



Brief

STRENGTHENING YOUTH-LED FAMILY PLANNING AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INITIATIVES

Lessons Learned from Rapid Response Technical Assistance with Youth

BACKGROUND

MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership is a 5-year global project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide targeted maternal, newborn, and child health, voluntary family planning, and reproductive health (MNCH/FP/RH) technical and capacity development assistance to country partners to facilitate sustainable development.

From August 2020 to January 2021, MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership collaborated with the International Youth Alliance on Family Planning (IYAFP) to strengthen the capacity of three IYAFP country focal points—located in Kenya and Malawi—to plan and implement COVID-19-responsive, youth-led FP/RH initiatives. IYAFP is a global, youth-led organization dedicated to advancing sexual and reproductive health, human rights, and justice for youth, by youth.

APPROACH

IYAFP requested COVID-19-responsive technical assistance (TA) from MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership. IYAFP and the project co-designed the approach by developing terms of reference (including the selection process for youth) and expectations of the youth and adult mentor. Criteria for identifying youth candidates included: membership in the IYAFP COVID-19 task force, availability to engage with a mentor, expression of a clear and feasible idea for their FP/RH COVID-19 work, and being youth from IYAFP country chapters that align with USAID and the project's priority countries. Based on this, IYAFP leadership selected youth focal points to participate in the mentorship opportunity. Two IYAFP COVID-19 task force members from Malawi and Kenya, Happy Mtambo and Erick Omondi, were selected and paired with a TA mentor from the project. A youth from IYAFP India was also selected, but was unable to complete the activity due to extenuating circumstances. Thus, an additional youth from Kenya, Michael Maina, was identified by IYAFP leadership to participate mid-way through the activity.



The youth focal points defined their needs and requests for TA from the project counterparts, including:

- Providing guidance on relevant FP/RH resources, including technical documents, toolkits, and globally available resources, and orienting the youth on how to best use them to address FP/RH impacts of COVID-19.
- Creating linkages with opportunities to strengthen FP and adolescent RH technical expertise, such as training courses and webinars.
- Coaching on fundraising, financial planning, and documenting organizational achievements.
- Providing human resource management and time management advice and guidance.

MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership mentors engaged with the IYAFP youth focal points through bi-weekly meetings and WhatsApp message exchanges to discuss overall progress of activities, as well as emerging technical and operations assistance needs and challenges encountered.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COLLABORATION

MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership's support for the youth focal points included:

- Orientations to new business development toolkits, potential funding opportunities, and proposal writing resources to support fundraising efforts.
- Coaching on how to position for future FP/RH programming and communications-related training to restructure the organizations' websites, which contributed to increasing the visibility of the youth organizations and expanding their network.
- Communications training that enabled youth to effectively communicate their organization's story, thereby amplifying their work to engage more youth and increasing their reach.
- Provision of guidance and strategies to make IYAFP activities more inclusive by considering the needs of diverse youth populations, enabling one of the youth focal points to develop a webinar focused on gender inclusion in FP/RH programming.

YOUTH PROFILES

Michael Maina (Kenya)

As founder of the Kenya Reproductive Health Youth Foundation and country coordinator for IYAFP, Michael is a strong supporter of ensuring that youth are meaningfully engaged in advocacy efforts around their RH, as well as human rights and justice.

Erick Omondi (Kenya)

Through his organization, Generation Guiders Community-based Organization, Erick is running an advocacy campaign to call attention to the need for improved access to FP for adolescent girls in Trans-Nzoia County.

Happy Mtambo (Malawi)

As an IYAFP task force member, Happy has organized youth community members in Mponela, Malawi to introduce a hands-free handwashing tool to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After the short-term capacity-strengthening activity, the project and IYAFP conducted a participatory after-action review to identify key learning and reflect on the collaboration. Overall, the youth and TA mentors perceived the collaboration as a valuable learning experience that contributed to strengthening the youths' technical and organizational capacity, as well as their response to COVID-19.

The youth mentees and TA mentors suggest the following recommendations to enhance future collaboration between youth and adults for capacity strengthening:

- **Create space and supportive processes for determining capacity-strengthening needs.** Although the youth and project counterparts agreed that a 6-month duration for this type of activity was appropriate and adequate, they reported investing substantial time at the start of the collaboration to determine specific, tangible needs of each youth. As such, it is important to allocate time at the beginning of the activity to help youth and mentors to collaboratively identify and articulate youth's priority needs. Relevant needs assessments or surveys could support this process.
- **Broaden the scope of capacity-strengthening activities to address both technical and operations support needs.** The priority of the TA collaboration was to strengthen IYAFP country chapter's capacity to adapt FP/RH programming to the context of COVID-19. However, the focus of the activity shifted to address the youth's desire for more operations-related support for their organizations (e.g., finance, administration and human resources management), in addition to evidence-based practices in FP/RH in the context of COVID-19.
- **Set expectations at the outset of the activity to facilitate a successful collaboration.** In addition to TA, the youth expected to receive financial support from the project for their organization's activities. However, this was not part of the design of this rapid response TA. Initial communications about this were insufficient to address expectations. It is essential to dedicate time early in the partnership to clarify the type of support needed and available, and ensure a common understanding of what the activity will entail, and include funding wherever possible.
- **Keep a flexible and adaptable mindset to respond to any changes.** Shifts in circumstances, scope, or capacity-strengthening needs are likely to occur as a mentorship relationship progresses. The ability and willingness to make course adjustments and respond to evolving situations is crucial. Key strategies to navigate changes include regularly reviewing partnership priorities, continuously evaluating goals, and maintaining open lines of communication.
- **Employ a systematic application and selection process to identify youth who can most benefit.** Co-create with youth a clear description of the activity, including the type of capacity-strengthening support offered, youth candidate requirements, mentor requirements, expected time commitments, and availability (or lack thereof) of financial support. Use this to guide the application and selection process.
- **Ensure gender parity of youth mentees.** In consultation with IYAFP, the project originally selected one female and two male youth from IYAFP country chapters for this activity. However, the female youth mentee who was unable to continue with the activity was replaced by a male youth, resulting in gender imbalance. To mitigate this, an intentional effort and clear requirements to ensure proportionate gender representation should be made during the selection process when feasible.
- **Pair youth with a technical or operations assistance counterpart with the right skillset.** Carefully match the mentor with the youth according to the priorities of the youth. Specifically, consider if the needs of the youth are related to FP/RH technical and programmatic needs or operational support (e.g., administration, fundraising, human resources) and identify counterparts accordingly.



This brief is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement #7200AA20CA00002, led by Jhpiego and partners. The contents are the responsibility of MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.