance—and this in turn is linked to perception of risk.

“operations staff want to minimise risks—so we also have to convince them that the risk factor if they

engage young people is small or contained.”

Key informant interview, ADB HQ staff

Minimising risk appears to be counter-intuitive to “next practice”—so how can this be resolved? One interesting example comes from ADB in Tajikistan where the YfA team is taking responsibility for quality assurance of the youth component of a much bigger ADB project. The notion of brokering or assuming risk around work with young people (where it is perhaps linked to or supported by more risk-averse entities) is an interesting development. We suggest some further research into these kinds of arrangement, where there is less emphasis on defining the inputs or outputs expected from youth engagement and more “risk brokering” to help neutralise or reduce the risks for other stakeholders. This might liberate young people to take programming to the “foresight” and “outsight” levels and lead to some “next” level gains.

Letting go of control also means making internal changes or developing the mechanisms to work with youth organisations or groups of young people as partners. This would challenge ideas of hierarchy and top-down culture that are prevalent in big development organisations. Most youth organisations or groups tend to have more horizontal and participative and less bureaucratic organisational structures.

Recommendation 2: Build the evidence base.

Our research suggests that there is a lot of promising work that young people are already contributing to and in some cases spear-heading, but that existing monitoring, evaluation and learning systems are not always able to capture these contributions. There is a need for more targeted data to fully comprehend what works and what does not. This data should cover the areas identified in “Building Blocks Essentials” as highlighted overleaf. There are some partnerships and initiatives that have been started that make good steps towards this such as the SDG Youth Action Mapper, an online tool that allows young people to map and measure action on the SDGs. However, these must be scaled up to reach the level of data required. There is also a need to critique and share experiences of both successful and less successful policies and programs, from local to national levels, as well as across countries.

Identify some “tangible outputs”

Decision-makers interviewed for the research often mentioned the value of having some “tangible products” to show what young people have achieved. It may be important for projects to identify some tangible outputs—ideally as “markers” towards more embedded, transformational changes—that could be flagged up to decision-makers and parents to gain credibility. The crowd-

sourced data from Safetipin is a good example of one such tangible output, demonstrating how youth notice different and important factors when compared to adults doing the same safety audits. Collecting school-specific data on teenage pregnancy and smoking data in RAISE target schools might be another example. While this data may not be statistically significant, it is empirical and factual and potentially powerful.

Re-frame so-called “soft skills” as important marketable skills

Almost all the projects that engage young people are introducing and supporting a whole range of important skills to succeed: leadership, decision-making, team work, communication, planning and prioritising, self-confidence,

Straight from the source.
Youth delegate from Pakistan shares her experience and challenges of getting an education.
(Photo by Plan International)



self-control, rules and behaviours. However we also found that because they are not in a project that clearly identifies as “youth employment” or “entrepreneurship” they are not seen as being relevant to livelihoods and therefore are not valued as “marketable skills” by youth themselves, parents and some decision-makers. For organisations that support a wide range of youth-targeted projects a light-touch mapping exercise could help identify the different kinds of skills that the various youth engagement projects are facilitating among participants and consider some generic guidance on language used to describe the skills young people are developing towards future jobs and citizenship. A re-framing of these skill-sets as “marketable” is likely to gain more support from parents, local leaders and authorities and lead to more coherence and clarity in describing some of the more tangible benefits that youth engagement work delivers.

Ensure appropriate levels of support

In order to optimise young people’s contribution to the SDG goals and to ensure there is sufficient support as young women and young men take on new roles, implementers need to think carefully about how much support young people require. This is especially important as young women and young men start talking about and acting on, subjects not usually openly discussed or start taking on roles not considered “appropriate”, because of their age or gender or both.

The findings from the focus group discussions clearly show that, in order to be able to increase their efficacy and optimise their contribution to

the achievement of the SDGs, most young people still require and in most cases seek, support from their parents. Activities to involve parents should be built in from the design phase.⁴⁴ Some of the “new” ideas that are being introduced to young people and parents are triggering internal dissonance. Young people may feel a little guilty that they are learning about topics that parents would find shameful; parents supporting their youth may feel that this is at odds with their tradition or their religion. Some focus group participants are also aware of the “risks” they face in taking on roles not usually ascribed to someone of their age or gender. These dissonances and potential risks to participants need to be proactively identified, recognised and managed as carefully as possible.^{45,46,47}

Streamline monitoring, evaluation and learning processes

Simplify: The tracking of youth contributions to the SDGs presents a great opportunity for youth-led monitoring and evaluation. Program staff could ask young participants themselves to help identify what kinds of personal growth or broader change they hope to see, what they think the questions should be and how to collect the data. This may vary depending on who they are and where they are. Ideally the process should be kept open and flexible; for some young people digital tracking might be feasible, while for others it may be impossible. At a project level, implementers might want to negotiate with youth if they feel it important to include some “core” variables on contribution to the SDGs.

44 Nair, C. et al., (2013) ‘ARSH 4: Parental Understanding of Adolescent Issues: Parent-Adolescent Dyad Agreement’. In the Indian Journal of Paediatrics, Volume 80, Supplement 2, p.209–213.

45 SFCG, (2017) ‘Supporting the design and implementation of Youth-Led research Projects. New York.

46 CRS, (2017) ‘Peacebuilding, Governance, Gender, Protection and Youth Assessments’.

47 Rhodes J. et al., (2009) ‘First Do No Harm: Ethical Principles for Youth Mentoring Relationships’. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, Vol. 40, No. 5, 452–458.

Building Block Essentials: How to capture the efficacy of youth engagement towards achieving SDG goals

Frameworks that look at youth engagement, its efficacy and contribution to the SDGs should be aligned with organisational processes (such as Plan International's new "Learn, Lead, Decide and Thrive" Monitoring and Evaluation tools), but also offer a space to try new approaches—by the very nature of working with young people—an alternative space is always a key aspect of meaningful youth engagement. It is crucial that reflective processes are protected and discussions around youth impact tackled head on. See the work of the UK's Centre For Youth Impact as an example, or the Centre for Effective Services' 2016 report: Evaluation of the United Youth Programme Pilot Phase 2015–16.

The following aspects will build the future evidence base for youth engagement and value add with regard to achieving the SDGs:

- 1 National and local context: social, economic, political barriers for young people to engage.
- 2 Personal and social development outcomes (including inter-generational cohesion).
- 3 Contribution by young people to monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (including how roles develop).
- 4 Contribution to project outcomes (SDGs) and indicate if it relates back to the type and quality of engagement.
- 5 How young people develop and extend a project's goals (or a question in comparison with adult only or non-youth activity).
- 6 How young people add or adapt ways of doing a project—positives and negatives captured.

As good practice, all monitoring frameworks and processes should also seek to identify comparisons with other youth organisations and SDG interventions.

Collate: Linked to the recommendation above, we suggest investing more time and resources into collating broader trends across interventions and nationally. Where tools are widely used (for example AIESEC's leadership survey) the results are only considered individually and not collated or analysed to demonstrate broader trends or changes for participants.

AIESEC's Leadership Assessments offer a potentially valuable data base—but this has yet to be exploited.

Adapt: As youth roles develop, so should the way that change results are tracked. Generally projects do not track "added" or "evolved" outcomes. Mid-term reviews offer a great opportunity to re-assess indicators and methods of tracking individual and broader outcomes. This could mean adapting

logical frameworks and even taking risks, co-creating new methods of tracking with young people and not just using them as data collectors (see Building Block Essentials above for further suggestions).

Recommendation 3: Ensure that young people are brought into inner circles.

Our findings suggest that a wide range of young people are ready, willing and able to be a part of bigger conversations about their lives and their futures. Achievement of the SDGs will be accelerated if there is a strong commitment to listen to, act upon and respect the voices of young women and young men of different classes, ages, socio-economic conditions and abilities. Especially because of their skills and capabilities in network and



Harnessing half the workforce. Trainees on the Skills for Employment Investment Program in Chittagong, Thailand learn about different types of tools. (Photo by ADB)

movement building both inter- and intra-generationally. Policymakers must ensure that young women and men are brought within the inner circles of decision-making, including with governments, the private sector and civil society.

Evidence from the YfA initiative shows that a group of young people can constructively challenge standard ways of working in an established institution like ADB. The YfA projects team based at ADB in Manila secured roles in the project architecture and formed partnerships with grassroots youth organisations in countries of implementation. Together they developed and implemented social behaviour change communications and there are strong indications that these collaborations enabled an increase in relevance of program outcomes for communities directly impacted.

Re-imagine opportunities to reflect, share, and learn with young people

Creating more opportunities for young people to share what they have learned, add to that learning and receive validation and support is important. This is especially true for youth with less experience. It may also become the basis for more solidarity through linking up with other groups and experiencing an increased recognition of the power of collective voice. During the field research many participants quickly pointed out the advantages of different kinds of workshops and events that had brought together otherwise unconnected young people and decision-makers, often sparking ideas they had not had individually. Improvements in knowledge management, such as how “evidence” is shared and stored internally and externally, could improve access for a variety of audiences.⁴⁸

48 UNICEF, (2014) ‘Knowledge Exchange Toolbox’. New York.

Where support to youth engagement is at an early stage, it is especially important to set up these processes, to avoid wasted opportunities.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen interventions that encourage civic space and accountability.

Future youth programming will require that civic space is safeguarded and alongside this institutional good governance is improved, especially in relation to accountability.

Some of the interventions in the study included an accountability component. However, many of the young people we interviewed were clearly poised to take on a “bigger role” in relation to decision-making—with the caveat that they wanted support to do so. But for youth to be effective active citizens, they need to understand how political and economic decisions are made and to recognise the huge part that they can play in contributing to improve accountability at all levels. By taking an informed and active role in accountability mechanisms young people’s current mistrust of politics, private sector operations and civic institutions can be reduced.

Given the opportunity, young people, especially youth-led groups and organisations operating at the grassroots, can be a powerful force in safeguarding transparency and accountability. Such groups are more likely to be responsive to the needs of the youth cohort they represent and offer greater possibilities to unleash the creativity and innovation of youth. It’s time for forward thinking.

Develop accountability mechanisms

Many young people do not see their worlds in terms of one or two issues, but rather a complex web. Nor are

young lives linear—they may have several jobs rather than one that gradually becomes more senior; they may become independent, and, in the case of educated girls moving into their husband’s family home, lose independence.

An overall finding was that the emerging and responsive advocacy roles of young people were often shied away from. Youth-led accountability can be a powerful tool to ensure promises are delivered, norms are challenged and the best outcomes achieved.⁴⁹ This could include influencing or advocacy with peers, with parents and with government and big business—opening out pathways for achieving greater accountability upwards, across and within organisations.

This does not have to be seen as confrontational. In fact when we look specifically at the SDGs, governments have signed up to the whole SDG process which includes more attention to citizens’ monitoring results as being efficient, effective and equitable.

The United Nations calls for a “data revolution” to create a “clearer and more up-to-date picture of the world, to use in planning, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programs that will together achieve the SDGs and in holding to account those in positions of power over resources and other decisions that affect people’s lives”.⁵⁰ Young people have a huge potential role to play in this data revolution.⁵¹

Incorporating digital engagement with tools such as Youth Action Mapper⁵² and Safetipin offers opportunities to extend aspects of accountability and collective voice across many youth engagement projects in innovative and exciting ways. But not all young people have

49 Oaktree et al., (2016) ‘Practice Note: Youth Participation in Development’.

50 UN, (2014) ‘A World that Counts: mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development’.

51 UNDP/Restless Development, (2017) ‘Guiding Principles for supporting young people as critical agents of change in the 2030 Agenda’. UNDP: New York.

52 <http://sdsnyouth.org/youth-action-mapper/>

equal access to technology and, in general, girls are likely to have less access. Therefore it is important to blend and optimise a combination of digital and face-to-face engagement. While either approach can deliver personal and community outcomes, the interest and motivation young people might have around technology opens up new spaces for “forward thinking”.⁵³

Support movement building

As the research found, young people have many of their own ideas about the roles they could take in developing their communities and contributing to the SDGs and these evolve and change over time. Initially young people clearly benefit from organisational support and “scaffolding” and find additional value when this is provided via youth-led organisations. However, we found fewer examples of project design that supports transforming from a project focus to broader support for youth-led social change movements.

Ideas like investing in and fostering youth alumni networks⁵⁴ and supporting youth-led dialogues are practical ways to nurture networking and connection-building.⁵⁵ Before creating “new” movements, this kind of strategic networking offers substantial opportunities for organisations to link up with existing groups of motivated, enthusiastic young people and, where relevant, other adult-based groups.

Organisations should take time to understand what change dynamics are already in place and look at what can be done to support nascent movements. There is a huge potential role for development partners to build bridges for young people to explore their potential for collective expression and action.

53 Safer Cities for Girls looked at Minecraft as a way to help young people present safety audit results in an innovative and future-focused way.

54 Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE) projects in Asia do this, and they are tracked as impact indicators.

55 E.g. YouthSpeak Forums AIESEC runs in 80+ countries on SDGs. See: <http://youth4globalgoals.org/understanding/>

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Annexes

Annex 1: Project Summaries

Yes I Do Indonesia

This is implemented by the Yes I Do Alliance (Plan Nederland, Rutgers, Amref Flying Doctors, Choice for Youth and Sexuality and the Royal Tropical Institute). This Alliance maintains that deeply rooted gender inequalities and social norms must be transformed for girls to enjoy their full freedoms. With partners, alliance members have committed themselves to a five-year initiative, commencing in 2016 and concluding in 2020.

Funded by the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) policy framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands and coordinated by Plan Nederland, the alliance operates in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Pakistan and Indonesia. Research and awareness-raising activities are guided by five complementary pathways of change which are expected in Indonesia, to reduce child marriages and teenage pregnancies. Yes I Do's five pathways of change seek to advance: a) behavioural change of community and "gate keepers"; b) meaningful engagement of adolescent girls and boys in claiming for their SRHR and c) taking informed action on their sexual health; d) alternatives to the practice of child marriages, female genital mutilation and

teenage pregnancies through education and economic empowerment; and e) responsibility and political will of policy makers and duty bearers to develop and implement laws toward the eradication of these practices.

In Indonesia YID has been rolled out in twelve villages in Rembang, Sukabumi and West Lombok districts and established Village Child Protection Group in each as well as identify "impact groups" and youth facilitators in these areas. Plan Indonesia is the lead partner in Rembang, Central Java.

Urban DRR Indonesia

This was implemented by Plan Indonesia for 33 months (October, 2014 -30 June 2017 in West Jakarta, DKI Jakarta Province. The project goal was that vulnerable urban poor communities have increased resilience for disaster and safety risks through children and youth engagement. The objectives were:

Objective 1: To increase the active participation and contributions of children and youth regarding DRR and safety issues affecting vulnerable urban poor communities

Objective 2: To increase neighbourhood and household capacity in disaster preparedness and safety promotion with a special focus on flood and fire hazards in urban contexts

Objective 3: To increase awareness and capacity of general public, local authorities and decision-makers on DRR and safety issues affecting vulnerable urban poor communities

The project was designed to strengthen resilience of the community through community based actions for disaster and safety risks among urban poor communities and the strategy included key components to engage neighbourhoods, households, youth and local as well as national government units in concern. The activities included 1) youth-led documentation and monitoring, 2) neighbourhood disaster and safety risk reduction planning, 3) household preparedness actions and 4) awareness raising and capacity support to the general public, local authorities and decision-makers in the Jakarta metropolitan area to the critical needs and gaps facing vulnerable urban communities. The target beneficiaries were approximately 15,000 direct child, youth and adult beneficiaries and 45,000 indirect beneficiaries in seven locations in West Java.

Real Assets through Improved Skills and Education (RAISE) for Adolescent Girls

This was implemented by Plan in the Philippines from July 2014-June 2017. It is focused on enabling marginalised children and adolescents, especially girls, in two of the Philippines' poorest provinces – Masbate and North Samar – to complete primary school and transition to and complete secondary school and have access to opportunities that will enhance their personal and social assets that will enable them to make better life choices. The project employs a dual strategy of 1) reducing barriers (including household poverty, gender

discrimination and labour-related constraints) and 2) building key social, personal and material assets for adolescent girls through quality formal and alternative education opportunities. The project's specific objectives are:

- 1 To increase completion rates of primary education and transition to secondary school for children at risk of dropping out, especially girls (aged 10-12).
- 2 To increase rates of secondary school completion for marginalized adolescents (aged 13-19), especially girls.
- 3 To ensure that marginalized adolescents (aged 12-19), especially girls, develop improved social and personal assets and are supported by their communities to make positive life choices.

The RAISE Project's target beneficiaries include a total of over 14,700 children and adults. At least 10,976 children and youth (aged 10-19) will directly benefit from the primary level education, secondary level and alternative education programs and life skills from the provinces of Masbate and Northern Samar.

SAFETIPIN Philippines

Safetipin is a tool that works to enable cities to become safer through collection of data through crowdsourcing and other methods. Safetipin in collaboration with ADB and YfA conducted safety audits in Quezon City in Metro Manila. The audits by the ADB volunteers were conducted between July and November 2016. Safetipin is a mobile-based phone and online application which contributes to making cities communities and cities safer for communities (with a particular

focus on girls and women) by providing safety related information collected by users. At the core of the app is the Women's Safety Audit, a participatory tool for collecting and assessing information about perceptions of urban safety in public spaces.

The audits are based on nine parameters: lighting, openness, visibility and crowds, security and walk paths, availability of public transport, gender diversity, and feelings of safety. Having a score for an area provides a simple way to measure improvements. Out of a total of 5,839 were generated and of these almost 2,000 were conducted by youth volunteers mobilised by YfA. After completing the safety audits all the data and shared in a January 2017 launch event held in Manila. Safetipin also worked with United Nations Women in Manila and took this work to the next stage of presenting data to decision-makers and to hold them accountable for making improvements.

Malala Project – Indonesia (Bandung)

The Malala Project was implemented by a mix of nine national (Indonesian) and five international volunteers in the summer of 2017. Planning started from April 2017 while the actual teaching interventions in orphanages in Bandung was during June-July. Bandung, is the capital of Indonesia's West Java Province. It is the second largest city set amid volcanoes and tea plantations. Bandung is home to Sundanese culture and tourism. Many children in Bandung do not have access to proper education. The Malala Project aims to raise awareness among Bandung citizens about the importance of children's education.

AIESEC volunteers intended to do it by teaching and motivating the children, campaign and direct education about the importance of children education to multiple stakeholders in such as schools and to public areas. The national volunteers (all university students) organised the six-week events with three orphanages. The 2017 project (Malala 2) was a follow-on from a 2016 Malala 1 project and therefore benefitted from some learning from earlier work – two of the volunteers were carried over from the project in 2016 and so had lessons to share. The task for the volunteers included a mix of organising, communicating marketing and designing promotional tools, primarily to raise funds.

Annex 2: Research Lines of Inquiry

Research Question 1

Understand: What meaningful roles do young people identify with in order to help achieve the SDGs? To what extent are these roles influenced by gender, education, class/caste/ethnicity (or any other identity)?

A. Contextual Programme Information

- Country, region
- CIVICUS ranking
- Type of project (self-initiated/NGO supported/etc.)
- Target Groups for the project (by age, ab/disability, gender, ethnicity)

B. Goals and Inputs

- Programme goals
- Summary of main activities

C. Quality of Documentation (evidence) Available on the Project/Program

- Feasibility/Situation Analysis
- Project Design—ToC and/or M&E Framework
- Monitoring and Reporting Docs/Info
- Assessments/Evaluations
- Learning Products/Briefs/Blogs

D. Young People's Self-Identification of Roles

- What were your intended roles in project x? (What were your intended contributions?)

Research Question 2

Capture/Evaluate: What evidence do we have to demonstrate how young people “add value” and contribute towards achieving the SDGs? To what extent is this mediated by gender, education, class/caste/ethnicity (or any other identity)?

A. VFM/Replication/Scale up/Sustainability characteristics

- Total Cost (per year/target beneficiary)
- Potential for scalability (High/Medium/Low)
- Potential for sustainability (H/M/L)
- Strategy/focus on delivery of learning products (internal and external) to inform/influence (H/M/L)
- Funding source (one or multiple, etc.)
- Degree of Government involvement/Buy -in (H/M/L)

B. Goals and Inputs

- Assessing needs/Prioritising
- Design and target group selection
- Risk management/Safeguarding
- Implementation

- Monitoring
- Evaluation
- Learning and dissemination
- Collaboration and influencing
- Holding authorities to account

C. Quality of Collaboration/Engagement (Red/Amber/Green)

- Voluntary nature of participation
- Resourced: in terms of staff support, access to information, funding, time span and space to carry out activities
- Informed: YP aware of what they are getting involved in & their rights/responsibilities are
- Valued: YP taken seriously, as is their work, in order to avoid tokenism
- Relevant: YP input into initiatives aiming to address their needs and deal with relevant issues of importance to them
- Owned: activities/initiatives youth led and YP feel that they have ownership
- Educational: opportunities for learning in both formal and informal settings
- Flexible: meet changing needs of YP and allow for personal/work obligations
- Foster empowerment and active citizenship
- Diversity in groups is not only respected, but sought after
- Monitored and evaluated on ongoing basis- ensure initiatives meet changing needs of YP, and can promote innovative youth participation activities

D. Outcomes/Impact Connected to SDG Targets (each project needs to link to at least one of these target indicators)

- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
 - 4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
 - 4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill
 - 4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated
 - 4.6.1 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
 - 5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age
 - 5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older

- subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence
- 5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18
- 5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age
- 5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care
- 5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
 - 8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities
 - 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
 - 8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training
 - 8.b.1 Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy
- Goal 17. Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
 - 17.16.1 Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness monitoring frameworks that support the achievement of the sustainable development goals

Research Question 3

Enhance: What are the programmatic and policy recommendations to enhance the roles and impact that young people can contribute towards the SDGs?

A. Appreciative Inquiry (future visioning)

- How can YP like you contribute to the future development of your community/country?
- How can you show others (prove, evidence) that you/YP are contributing?
- What kinds of support would YP need to make these contributions?



Back cover: Young people leading disaster preparedness innovations in the Philippines. (Photo by Plan International)

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members—48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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