

Chapter 9

Youth-centric Evidence and Data Disaggregation

This chapter discusses:

- the role of research and evidence in informing youth mainstreaming
- the centrality of youth-led research in bringing youth-centric knowledge to the table
- the importance of data disaggregation for youth in articulating youth cohort involvement and outputs and outcomes for youth.

9.1 Research and youth-led research¹ and analysis provides the evidence base

Evidence tells us what works, and what does not work, for young people and society. It is the bedrock of objective planning.

For development research perspectives to legitimately represent young people's interests:

- All research needs to take on a youth lens.
- Young people must be involved as partners in the development research process.² This involves young people partnering and/or leading the identification of research topics as relevant to the sector, and leading the design, implementation, data interpretation and report writing of the research.

This can have a formidable influence on research outputs by virtue of the lived experiences young people bring into research. Part of the value, but also a positive challenge, of youth-led research is also that findings and recommendation have a great likelihood of challenging orthodox knowledge and assumptions about research, and putting forth transformational recommendations for change. This in turn requires readiness on the part of stakeholders to rethink and reconfigure development planning.

These processes require either in-house research capacity or strong links with collaborative research institutes, including youth research institutes. Box 9.1 describes an experimental research process undertaken by the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

Box 9.1 Young people research urban relocation³

In a Commonwealth-led youth research pilot in Punjab, India, members of a youth club run by India's Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) engaged in a co-created, small-scale research with adults on the issue of the relocation of their communities to government-assigned accommodation. The youth club members came from one of the lowest-income, provincial migratory communities in India, who lived in informal settlements and engaged primarily in employment in the informal sector. While the relocation afforded them better-quality housing, it had nevertheless lacked the necessary youth and community consultation that would have supported better planning to address transition challenges.

Implemented a few months after relocation, the research was designed in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat's then-active Asia Regional Centre, NYKS and Pravah, a leading youth worker-training institution in India. It was designed to address the challenges faced by young people and communities due to the transition, which affected their social interactions, education and employment.

The young people were supported to identify their own research topic, design information-gathering tools, and analyse and present data. The research not only enhanced the young people's sense of agency in decision-making at a particularly significant transition in their lives, but also helped promote solidarity among youth, communities and the three participating development agencies.

As one youth researcher, Sandeep, said:

'One of the reasons we felt the need to conduct more research on the issues affecting our community was because earlier, we thought we were the only ones who felt that we faced problems. For example, I lost my job when we were relocated to Dhanas. We knew other people who were in the same situation. But when we got people to fill out the survey, we realised exactly how widespread the problem was. Eighty per cent of the people surveyed agreed that unemployment was the biggest problem arising out of the relocation. We were able to identify the impact of these problems on the community through research. Earlier, it was all abstract'.

During this process, the youth club also engaged with several stakeholders, including community leaders and government officials. They used the data collected through the research to advocate with the local authorities for effective resolutions. For example, the youth club shared the data on the impact of the relocation on employment with the Municipal Corporation of Chandigarh. The municipal corporation worked to address these issues, at least in part, by engaging the young people in cost-free skills development courses to increase their employability.

(Continued)

Box 9.1 Young people research urban relocation (cont.)

This research process had several implications for the young researchers, and the organisations that supported the youth-led research.

For these marginalised young people:

- It demystified the research process. They had no previous exposure to processes of inquiry, or indeed agency in decisions that affected their lives.
- It enhanced their confidence and skills in leading research implementation, analysing findings, and formulating and acting on research recommendations.
- It changed their level of agency in local government decision-making, even minimally.
- It changed their relationship to one of greater agency with the collaborating agencies.

For the collaborating organisations:

- It strengthened organisational capacity for working with young people, and allowing young people to lead inquiry.
- It enabled the organisations to restructure and re-prioritise capacity building for skills in working on youth-led research.
- It created the significant learning that organisations need to develop their own accountability to young people by supporting them **throughout the process of implementing research recommendations**, not just implementing the research, as this is the key goal of development research.

For service delivery organisations:

- required the opening up of spaces (in this case, local municipality spaces) to young people's voice and listening to youth on their issues, and
- influenced municipality decisions, at least in minimal ways.

These forms of youth engagement can change power relationships between adult research staff and youth.

9.2 Data disaggregation helps provide young people with visibility in planning

Assessing differential impacts of development for youth (pre-YM) and assessing outcomes for youth (post-YM) require systematic efforts to disaggregate data for youth and to harmonise methods of disaggregation across data sources, so that young people are made quantitatively visible in planning.

There are several forms of data that can inform the design of youth mainstreaming initiatives and help evaluate the impact

of youth mainstreaming (these will be elaborated on in Part 2, Chapter 15):

1. data to measure youth cohort involvement in a sector in relation to other cohorts;
2. data to measure access for youth to resources, including for subgroups (youth age subgroups and other social categories), (comparative outputs for youth); and
3. data to measure equality and equity for youth, including for subgroups (youth age subgroups and other social categories), in relation to other cohorts (comparative outcomes for youth).

Box 9.2 contains an elaboration for explanation of equality data versus equity data.

As the youth inclusive indicators document points out, quoting the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Target 17.18, states have committed to improve measurements to ensure that data are disaggregated ‘by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts’. It also points out how some existing measures overlook children and young people, and highlights the importance of harmonising disaggregation across data sources, which has specific implications for multi-sectoral approaches to youth development.⁴

In data disaggregation, it is also important to ensure that youth data are disaggregated for different youth age groups and for

Box 9.2 Social equality/equity data

There are quantitative measures for both equity and equality. Formulating both forms of data is important to demonstrate existing and projected outcomes for young people through youth mainstreaming.

For example, if we say that the youth unemployment rates is three times those of the adult unemployment rate in Country X, this is clearly an **inequality** measure – because it is measuring the same variable (employment), but comparing the youth in the job market against the youth unemployed cohort, and the adults in the job market with the adults unemployed cohort.

There can be quantitative measures for equity too. For example, if youth are 30 per cent the total adults + youth in the job market in Country Y, but they make up only 12 per cent of those employed, then this is an expression of **inequity**.

Box 9.3 The Youth Development Index and aboriginal youth, Australia

In the National YDI for Australia, the index is being used with aboriginal youth groups to ensure that educational, economic and empowerment data are specifically gathered for this group of historically marginalised people to demonstrate the disparities *among* youth groups in the country.

socially, politically, economically and geographically vulnerable groups, depending on the context, to ensure that there is not just equality for youth, but equality for all youth groups irrespective of difference. This will also harmonise planning with the SDG agenda of 'leaving no one behind'. An example of data disaggregation for a marginalised youth cohort in Australia, aboriginal youth, is indicated in Box 9.3.

9.3 Conclusions and reflections

Without the right kinds of evidence, and evidence that young people have participated in creating, youth mainstreaming will not become a reality. Organisations should ensure that there is adequate attention to research within the organisation's priorities, including building research partnerships; that young people are active agents in evidence creation; and that



Box 9.4 Reflections on Chapter 9: Youth-centric Evidence and Data Disaggregation

- Is evidence considered an important part of planning in your context?
- Is there a youth perspective in the research that is relevant to your work, including data disaggregation for youth where the focus is on quantitative data?
- Are young people involved as researchers? If so, which young people?
- If so, how does this involvement help provide a youth lens to planning?
- Where tensions exist between organisational assumptions and the findings of youth-centric research, how is this dealt with? Is the process of decision-making fair and open?
- How can youth-centric approaches be strengthened in research and evidence gathering?

evidence is used meaningfully and impartially in the design of policies and programmes for youth. Where evidence challenges predominant assumptions of organisations, these need to be dealt with fairly and openly.

Notes

- 1 Simple tools for small-scale, youth-led research are available in the Commonwealth joint publication with India's Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and Pravah, New Delhi (Commonwealth Youth Programme et al. 2014).
- 2 Development research, as opposed to academic research, focuses on evidence to inform development policy and practice, and is often more participatory than academic research.
- 3 This youth-led research initiative was part of a youth club pilot conducted by the Commonwealth Youth Programme in collaboration with Pravah, an Indian youth work training institute, and the Punjab offices of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), the largest youth club network in the world. This case study appears in Commonwealth Youth Programme et al. 2014.
- 4 Plan et al. 2016, 7. The elaboration says: 'Disaggregation by age should move towards greater consistency between data sources (e.g. standardisation of 5- or 10-year age brackets), and reporting of results within each source should be consistent (e.g. avoid combining or splitting age brackets, such as 1–18, 19–35, 36–65, 65+).'

References

- Commonwealth Youth Programme, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and Pravah (2014), *Co-Creating Youth Spaces: A Practice-Based Guide for Youth Facilitators*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, available at: http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/Co-Creating_Youth_Spaces_web.pdf.
- Plan, Restless Development, Children's Environments Research Group, Queen's University and UNDP (2016), *Critical Agents of Change in the 2030 Agenda: Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicators for National-Level Monitoring*.