THEORY OF CHANGE

Young People Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health: Toward a New Normal Youth Investment, Engagement and Leadership Development (YIELD) Project
THE SITUATION

The largest cohort of young people in human history is coming of age. Young people ages 15-29 experience poor sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) outcomes—and related policies, programs, and services do not reach youth at highest risk.

Young people are not only uniquely aware of their own needs and wants, but also innovative, resourceful, and deeply invested in driving new SRHR solutions.

They have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

THE YIELD PROJECT

The Youth Investment, Engagement, and Leadership Development (YIELD) Project offers a stakeholder-led synthesis of current best practices in youth SRHR. YIELD findings suggest that improving outcomes for young people requires youth participation and leadership at every level of SRHR initiatives—from ideation to implementation.

Youth SRHR must transform from a field for young people to one with young people.

More information on the YIELD Project can be found at yieldproject.org.
HOW TO READ THE YIELD THEORY OF CHANGE

The YIELD Theory of Change emphasizes the value of both youth contributions and youth partnerships.

Youth partners* act to build youth capabilities and encourage youth agency—but are most effective at doing this when their efforts are informed and influenced by young people. Young people’s contributions to SRHR are similarly strengthened by partnerships with both peers and adult allies. Neither group is dependent on the other. But both adults and young people exert the greatest possible impact when working together in complementary ways.

The result of these reciprocal and mutually-reinforcing efforts are positive changes in individuals (youth and adults alike)—that drive outcome-level changes in both the SRHR ecosystem and broader society.

This is the world as we want it to be. To make this vision a reality, SRHR stakeholders must align around shared goals—as well as shared commitments to equity, inclusivity, and safety. Youth SRHR must also be supported and resourced in ways that mainstream youth participation, while catalyzing and sustaining youth-driven initiatives.

*see definitions page for clarification of terms
**YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS**

**How partners strengthen youth capabilities**

ID & engage diverse cross-sections of youth
Build youth knowledge, skills, & capabilities

**How partners catalyze youth agency**

Create safe & supportive environments that enable engaged youth to act
Connect youth with networks & power centers
Develop pipelines & pathways for youth to advance

**YOUTH CONTRIBUTIONS**

**What youth do with capabilities and agency**

Collaborate with peers, SRHR colleagues, & decision-makers
Inform, support, & influence organizations & program cycles (design & delivery)
Inform, support, & deliver youth-friendly services
Inform & influence laws & policies related to health & development
Inform, conduct, & interpret research
Inform & influence financial flows & funding mechanisms
Organize & advocate
Develop new SRHR initiatives
Form new SRHR organizations
Build & strengthen SRHR movements

**OUTCOMES + IMPACTS**

**Positive change in individuals**

- **Youth:** personal & professional growth; increased SRHR knowledge & skills; increased agency & decision-making power; healthier choices

- **Adult allies & decision-makers:** heightened awareness of & value for youth contributions; increased understanding of youth needs, commitment to youth-adult partnerships, & skill at intergenerational power-sharing

**Positive change in SRHR ecosystem**

- Robust, youth-driven solutions
- Increased transparency, responsiveness, & reach of interventions
- New, local HR pools; increased capacity of current & future SRHR leaders & decision-makers

**Positive change in society**

- Increased demand for & access to high-quality SRHR information & services
- Improved health & social outcomes
- Reductions in unmet need
- Increased civic engagement & participation
- Social norm change

**STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT**

How power is shared & youth SRHR is supported & resourced

**EQUITY, INCLUSIVITY, SAFETY, & RIGHTS**

**EXTERNAL FACTORS**

**TRACK & ASSESS**

Yield Theory of Change

Positive change in individuals

Positive change in SRHR ecosystem

Positive change in society

EQUITY, INCLUSIVITY, SAFETY, & RIGHTS

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Track & Assess
HOW TO USE THE YIELD INDICATORS

Young people impact SRHR in many meaningful ways—but these impacts can be difficult to measure.

Partly, this is because we must assess youth contributions as part of a broader SRHR ecosystem (making causality difficult to establish). But this is not the only problem: we are also hindered by the disconnected and under-supported nature of our current monitoring and evaluation efforts.

In an effort to align stakeholders around a shared vision of impact measurement, the YIELD Project has developed sample indicators to correspond with each element of the YIELD Theory of Change.

This list of indicators is not exhaustive: the field of youth SRHR is too diverse and the contributions of young people are too multifaceted for that to be practical. Nor are these indicators operationalized in ways that would be appropriate for any individual program, organization, country, or context. This must be done locally, in partnership with local youth.

What these indicators do offer is a necessary starting point.

Rigorous demonstration of youth impacts requires all SRHR stakeholders, including youth, to align around shared principles, purposes, and instruments. This is the YIELD Project’s contribution to that larger effort.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How partners strengthen youth capabilities</th>
<th>Sample Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ID & engage diverse cross-sections of youth | --Proportion of programs using intentional recruitment strategies to prioritize engagement of underserved youth  
--Proportion of participating youth, by program, from vulnerable, marginalized, or target populations |
| Strengthen youth knowledge, skills, & capabilities | --Proportion of programs with flexible, participatory, & skill-strengthening approaches that are responsive to youth needs, interests, & experiences  
--Proportion of programs that engage youth in ongoing, experiential learning |
| How partners catalyze youth agency | Sample Indicators |
| Create safe & supportive environments that enable engaged youth to act | --Proportion of organizations that offer formal support for youth-adult, as well as youth-youth, mentoring & accompaniment relationships  
--Proportion of organizations that train adult staff to work effectively with youth; provide active support for youth-adult partnerships; and conduct ongoing assessments of the effectiveness of these working relationships  
--Proportion of staff, within individual programs or organizations, trained in meaningful youth engagement  
--Proportion of staff, within individual programs or organizations, with positive attitudes toward youth contributions and/or self-reported trust in youth partners  
--Proportion of organizations that fairly compensate youth for their SRHR contributions  
--Proportion of organizations that actively mainstream or institutionalize youth leadership by including youth in decision-making & governing bodies, while soliciting youth input across all domains of the organization  
--Proportion of youth, per program, who report that they believe that their input is valued and/or influential in organizational and/or programmatic decision-making  
--Proportion of youth, per program, who report that they are acting in meaningful partnership with supportive adults  
--Proportion of organizations that have structures & processes in place to safeguard young people from exploitation, coercion, & violence; proportion of young people, within organizations, who are aware of these processes & consider them to be effective |
| Connect youth with networks & power centers | --Number of youth, per program, who belong to active peer and/or professional networks  
--Number of youth-led organizations or movements connected with other SRHR networks and power centers |
| Develop pipelines & pathways for youth to advance | --Proportion of organizations that encourage youth to move into roles of increasing responsibility & influence as they age  
--Proportion of programs that hire graduates as staff  
--Number of youth, per program, able to identify additional professional opportunities in SRHR, if they so desire |
### YOUTH CONTRIBUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What youth do with capabilities and agency</th>
<th>Sample Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Collaborate with peers, SRHR colleagues, &amp; decision-makers</td>
<td>--Number of youth serving as peer ambassadors within local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inform, support, &amp; influence institutions, program cycles, program design, &amp; program delivery</td>
<td>--Number of youth taking leadership, advisory, and/or decision-making roles within initiatives or institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inform, support, &amp; deliver youth-friendly services</td>
<td>--Number of sustained, youth-led collaborations (e.g., at the local, national, regional, or global level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inform &amp; influence laws &amp; policies related to health &amp; development</td>
<td>--Number of youth, by program, who participate in each phase of the program cycle, from design to evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inform, conduct, &amp; interpret research</td>
<td>--Proportion of programs that involve youth in all phases of the program cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inform &amp; influence financial flows &amp; funding mechanisms</td>
<td>--Number of youth, by locality, who participate in the provision of youth-friendly services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Proportion of service areas that employ youth in the provision of youth-friendly SRHR services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of youth who participate in national, regional, or international policy-making processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Proportion of participating youth who report feeling involved, empowered, &amp; influential in decision-making processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of youth who participate in the design, collection, or analysis of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Proportion of organizations that assess their work using context-specific targets &amp; indicators co-designed with youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of youth with grant-making or decision-making roles within funding organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of interventions, programs, evaluations, or projects designed and/or initiated by youth or youth-led organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of youth or youth-led organizations accessing grants or other financial support to implement action plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of new, youth-led organizations &amp; networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Number of youth or youth-led organizations engaged in ongoing advocacy or movement-building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Youth leaders, youth-led organizations, &amp; youth movements report that they have the capacity, support, &amp; resources to implement their self-directed plans for ongoing SRHR change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Sample Indicators*
## OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive change for INDIVIDUALS</th>
<th>Sample Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For youth:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal &amp; professional growth; increased SRHR knowledge &amp; skills; increased agency &amp; decision-making power; healthier choices</td>
<td>--Proportion of youth who demonstrate increased SRHR knowledge/skills, following program participation or as a result of their SRHR work --Proportion of youth who report personal &amp; professional growth as a result of their SRHR work --Proportion of engaged youth who report increased power over their bodies &amp; decisions --Proportion of youth who self-report healthier SRHR decisions, following program participation or as a result of their SRHR work --A diverse range of young people feel listened to &amp; valued by the programs &amp; organizations with which they work --A diverse range of young people feel they have the information &amp; power necessary to make healthy SRHR choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For adult allies &amp; decision-makers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heightened awareness of &amp; value for youth contributions; increased understanding of youth needs, commitment to youth-adult partnerships, &amp; skill at intergenerational power-sharing</td>
<td>--Proportion of adults, by organization, who report increased awareness of &amp; value for youth contributions, as a result of their work with youth --Proportion of adults, by organization, who report increased understanding of youth needs, increased commitment to youth-adult partnerships, and/or increased skill at intergenerational power-sharing --Organizational staffs demonstrate an evolving, nuanced understanding of the needs of youth in the communities in which they work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive change in SRHR ECOSYSTEM</td>
<td>Sample Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Robust, youth-driven solutions; increased transparency, responsiveness, & reach of interventions | --Number of youth-led interventions, programs, evaluations, and projects with demonstrable impact  
--Number of youth engaged through peer-to-peer outreach  
--Engaged youth report that programs are responsive to their evolving interests & needs  
--Youth leaders, youth-led organizations, & youth movements report that they have the capacity, support, & resources to implement their self-directed plans for ongoing SRHR change                                                                                           |
| New, local HR pools; increased capacity of current & future SRHR leaders & decision-makers       | --Number of programs that employ youth graduates as staff  
--Proportion of youth who remain engaged in SRHR work, following program participation  
--Proportion of adult SRHR advocates and decision-makers trained through youth leadership programs  
--Young people report that they have the experiences, skills, and capabilities that they need to be successful in SRHR work  
--Adult staff members report that young people have the experiences, skills, and capabilities that they need to be assets in their work with SRHR organizations                                                                                           |
| Rise in laws, policies, services, and organizations sensitive to youth needs & supportive of youth rights | --Proportion of relevant laws & policies, per country, that qualify as youth-friendly  
--Number of countries with youth-friendly laws & policies  
--Number of laws & policies that recognize youth rights, including the evolving capacity of children under the age of 18 to make their own decisions; number of countries with laws of this kind  
--Proportion of youth who report living in a society with youth-friendly laws & policies—or who report that their experiences reflect the consistent implementation of this type of legal/policy framework  
--Number of laws and/or policies related to health & development that were influenced by youth advocacy, youth networks, and/or youth movement-building (as described in qualitative terms by relevant stakeholders)  
--Young people who access SRH services report that those services are sensitive to their needs and supportive of their rights  
--Young people feel listened to and valued within their home organizations                                                                                           |
| Sustained resource allocations to & for youth                                                   | --Number of organizations with a dedicated budget line for youth engagement processes  
--Number of youth leaders, youth-led organizations, and/or youth movements that receive grants to support self-directed SRHR activities and initiatives  
--Number of youth leaders, youth-led organizations and/or youth movements that receive funding, by funding level (e.g., under $1,000, $1,000-$10,000, $10,000-$50,000, etc.)  
--Amount of flexible funds available to youth-led projects and organizations (both in aggregate & disaggregated by donor type)  
--Amount of long-term funding available to youth-centered organizations (both in aggregate & disaggregated by donor type)  
--Youth-led organizations can sustain themselves; youth-led organizations report that they are financially secure                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Sample Indicators:  
- Number of youth-led interventions, programs, evaluations, and projects with demonstrable impact  
- Number of youth engaged through peer-to-peer outreach  
- Engaged youth report that programs are responsive to their evolving interests & needs  
- Youth leaders, youth-led organizations, & youth movements report that they have the capacity, support, & resources to implement their self-directed plans for ongoing SRHR change  
- Number of programs that employ youth graduates as staff  
- Proportion of youth who remain engaged in SRHR work, following program participation  
- Proportion of adult SRHR advocates and decision-makers trained through youth leadership programs  
- Young people report that they have the experiences, skills, and capabilities that they need to be successful in SRHR work  
- Adult staff members report that young people have the experiences, skills, and capabilities that they need to be assets in their work with SRHR organizations  
- Proportion of relevant laws & policies, per country, that qualify as youth-friendly  
- Number of countries with youth-friendly laws & policies  
- Number of laws & policies that recognize youth rights, including the evolving capacity of children under the age of 18 to make their own decisions; number of countries with laws of this kind  
- Proportion of youth who report living in a society with youth-friendly laws & policies—or who report that their experiences reflect the consistent implementation of this type of legal/policy framework  
- Number of laws and/or policies related to health & development that were influenced by youth advocacy, youth networks, and/or youth movement-building (as described in qualitative terms by relevant stakeholders)  
- Young people who access SRH services report that those services are sensitive to their needs and supportive of their rights  
- Young people feel listened to and valued within their home organizations  
- Number of organizations with a dedicated budget line for youth engagement processes  
- Number of youth leaders, youth-led organizations, and/or youth movements that receive grants to support self-directed SRHR activities and initiatives  
- Number of youth leaders, youth-led organizations and/or youth movements that receive funding, by funding level (e.g., under $1,000, $1,000-$10,000, $10,000-$50,000, etc.)  
- Amount of flexible funds available to youth-led projects and organizations (both in aggregate & disaggregated by donor type)  
- Amount of long-term funding available to youth-centered organizations (both in aggregate & disaggregated by donor type)  
- Youth-led organizations can sustain themselves; youth-led organizations report that they are financially secure
### OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive change in SOCIETY</th>
<th>Sample Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Increased demand for & access to high-quality SRHR information & services; improved health & social outcomes; reductions in unmet need** | --Number of youth, per locality, who access youth-responsive SRHR information & services  
--Youth report increased awareness of and access to youth-responsive SRHR information & services  
--Youth report increased utilization of youth-responsive SRHR information & services  
--Service-providers demonstrate improved understanding of youth needs  
--Young people who access SRH services report that those services are sensitive to their needs and supportive of their rights  
--Diverse communities of young people report improved physical and mental health  
--Reductions in unmet contraceptive need  
--Reductions in adolescent pregnancy rates  
--Increased birth intervals  
--Improved maternal & infant health outcomes  
--Reductions in HIV/STI transmission  
--Reductions in sexual or gender-based violence |
| **Increased civic engagement & participation; social norm change** | --Proportion of youth who report participation in community activities, events, or voting processes  
--Proportion of community members who support universal youth access to SRHR information & services  
--Community members support the rights and opportunities of young people, including their rights to reproductive self-determination and bodily integrity/autonomy  
--Youth feel supported by their communities  
--Target groups attribute changes in their knowledge, attitudes, perspectives, or behavior to the actions or advocacy of young people |
**RELEVANT DEFINITIONS**

**Youth:** young people between the ages of 15-29. This age range reflects the demographic currently being reached by the vast majority of programs explored by the YIELD Project. We use the terms “youth” and “young people” interchangeably—understanding that any definition of either term is intrinsically inadequate, as the experience of adolescence and young adulthood is as varied and diverse as young people themselves. Because this experience is also conditioned by power—as well as by dynamics related to gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and other shapers of personal identity—it is necessary to take an inclusive approach, in conjunction with explicit steps to engage a diverse range of young people.

**Youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR):** the physical, emotional, and social well-being of young people, achieved through universal access to high-quality, comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly services (including those devoted to counseling, contraception, safe abortion, maternity care, and the prevention/treatment of HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections), under conditions that fully respect privacy, confidentiality, and human rights. This is a capacious definition, the fulfillment of which allows young people to engage in informed and respectful sexual relationships, as well as mutually-consenting, healthy, and positive sexual experiences.

**The youth SRHR ecosystem:** the complex, interdependent network of stakeholders and initiatives working on youth SRHR issues across sectors, from the local to the global level. This includes policy, program, service-delivery, and research-related activities at the community, sub-national, national, regional, and international levels.

**Youth partners:** stakeholders, organizations, and initiatives within the youth SRHR ecosystem, working in concert with young people to strengthen youth capabilities and catalyze youth agency.
SELECTED REFERENCES

- ActKnowledge/OXFAM, *Supporting Young People to Make Change Happen: A Review of TOCs*
- Coalition for Adolescent Girls, *Partners & Allies: Toolkit for Meaningful Adolescent Girl Engagement*
- Development Alternative, *Towards a Thriving, Credible, and Sustainable Youth Civil Society*
- Girls Not Brides, *Theory of Change*
- Global Consensus Statement, *Meaningful Adolescent & Youth Engagement*
- IPPF, *Young At Heart: How to be Youth-Centered in the 21st Century* AND *Participate: The Voice of Young People in Programmes and Policies*
- Marcus & Cunningham, *Young People as Agents and Advocates of Development: Evidence Gap Report*
- OXFAM, *Youth Participation and Leadership: Theory of Change Resource*
- Rutgers Netherlands, *Right Here, Right Now: Theory of Change*
- UNFPA, *Community Pathways to Improved Adolescent SRH: a Conceptual Framework and Suggested Outcome indicators*
- WHO/IPPF/UNFPA, *SRH and HIV Linkages Compendium: Indicators and Related Assessment Tools*
- Youth on Board, *Organizational Assessment Checklist*