

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH PARTNERSHIP: EXPERIENCES AND LEARNING FROM THE GLOBAL ADOLESCENT NUTRITION NETWORK (GANN) TO GUIDE ENGAGING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESEARCH, PROGRAMMING AND GOVERNANCE FOR NUTRITION.



There is growing recognition of young people's role in achieving the [Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and promising momentum toward youth-centred global health. Yet, the voices of young people remain absent in spaces where decisions are made about their nutrition and health needs and how to address these.

Recommendation 10 of the [2021 Lancet series on Adolescent Nutrition](#) called for active partnership with young people to enable them to advocate for change. For many organisations that have engaged with youth, and continue to do so, questions remain as to how to facilitate meaningful partnerships that provide young people with adequate opportunities to express their views, develop their capacities for leadership and influence decision making.

Based on insights and active co-collaboration with young people and nutrition experts from the Global Adolescent Nutrition Network (GANN)¹, we propose **7 guiding principles for youth partnership**. We hope that these principles will be used to inform more purposeful and meaningful partnerships with young people across all phases of research, programming and governance for nutrition.

EMPOWERMENT

- Enable exposure to local and global levels of youth representation
- Provide upskilling opportunities and leadership training to enhance knowledge and capacity
- Create a space for safe dialogue and to grow self-confidence within young people
- Consider the power balance between young people and adults
- Engage youth who are passionate about the cause thereby fostering their intrinsic empowerment
- Engage the parents, families, and communities of young people.



It is important that, when planning partnerships with young people, we provide them with opportunities to engage from policy or practice concept to the design, implementation, and dissemination at all levels (local to global).

Any partnership should actively incorporate opportunities for upskilling and leadership training and for young people's participation in decision making. Youth can have a huge positive influence on finding solutions to global problems and even more so if they are empowered with the skills needed to take part in decision-making.

An organisation that provides a safe space for dialogue consciously and systematically creates an environment where the safety and wellbeing of young people are at the centre of thought, values, and actions. This approach places emphasis on genuine engagement with youth through the consideration of a possible power balance and creates conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm. Partnerships should foster spaces of safe and open dialogue in which young people are able to connect and share their views and experiences without fear of judgement. This may mean having separate meetings for young people, or changing an organisation's ways of working.

Ensuring that young people are invested in a cause may equate to a degree of intrinsic empowerment and self-motivation that benefits both the project and their own capacity development.

As part of the empowerment process, organisations can consider engaging the parents, families, and communities of young people to further develop an enabling environment – both for youth participation itself, and for the changes that young people advocate for.

1

It is important to be transparent about the aims of the project and to clearly define and communicate the role of young people in achieving these.

It is not uncommon for miscommunications to arise between partner organisations and youth partners. To avoid loss of trust between both the youth partner and the organisation, young people must understand what is expected of them before they agree to participate and, where possible, feed into outlining ways of working that they feel comfortable with and that promote their active participation. Trust plays an important role in the meaningful engagement and involvement of young people. Building trust, as with anything, can take time and often a good starting point is the sharing of simple information in casual conversations, e.g., what they are interested in? What their hobbies are? etc.

Transparency should extend to the intended use for young people's input and to the continued sharing of outputs and decisions made as a result, even after project completion. Ensure it is explained to youth partners how their inputs are used, interpreted and have influenced outcomes by establishing a communication feedback loop.



TRANSPARENT

- Clearly set involvement expectations at the outset
- Build trust between the organisation and young person
- Clearly communicate when outcomes have been informed by or resulted from young people's input

2

¹ The [Global Adolescent Nutrition Network](#) is a network of global experts in adolescent nutrition from academia to United Nations agencies, governments and international non-governmental organisations, coordinated by the Emergency Nutrition Network.

RECOGNITION

- Recognise youth as the leaders of today, and as equal actors in any partnership
- Value and recognise youth capacities and contributions as you would those of adults, including by providing a job title
- Value young people's time and input through remuneration and authorship

3



Young people must be adequately recognised as partners. This can be achieved in various ways including in project descriptions and job titles or by providing them with certificates of participation, references for their CVs, or opportunities to speak at meetings or conferences.

The role of an organisation when engaging with young people is to ensure they know they are valued and that they are appropriately remunerated for their time. In some cases, young people may be financially compensated for their time, have their involvement costs covered or receive opportunities to travel.

Recognition of the contributions by youth partners should be reported on and acknowledged both in person and in any publications or presentations connected to the partnership's work.

To respect the rights of young people, it is important that a partnership is conducted with integrity and honesty. Organisations have the responsibility to ensure that privacy, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivities are guaranteed at all times and that young people are free to make their own decisions.

As partner organisations, we need to make sure that power dynamics do not cause harm to participants or disrespect their rights. Respect of youth partner's decisions within the engagement process needs to occur – including if the young person wants to withdraw from the partnership.

Organisations should provide opportunities for youth partners to make informed choices about their participation and to give their consent, assent or dissent. Safeguarding procedures must be in place for partnering with youth under the age of 18. Consideration must also be given to the advantages and disadvantages of parental consent in different cultural contexts.

Organisations need to spend time understanding the context and identity positions of the youth partners and how these might produce intersecting forms of disadvantage, discrimination – or privilege – and build relationships by respecting their lived experiences and maximising their benefits through the partnership.



RESPECTFUL

- Respect young people's input through adaptable working practices (considering workspaces and times outside usual business hours)
- Ensure mutually respectful partnerships between young people and adults
- Respect youth partners as co-contributors, innovators and lived experience knowledge brokers
- Always obtain consent/assent from a young person – not just a parent
- Ensure safe and sensitive risk protection for the youth engaged through organisation safeguarding procedures as well as child rights protection and responsibilities for youth under the age of 18

4

INCLUSIVE

- Provide equal opportunities for all young people to engage, regardless of cultural and social backgrounds, education, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, context, political and economic status, or other characteristics
- Provide opportunities for the most vulnerable and underrepresented youth to engage (e.g., out of school adolescents, girls, young mothers)

5



Meaningful engagement with young people must have inclusive and diverse representation across cultural and social backgrounds, education, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, political and economic context to ensure all voices are captured.

Consideration of intersectionality is crucial to allow opportunities to engage young people on multiple levels, all who have unique expertise and lived experiences of different forms of oppression.

To capture truly diverse and inclusive representation of young people, specific consideration of how to provide the most vulnerable and underrepresented youth (e.g., out of school adolescents, girls, young mothers) an opportunity to engage with nutrition policy and practice is key. To ensure that this takes place, specific consideration of how to best identify and invite participation by these youth partners should be included in engagement planning (e.g., facilitation through local trusted youth organisations such as religious groups or girl guides).

Once identified, the organisation will need to be adaptable in how it engages vulnerable young people and possibly pivot from traditional communication methods or types of digital or written engagement to more facilitated face to face engagement. Specific consideration should also be provided to principles 1,2, 4 during this process.

Engagement must be authentic through intentional interactions that are respectful (guiding principle 4) and provide the opportunity for young people to be heard and contribute to decision making.

Organisational partners should be intentional about youth partners being consulted on decisions, making joint decisions or, best of all, initiating and leading decisions. Participation for show where young people have had little or no influence, decoration where young people simply implement adult initiatives, and manipulation where adults use young people to support their own projects are all unacceptable (see [UNFPA ladder of youth participation](#)).

The measurement of intentional youth engagement and partnerships is key to monitor the accountability of the organisation and the experiences of young people. It also helps to ensure that partnerships are mutually beneficial. This could be achieved by creating feedback loops, conducting interim and exit interviews with young people and/or through internal reflection. Monitoring outcomes of intentional youth engagement and partnerships can provide valuable data for future investment and resourcing of partnerships.



INTENTIONAL

- Engage young people authentically through intentional and respectful interactions
- Intentional partnerships should make joint decisions with young people
- Encourage young people to initiate and lead decision making
- Measure intentional youth engagement and partnerships



CONSISTENT

- Engage young people consistently and embed youth partnership across sectors



Young people must be consistently provided with opportunities for engagement where their opinions can be heard and they can meaningfully influence decisions. This requires more than a 'token' one-off consultation. The opportunity for meaningful engagement must be embedded in institutional policy along with local communities, schools, health care, child protection, and workplaces.

Organisations should support young people to organise and identify issues of concern and help them to access relevant policy makers. This might include actions such as enabling young people to undertake research, develop strategies for change, and provide campaign and advocacy support (ensuring this is led by the youth partner).

REFERENCES DRAWN ON TO BUILD CONTENT

1. *Youth Co-Research Toolkit for Researchers 2023* Young and Resilient Research Centre Western Sydney University, Sydney Australia. https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/young-and-resilient/research/co-research_toolbox/youth_co-research_toolkit_for_researchers
2. *Meaningfully engaging with youth. Guidance and training for UN staff 2019* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the Interagency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), PARIS <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2021/05/Meaningfully-engaging-youth-Guidance-training-UN-staff.pdf>
3. *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation 2019* United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York <https://www.unicef.org/media/59006/file>
4. *Guidance on Enhancing Youth Participation in East and Southern Africa. 2018 Report.* United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/publications/guidance-enhancing-youth-participation-east-and-southern-africa>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This technical brief was written by Stephanie V Wrottesley (ENN) and Catharine Fleming (Western Sydney University). The authors thank our youth partners, Alexi Cross (Western Sydney University), Dipty Chowdhury, Milca Jane Cameseria, Webster Makombe (Act4Food), and the following members of the Global Adolescent Nutrition Network for their conceptual guidance and review: Amanda Mrungi (Ministry of Health Uganda), Cristina Alvarez (UNICEF), Frances Mason (Save the Children UK), Natasha Lelijveld (ENN), Marion Roche (Nutrition International), Miriam Schindler (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition), Sarah Kehoe (University of Southampton), and Silvia Alayon (Save the Children US). We thank our copyeditor Alison Parkin and Designer Chris Woodrow.

We were able to publish this brief thanks to the generous support of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland. The ideas, opinions, and comments included here are entirely the responsibility of the document's authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the policies of the donor.

Suggested citation: Stephanie V. Wrottesley and Catharine Fleming (2024). Guiding principles for youth partnership: Experiences and learning from the Global Adolescent Nutrition Network (GANN) to guide engaging with young people in research, programming and governance for nutrition. Global Adolescent Nutrition Network (GANN) and Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN): Oxford, UK. April 2024. <https://doi.org/10.71744/2546-PC26>



Irish Aid

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs



7 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

These guiding principles are based on insights and active co-collaboration with young people and nutrition experts from the [Global Adolescent Nutrition Network \(GANN\)](#). We hope that they will be used to inform more purposeful and meaningful partnerships with young people across all phases of research, programming and governance for nutrition.

TRANSPARENT

- Clearly set involvement expectations at the outset
- Build trust between the organisation and young person
- Clearly communicate when outcomes have been informed by or resulted from young people's input

RESPECTFUL

- Respect young people's input through adaptable working practices (considering workspaces and times outside usual business hours)
- Ensure mutually respectful partnerships between young people and adults
- Respect youth partners as co-contributors, innovators and lived experience knowledge brokers
- Always obtain consent/assent from a young person – not just a parent
- Ensure safe and sensitive risk protection for the youth engaged through organisation safeguarding procedures as well as child rights protection and responsibilities for youth under the age of 18

INTENTIONAL

- Engage young people authentically through intentional and respectful interactions
- Intentional partnerships should make joint decisions with young people
- Encourage young people to initiate and lead decision making
- Measure intentional youth engagement and partnerships

EMPOWERMENT

- Enable exposure to local and global levels of youth representation
- Provide upskilling opportunities and leadership training to enhance knowledge and capacity
- Create a space for safe dialogue and to grow self-confidence within young people
- Consider the power balance between young people and adults
- Engage youth who are passionate about the cause thereby fostering their intrinsic empowerment
- Engage the parents, families, and communities of young people.

RECOGNITION

- Recognise youth as the leaders of today, and as equal actors in any partnership
- Value and recognise youth capacities and contributions as you would those of adults, including by providing a job title
- Value young people's time and input through remuneration and authorship

INCLUSIVE

- Provide equal opportunities for all young people to engage, regardless of cultural and social backgrounds, education, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, context, political and economic status, or other characteristics
- Provide opportunities for the most vulnerable and underrepresented youth to engage (e.g., out of school adolescents, girls, young mothers)

CONSISTENT

- Engage young people consistently and embed youth partnership across sectors