



GLOBAL CONSENSUS STATEMENT

MEANINGFUL ADOLESCENT & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

We, the signatories of this Statement, experts and leaders in international development, affirm that young people have a fundamental right to actively and meaningfully engage in all matters that affect their lives. Through this Statement, we build on a growing body of evidence showing the importance of meaningful engagement of young people in development efforts and reaffirm our commitment to protect and promote the rights of all young people, and to ensure they are central in strategy setting as well as the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all policies, programmes, and initiatives that affect and protect them. We also acknowledge the importance of engaging early adolescents¹ and appreciate the additional precautions it may take to secure their meaningful engagement and ensure their safety.

This Statement seeks to galvanize local and global health and development communities around a common understanding of how we can ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged and participate in the development and implementation of all policies, programs, and processes that affect them. Meaningful engagement of young people is central to our common vision of achieving the outcomes and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), FP2020 goals, and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health among other internationally agreed upon targets for eliminating poverty and promoting health, rights, and wellbeing.

As a result, we are moving beyond the recognition and identification of young people solely as beneficiaries and towards engaging them as equal and valuable partners in projects, research, programmes and initiatives that are led, co-led, and centred around young people, whereby they are equal partners in decision making with other stakeholders, or young people are consulted and meaningfully engaged in the execution of initiatives led by other stakeholders.²

To this end: We commit to actively abide by the definition and principles of meaningful adolescent and youth engagement highlighted herein.

Meaningful adolescent and youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between adolescents, youth, and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and world.

Meaningful adolescent and youth engagement recognizes and changes the power structures that prevent young people from being considered experts regarding their own needs and priorities, while also building their leadership capacities. Young people includes 'adolescents' ages 10-19 and 'youth' ages 15-24 (based on the WHO definition)³ regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, marital status, religion, disability, political affiliation, or physical location. - Adapted from Youth Power, USAID⁴

This definition of meaningful adolescent and youth engagement is framed by the following principles, which enable a young people-centred approach wherein an organisation main-streams engagement and systematically places young people at the centre, acknowledging their diversity as individuals and as autonomous rights-holders.⁵

1. Early adolescents refer to young people aged 10-14 years.

2. USAID, *Youth Engagement in Development: Effective Approaches and Action-Oriented Recommendations for the Field*.

3. For the purposes of this document, 'youth' refers to all people ages 15-24 years and 'young people' refer to all people ages 10-24 years. However, it is recognized that youth-led organizations work with those up to 29 years, as this broader group provides meaningful contributions and expertise to policies and programs for young people.

4. Youth Power, *Meaningful Youth Engagement*, Available at <http://www.youthpower.org/youth-engagement-cop>

5. IPPF (2015) *The journey to youth-centeredness in IPPF*. London: IPPF.



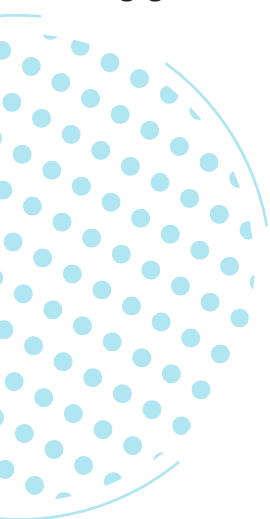
We commit to fully realizing the following principles as a part of our efforts to meaningfully engage young people, value their expertise, work and input, and nurture their talent to maximize their potential:⁶

- 1. Rights-based** – Young people are informed and educated about their rights and empowered to hold duty-bearers accountable for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling these rights;
- 2. Transparent and informative** – Young people are provided with full, evidence-based, accessible, age-appropriate information which acknowledges their diversity of experience and promotes and protects their right to express their views freely. There is a clear and mutual understanding of how young people's information, skills, and knowledge will be shared, with whom, and for what purpose;
- 3. Voluntary and free from coercion** – Young people must not be coerced into participating in actions or expressing views that are against their beliefs and wishes and must at all times be aware that they can cease involvement in any process at any stage;
- 4. Respectful of young people's views, backgrounds, and identities** – Young people will be encouraged to initiate ideas and activities that are relevant to their lives, and to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. Engagement will actively seek to include a variety of young people according to the relevant needs or audience. Engagements will be culturally sensitive to young people from all backgrounds, recognizing that young people's views are not homogeneous and they need to be appreciated for their diversity, free from stigma;
- 5. Safe** – All adults and those in positions of authority working directly or indirectly with young people in relation to issues at every level have a responsibility to take every reasonable precaution to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation, tokenism, or any other negative consequence of young people's participation.

Through the recognition and realization of this Statement, we reiterate that young people have a right to participate on equal terms with other stakeholders on matters which impact their lives.⁷ This includes the development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes, and initiatives.

We commit to ensuring that young people are afforded trust and acceptance in their role of decision-making, so we may all benefit from true partnerships, opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, and strengthened ability to tackle issues which affect young people's lives.⁸

We agree to participate in accountability mechanisms to monitor our progress as we champion the meaningful engagement of young people.



6. Adapted from the UNICEF, *Adolescent and Youth Engagement Strategic Framework*. Available at <http://www.unicefemergencies.com/downloads/resource/docs/Adolescents/63792683.pdf>

7. *The A-Z of MYP: How to integrate Meaningful Youth Participation into your organisation and program, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality.*

8. *Women Deliver, A Discussion Paper on Meaningful Youth Development.*



CHECKLIST AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A Complement to the Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent & Youth Engagement

CHECKLIST

These are recommended practical strategies for meaningful adolescent and youth engagement which agencies, policymakers, civil society, health practitioners, and all others who seek to work with young people in an inclusive and equitable way can implement:⁹

1. **Support young people's leadership** by facilitating opportunities for decision-making in all stages of programs and initiatives. This includes working with adolescent and youth-led organisations as a core partner, creating and/or supporting projects, establishing an advisory group of young people with a clear structure for influencing the direction of the organisation or initiative, and reserving spaces for young people on planning and decision-making groups. It also includes ensuring that these roles are clearly defined and young people are adequately supported in every way to ensure that they can influence decisions.
2. Make a commitment to discuss and **agree upon the roles, responsibilities, and expectations** together with young people, preferably in a written agreement. These discussions should explore the aim, goal, and purpose of engagement with young people to ensure mutual accountability. Before engaging, young people should be involved in determining how their participation will take place, its scope, purpose, and potential impact, and how or what they would like to contribute. After engagement, young people should receive clear feedback on how their participation has influenced outcomes, and given opportunities to participate in follow up processes or activities, including monitoring and evaluation of young people's participation and its overall impact.
3. **Establish a clear method for addressing and responding to feedback.** Regularly discuss with young people whether or not their views and ideas are being heard, and how meaningful engagement of young people can be improved.
4. **Create and identify opportunities** for young people and support them to advocate for issues and causes of their choice, and to safely share their experience and knowledge as experts by connecting young people with key population networks, mentoring young people to speak at advocacy events, and hiring young people as members of staff.
5. **Support sustained engagement and ongoing relationships** between young people and the communities they represent. This may include providing young people with enough time, space, and other necessary resources for meetings with community members to multiply their impact and reach within their community, including before, during, and after major events.
6. **Build skills and knowledge** of young people and the adults working with them. Young people may need help to develop their ability to engage other stakeholders and specific training on a variety of topics and to ensure their successful involvement. Additionally, adults need preparation, skills, and support to facilitate young peoples' engagement effectively. This may include training adults to listen to, work jointly with and engage young people effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities.
7. **Use language and communication methods that are understandable, respectful, and accessible** to everyone by avoiding overly technical language and jargon, developing material for disabled young people, and providing translation support to those who should require it.
8. **Provide young people sufficient support and resources**, including financial resources, in a timely manner. This includes giving appropriate priority to funding and officially partnering with adolescent and youth-led organizations. It also includes heightened transparency and diversity in funding arrangements by allocating funds to young people in an equitable way and ensuring sufficient funds are available to guarantee that participation is truly accessible for a range of young people. Within culturally appropriate boundaries, young people will be compensated for their participation in recognition of their skills, expertise, and time.
9. **Provide enabling environments** and ensure that adequate time and resources are made available to young people so that they are prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to participate in decision making. These approaches should be mindful of the differing levels of support needed, based on the age and evolving capacities of young people, and acknowledge that the expertise and participation of some young people may draw from adverse personal experiences that could trigger emotional trauma that may require the provision of psychological support.
10. **Promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women** in all processes. This includes implementing gender-sensitive measures to facilitate the engagement of girls and young women in participatory governance. By meaningfully engaging women and girls, we will transform gendered social norms by legitimising their engagement in decision-making arenas.

RESOURCE LIST

The principles of meaningful adolescent and youth engagement are reaffirmed in:

1. Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12 - This highlights that participation is a substantive right of all children and young people.
2. 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) - Action 6.15 - This noted that young people should be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives.
3. 2016 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS – Paragraphs 21, 30, 64(b) - This notes the importance of the meaningful involvement of people most at risk of and affected by HIV, highlighting that they should enjoy all human rights and equal participation in civil, political, social, economic and cultural life, without prejudice, stigma or discrimination of any kind.

⁹. AIDS Alliance, "Aiming High: 10 Strategies for Meaningful Youth Engagement".



4. 2006 African Youth Charter – Article 16 - This notes that States have a responsibility to secure the full involvement of youth in identifying their reproductive and health needs and designing programmes that respond to those needs.
5. 2012 Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration – This identifies issues and priorities facing young people within the context of population and development, noting recommended actions for the outcome report of the [ICPD +20] review and for the post 2015 United Nations development agenda. It highlighted the importance of putting young people's rights at the heart of development.

Resources to further your application of the Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent & Youth Engagement

1. **AIDS Alliance: [Aiming High: 10 Strategies for Meaningful Youth Engagement](#)** - This outlines and explains 10 key strategies for MYE.
2. **CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality: [The A-Z of MYP: How to integrate Meaningful Youth Participation into your organization and program](#)**, 2nd edition, January 2018 - This provides all the tips, tools and information necessary to conduct a three-day training on MYP, including draft resources and pull-outs. It has a notable Flower of Participation graphic which aids in understanding MYP easily. Additionally, it presents a series of checklists to help young people to measure the different elements of youth participation and develop graphs to represent how well agencies are engaging in MYP.
3. **DFID: [CSO Youth Working Group, Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers, 2010](#)** - This document targets donor agencies and policy makers and the processes they employ for the engagement of young people. It outlines and displays the three-lens approach to youth participation and makes a case for why donors and policy-makers should engage with youth in a meaningful way. It explores policy frameworks and national policies and has a series of 20 case-studies exploring youth engagement issues in different countries and organisations. Additionally, it presents relevant resources including a youth scorecard template and a list of indicators from Youth Development Index.
4. **Advocates for Youth: [Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation](#)** - This document targets organisational staff involved in implementing activities, and youth who may be engaged at all levels of an organisation. It has a series of pull-out handouts covering aspects of MYE which can be used in conducting trainings. Additionally, it has a youth-adult partnership training curriculum and accompanying slides, designed to build the skills of individuals and organizations to involve youth reproductive health (RH) and HIV/AIDS program design, development, implementation, and evaluation.
5. **IPPF: [Setting Standards for Youth Participation](#)** - This document was aimed at agencies engaging in planning their development work with young people. It highlights the continuum of youth participation and presents the advantages, disadvantages and some programmatic examples of aspects of the continuum. It also outlines 15 tips for good participation practice and has a series of self assessment questions targeted at adults working with young people.
6. **IPPF & USAID: [Forging Youth-Adult Partnerships on the Board](#), IPPFAR induction guide for board members** - This document targets Board members of IPPF highlighting methods through which young people can be integrated meaningfully. It has a series of activities and pull-outs to conduct a training session on MYE.
7. **IWHC: [Ensuring Youth Participation in Sexual and Reproductive Health Policies and Programs: What we Know](#)** - This has a brief but thorough summary of policy obligations, that are the series of commitments that have been made by governments to realise the right of young people to participation and decision making, including in SRHR programs. It also provides a comprehensive definition of youth participation.
8. **PMNCH/Women Deliver: [Advocating for change for adolescents: A Practical Toolkit](#)** - This document aims at engaging young people meaningfully in advocacy through providing practical information to guide the design, implementation and monitoring of advocacy action roadmaps.
9. **UNICEF: [Adolescent and Youth Engagement Strategic Framework](#)** - This highlights the distinction between participation and engagement and delineates the key principles that are necessary for AYE to be effective, ethical, systematic and sustainable.
10. **USAID: [Youth Engagement in Development: Effective Approaches and Action-Oriented Recommendations for the Field](#)** - This document has a thorough explanation of the Hart's Ladder of Participation and a series of action-oriented approaches to youth engagement.
11. **WHO/UNAIDS/UNESCO/UNFPA/UNICEF/UN Women/World Bank/PMNCH/EWEC: [Global AA-HA! \(Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents\). Guidance to Support Country Implementation](#)** - This set of documents aim to give countries evidence-based guidance as they decide what they will do for adolescent health and how they will do this. Throughout them, they reinforce the importance of meaningful adolescent and youth engagement.
12. **Women Deliver: [A Discussion Paper on Meaningful Youth Development](#)** - This provides a comprehensive definition of Meaningful Youth Engagement and explored key elements, which was achieved through a widespread, multi-layered consultation about youth engagement. It also highlights the major barriers to young people's engagement in SRHR advocacy.
13. **World YOUTH Report: [Chapter 10: Youth Participation in Decision-making](#)** - This highlights the benefits of youth participation and the consequences of failing to give young people a voice, identified models of youth participations and itemizes a list processes which young people can be engaged.
14. **Youth Coalition & CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality: [A step by step guide to creating sustainable youth-led organisations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#)** - This document is a guide which tackles the establishment and sustainability of youth-led organizations on SRHR. It clearly shows key lessons in ensuring organizational sustainability and identifies challenges and strategies to overcome them. It also identifies additional resources for young people interested in creating, maintaining or strengthening youth-led SRHR organizations.