

Meaningful Youth Engagement & Youth Leadership in the HIV Response



Background

Despite progress globally, young people continue to be marginalised and homogenised and seen primarily as beneficiaries of programmes and policies, rather than as leaders and implementers in their own right.



Key Demands and Priority Actions for Young People



Key demands from young people include the meaningful engagement of young people *in all our diversity*; that is, not engaging one young person in a process or one youth network as a tick box exercise

but ensuring that young people who are members of key populations are engaged on the basis that they have their own set of needs and requirements within the context of the HIV response.

Getting a Baseline



Getting a baseline for meaningful youth engagement and youth leadership requires utilising a framework that recognises these as two separate yet important concepts within the HIV response.

Meaningful youth engagement is the “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 organisations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and world.”¹

Youth leadership is putting the funding and decision-making power in the hands of young people and youth led organisations to implement services and advocacy for the improvement of the health of young

communities and ensuring a community-led response to HIV for young people.

Both of these are key and should not be mixed up. For example, you could advocate for meaningful youth engagement in national decision-making processes relating to the HIV response, and that advocacy could include advocating for youth-led HIV-related services. Having a clear understanding of your targets and goals are key to a successful advocacy campaign.

For MYE in particular, the UNAIDS NCPI generates some data on this that may be useful during the planning phase of your work.

Contextualising the Targets



Depending on your situation, these targets may be closer or further away from being achieved. Based on your baseline, set some intermediary targets that are contextual to your setting that are achievable in

a reasonable timeframe that will support with the reaching of the relevant 2025 targets. You don't need to shoot straight for them, set some more achievable outcomes if needed.

Relevant Commitments in the 2021 Political Declaration



Commitments on Meaningful Youth Engagement

58

Commit to reinforce global, regional, national and subnational HIV responses through enhanced engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, including regional and subregional organisations and initiatives, people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV, key populations, indigenous peoples, local communities, women and men, girls and boys, including adolescents, young people and older persons, in diverse situations and conditions, refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, political and community leaders, parliamentarians, judges and courts, communities, families, faith-based organisations, religious leaders, scientists, health professionals, donors, the philanthropic community, the workforce, including migrant workers, the private sector, media and civil society, and community-led organisations, women's organisations, feminist groups, persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, youth-led organisations, national human rights institutions, where they exist, and human rights defenders, and relevant United Nations entities and other key international partners such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

This can be used to advocate with policy makers to ensure that young people are adequately represented in relevant fora and decision-making processes, and that young people are included in any consultations are held with civil society and communities to ensure an enabling legal and policy environment.

59

Commit to effective, evidence-based, operational mutual accountability mechanisms that are transparent and inclusive, with the active involvement of people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV and other relevant civil society, academia and private sector stakeholders, to support the implementation and monitoring of progress on the commitments contained in the present declaration

This paragraph clearly makes commitments on CSO engagement, and as such is relevant to youth-led organisations.

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Commit to the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS principle and to empower communities of people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV, including women, adolescents and young people, to play their critical leadership roles in the HIV response by

This is the first time the GIPA Principle has been referenced in a Political Declaration. This is a good platform to ensure that young people living with HIV are meaningfully engaged in relevant national and sub national policy making processes.

64(a)

Ensuring that relevant global, regional, national and subnational networks and other affected communities are included in HIV response decision-making, planning, implementing and monitoring and are provided with sufficient technical and financial support

Part of ensuring meaningful youth engagement is ensuring that youth-led networks are well resourced, and engagement is not extractive. This could be used to advocate for any funders of civil society to dedicate funds for youth-led networks to be able to continue operating.

64(d)

Supporting monitoring and research by communities, including the scientific community, and ensuring that community-generated data are used to tailor HIV responses to protect the rights and meet the needs of people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV

The aspect of this that encompasses meaningful youth engagement is the part that refers to "ensuring community-generated data are used to tailor HIV responses." Youth networks are often generating data and know the need of their constituents, so you can use this commitment to request NACs and other relevant bodies to include this data in their considerations for the national and sub-national HIV response.

Commitments on Youth Leadership

61(b)

Using differentiated service delivery models for testing and treatment, including digital, community-led and community-based services that overcome challenges such as those created by the COVID-19 pandemic by delivering treatment and related support services to the people in greatest need where they are

The reference to community-led service delivery can be used to advocate for youth-led service delivery, particularly as youth-led organisations are specifically mentioned in paragraph 58.

64(b)

Creating and maintaining a safe, open and enabling environment in which civil society can fully contribute to the implementation of the present declaration and the fight against HIV/AIDS

This is key to ensuring youth-led organisations, in particular young key population-led organisations, can provide services and conduct the advocacy needed for an effective HIV response. Leverage this commitment for policy and law change you wish to see.

64(c)

Adopting and implementing laws and policies that enable the sustainable financing of people-centred, integrated, community responses, including peer-led HIV service delivery, including through social contracting and other public funding mechanisms

This can be used to advocate for social contracting with youth-led organisations/for youth-led responses. In particular, if there are any restrictions on who can be engaged for social contracting, you can also advocate for these to be changed to allow for greater social contracting of youth-led and YKP-led networks.

64(c)

Supporting monitoring and research by communities, including the scientific community, and ensuring that community-generated data are used to tailor HIV responses to protect the rights and meet the needs of people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV

This can be used to advocate both for greater funding, as well as technical support and capacity strengthening of youth-led organisations to implement CLM.

64(e)

Increasing the proportion of HIV services delivered by communities, including by ensuring that, by 2025, community-led organisations deliver, as appropriate in the context of national programmes:

30 per cent of testing and treatment services, with a focus on HIV testing, linkage to treatment, adherence and retention support, and treatment literacy;

80 per cent of HIV prevention services for populations at high risk of HIV infection, including for women within those populations;

60 per cent of programmes to support the achievement of societal enablers

This can be utilised to monitor the proportion of youth-led services that are available. This could include working with other community providers, such as key population networks, to set up a specific service within a general community-led service for young people, through sub-contracting or submitting joint proposals for funding.

64(f)

Encouraging the strengthening of peer-led responses and the scaling-up of efforts to promote the recruitment and retention of competent, skilled and motivated community health workers as well as to expand community-based health education and training in order to provide quality services to hard-to-reach populations

This can be used to ensure continuity and sustainability of the community-led HIV response by ensuring that young people are included in these processes.

Conclusion



While the PD only makes one explicit reference to youth-led organisations in its operative paragraphs (para58), there are many other references to community leadership that can be utilised to promote youth leadership. Working with other community networks, including key population-led networks,

to advocate for community-led responses that include youth could be one strategy to take this forward.

Further, the targets on community-led service delivery can be used to advocate for youth-led responses for young people.

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- 1 The Global Consensus Statement was created under the coordination of PMNCH and can be found here: <https://pmnch.who.int/resources/publications/m/item/global-consensus-statement-on-meaningful-adolescent-and-youth-engagement>

This advocacy guide would not have been possible without the contributions of the following (in alphabetical order)

- African Network of Adolescents and Young Persons Development
- Sinayo Mukume
- The PACT
- Y+ Global
- Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights
- Youth LEAD
- Youth RISE
- Youth Voices Count

These youth networks and young activists have been critical in providing insight into how the 2021 Political Declaration can be used to hold decision-makers accountable to their commitments to young people to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

