Engaging Young People Across Sectors

A Practical Guide for Amplifying the Positive Impact of Youth-led and Youth-Serving Democracy, Rights, and Governance Programs

Executive Summary
**Background**

Young leaders and youth development practitioners alike can support young people in gaining civic and political knowledge and assuming leadership roles across key development sectors. Cross-sectoral programs integrate locally led development and youth-driven systems change, envisioning local actors, such as young people, as leaders who foster sustainable results within their country and local context. Informed by Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles, cross-sectoral approaches also help address some of the barriers that prevent young people from participating in decision-making by helping young people understand and address power dynamics in their work.

Utilizing lessons learned from young leaders around the world, and case studies from USAID-funded programs, this abbreviated resource aims to help young people and development practitioners better understand the importance of linking democracy, human rights, and government (DRG) programming with working being implemented in other sectors to build effective cross-sectoral approaches that achieve long-term, meaningful change. The full resource can be found at CEPPS.org.

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<th><strong>Key Terms</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Sector:</strong> an economic or political subdivision of society. Sectors mentioned in this toolkit include education, technology, media, business, healthcare, and peace and security. Cross-sectoral programming involves working across two or more sectors.</td>
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<td><strong>Locally led development:</strong> the process in which local actors – individuals, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, and governments – set their own agendas, develop solutions, and bring the capacity, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality.</td>
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<td><strong>Systems change:</strong> adjustments or transformations in the policies, practices, power dynamics, and mindsets that underlie societal issues.</td>
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<td><strong>Positive Youth Development (PYD):</strong> engages young people along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that they are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the enabling environment for youth participation; and transform systems.</td>
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Promising Practices

1. Integrate Technical and Political Skill Building, Specifically Political Skills, Into All Programs

Without key political knowledge and skills, young people may find it difficult to assume leadership roles in locally led development efforts. To address this, youth development practitioners and young leaders should:

- **Design programs that integrate introductory or refresher political skills training at the beginning of programming.** This encourages young people from outside the DRG community to engage in programs that promote civic and political participation.

- **Identify participants across sectors.** Understand the environment in which you are working, and leverage existing relationships with organizations and networks to recruit young people across sectors. Advertise opportunities online and get recommendations for candidates.

- **Include technical training opportunities at the onset of programs** to ensure a more inclusive and equitable experience for all young people.

- **Provide follow-up training opportunities or check-ins to assess participants’ understanding of concepts** and refine programs based on feedback. Include experiential learning opportunities such as volunteer activities or internships in technical skill-building programs.

2. Provide Space to Develop Soft Skills that are Transferable Across Sectors

Barriers to participation in decision-making can limit young people’s ability to develop leadership skills and exclude them from various sectors. To address this challenge, incorporate modules to build soft skills in program or activity design, which can promote better development outcomes for young people from diverse backgrounds.

Soft skills that could be incorporated into programs across sectors include **communication, active listening, time management, empathy and emotional intelligence, collaboration, teamwork, conflict resolution, and creativity.** Young people can develop these soft skills by:

- **Engaging** in opportunities like model parliaments and Model United Nations (UN) where participants speak publicly and negotiate with other people.

- **Organizing or participating** in community-based action initiatives or engaging in networks that connect young people, share best practices, and generate lessons learned.

- **Observing** people with relevant soft skills to learn how to use them more effectively, such as watching TED Talks to learn about public speaking.
Promising Practices

3. Foster Opportunities that Help Young People Develop Solutions to Issues Across Sectors

Opportunities that can be included in DRG programs which provide space for young people to develop solutions to challenges in other sectors include:

- **Providing small grant funding.** Small grant funding can be an opportunity for young implementers to work with, as well as reach out to, youth and adult stakeholders across sectors.

- **Including a range of topics to focus on that span across sectors within a DRG program.** When designing activities, consider including a diverse set of topics for participants to analyze through both a cross-sector and DRG lens.

- **Understanding what young people care about.** Ask young people to participate in a storytelling exercise, a group discussion, or leverage social media to capture young people’s perspectives and inputs to better understand what they care about.

4. Include Collaboration with Actors from Multiple Sectors

Traditional approaches to youth development are often designed and implemented using narrowly defined objectives and outcomes. Improving youth development outcomes across sectors and addressing systemic inequality and exclusion requires working beyond silos to understand and respond to increasingly complex democratic challenges.

When working in the **education sector**, establish transparent partnerships built on trust with the appropriate stakeholders to gain access to schools and students. Collaborate with teachers, student committees or clubs, and engage in curriculum development that promotes democratic and human rights-based values. Alternatively, engaging young people outside the formal school system can help reach diverse groups of young people.

Strategically leveraging **media** platforms can increase the impact of DRG programs. Sharing positive stories about the contribution of young people in both traditional media such as television and radio, as well as on social media, can challenge negative perceptions and establish greater buy-in for follow-on initiatives, maximizing the impact of programs. Encourage young people to use social media to make their voices heard! Training young people in digital storytelling and strengthening their social media engagement skills can help them further amplify their work and build their network.
The European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN). EDYN, supported by CEPPS/NDI and CEPPS/IRI, is a coalition of young leaders from 22 countries in Central and Eastern Europe promoting political and civic engagement. They also offer a small grants mechanism called Membership Engagement Fund (MEF) to fund youth-led interventions. An example of this is the "Youth and Europe" debate tournament launched by EDYN Albania in 2020 for 48 college students covering topics such as gender equality, media censorship, and European integration. The winning team debated solutions to youth unemployment, youth leadership in politics, and EU integration on a live television production.

Support for Electoral Reform Project. CEPPS/IFES collaborated with Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) in Nigeria to implement the Nigeria Election Violence Report project in 2020, ahead of the off-season elections in Edo and Ondo states. KDI engaged key stakeholders, monitored conflict related to electoral violence, and shared data with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to inform security planning. KDI also expanded tracking of violence against women in elections with technical assistance from CEPPS/IFES and adopted community-wide solutions to mitigate violence on Election Day. KDI utilized social media and a mobile app to raise awareness and collect data more effectively.

Youth Policy Agendas. In 2019, CEPPS/NDI collaborated with three civil society organizations in Ekiti, Kaduna, and Osun states in Nigeria to conduct training on advocacy and policy development to address political and socio-economic needs of young people. Each partner created a youth policy agenda, in consultation with young people, and an advocacy campaign addressing critical priorities, such as education, health, agriculture, employment, and poverty reduction. The advocacy campaigns included policy town halls, dialogues, and meetings with different government stakeholders.
# Why We Vote.

In 2019, CEPPS/IRI organized a video competition called #WhyWeVote to mobilize young voters in Ukraine for the 2020 local elections. Over 100 activists participated in seminars on creating effective advocacy videos and submitted their own get-out-the-vote videos. The competition received 60 submissions, with 15 finalists shared on social media and public TV networks, reaching over 3 million viewers. The campaign trained and engaged young people with skills such as video editing and messaging to help motivate their peers to vote in the elections.

Democracy: From Theory to Practice.

Over 12,000 Ukrainian students from over 59 universities have completed the civic education course "Democracy: from Theory to Practice" since 2018. The course teaches democratic values and provides knowledge and skills necessary for informed citizenship in the digital age through interactive teaching and student action projects. During the student action project component, students identify and tackle societal challenges, such as gender equality and media literacy, while building relationships with community partners.

Youth Leadership Training School.

CEPPS/IRI supported the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) to empower youth through the Youth Leadership Training Schools (YLTS). The YLTS targeted young people from several provinces and backgrounds, aiming to enhance their leadership skills and promote their inclusion in local governance. The training included team-building activities and focused on developing different types of leadership, such as transformational, authentic, servant, and team leadership.

Support for University of South Pacific Student Association.

CEPPS/IFES partnered with the University of South Pacific Student Association (USPSA) to engage student leaders and support them as decision-makers and active members of their communities. USPSA students developed a Policy Platform for Pacific Youth focused on improving education and supporting the rights of young people with disabilities. They used social media advocacy and engagement with government and institutional stakeholders to advocate for more funding and resources to make education accessible, revise the curriculum, and prioritize teacher training.
About the CEPPS Youth Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Cross Sectoral Initiative

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), CEPPS established the Youth DRG Cross-Sectoral Initiative (CSI) to examine the intersections between DRG programs and initiatives in other youth development sectors, bringing together a global cohort of practitioners, young leaders, and donors from across disciplines in a knowledge-sharing forum. This toolkit is one effort by CEPPS to respond to the expressed need for practical guidance and case examples that highlight cross-sectoral approaches to youth development.