



■ Technical Brief

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS

Insight for Youth, from Youth

INTRODUCTION

In June 2023, MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership convened eight youth-led organizations (YLOs)¹ from five African countries for a workshop in Kenya. The event was part of a co-creation process facilitated by MOMENTUM and the YLOs to consolidate learning and co-create guidance on the unique organizational, technical, and network capacity-strengthening needs of YLOs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this brief is to share externally the insights generated by youth in the workshop and to elevate the voices of participating YLOs that are often not heard in discussions around YLO capacity strengthening. The brief provides a high-level summary of capacity-strengthening insights discussed at the workshop intended for YLOs. A companion brief with insights for adult-led organizations and donors is [available here](#). These key insights reinforce the growing body of guidance and recommendations on YLO capacity strengthening and partnerships with adult-led organizations that have been recently developed by [YIELD Hub](#) and others, thus adding further validity and raising the importance of these topics in the field and grey literature.

KEY INSIGHTS FOR YLOs FROM YLOs

- 1. Champion YLO-led capacity strengthening.** YLOs that are proactive in strengthening their organization's capacity are more likely to deliver results that benefit young people. To achieve this, YLOs recommend taking practical internal measures to identify, prioritize, execute, monitor, and report on their capacity-strengthening initiatives even in the absence of external support for the same.
- 2. Document commitment to remain a YLO.** Many YLOs have constitutions, visions, and missions that do not address their commitment to remain a YLO. If a YLO intends to remain youth-led, its organizational documents should be updated to reflect that commitment. This guards the YLO from potential drift to a youth-serving organization² during leadership transitions.

¹ A YLO is an organization that is led, managed, and coordinated by young people. Staff and members are generally below a certain age and work on a variety of issues from a youth perspective. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USAID-Youth-in-Development-Policy-2022-Update-508.pdf>

² Youth-serving organizations are not exclusively led or managed by youth but provide youth with recreational, educational, cultural, social, charitable, political, or other activities or services. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USAID-Youth-in-Development-Policy-2022-Update-508.pdf>



- 3. Plan ahead for leadership succession to remain a YLO.** The YLOs recommended that founders be proactive in their leadership transition and be willing to work closely with the board for a smooth transition. Given the high turnover of youth volunteers and leaders, those committed to the YLO vision, mission, and growth should be identified early. The process of recruiting promising youth leaders should ensure gender equality and make provisions for on-the-job skills and competency development. Outgoing YLO founding members can be responsible for mentoring potential leaders within the YLOs and working closely with the board to ensure a smooth handover. Founders can build trust between new leadership and partners, help the incoming leaders build on existing networks, and push forward the YLO's mission.
- 4. Invest in organizational strategic planning.** While YLOs agreed that strategic planning was critical for providing direction and clarifying the organization's goals, they had different levels of awareness and experience around how to go about it for their organizations. Some YLOs had strategic plans in place, others were aware of the concept but were resource constrained, and some were not familiar with the concept. YLOs recommend using internal resources to develop strategic plans that can lead to long-term benefits—empowering youth, creating ownership, and a deeper connection to the organization. If a YLO is offered external funding and or technical assistance for strategic planning, they should consider the opportunity after appropriate due diligence and aligning expectations, as it can benefit both the organization and the professional development of its staff.
- 5. Include youth members in governance structures.** For many of the YLOs at the workshop, youth representation in their governance structures was limited to the YLO's founder/leader. YLOs agreed that this needs to change to increase meaningful youth representation on their boards. This is critical in ensuring that youth-centric plans, operating policies, and initiatives are implemented. They recommended having a board comprised of at least 51 percent young people and at least 51 percent women. In addition to increasing youth representation and inclusion, YLOs identified promotion of youth development and leadership skills as areas for improvement that could benefit from capacity-strengthening support.
- 6. Leverage learning from peer organizations.** YLOs appreciate networking and coalition-building opportunities with other YLOs so they can learn from their peers and promote gender and social inclusivity, even if these aims are not a part of their primary programmatic mandate. This is especially valued when learning from other YLOs that have dealt with and overcome similar issues, whether organizational or programmatic. YLOs recommend being proactive in identifying other YLOs they can learn from and initiate engagements for shared learning.
- 7. Amplify youth voice in organizational decision-making.** YLOs desire spaces for youth to have a voice, contribute their perspectives, and actively engage in decision-making processes in the organization. They recommend that YLO leadership should represent the youth voice and be consultative and inclusive in their management style.
- 8. Establish good project management practices.** YLOs prefer simple and user-friendly guidelines, tools, and templates for work planning and monitoring at different levels, i.e., organizational, departmental, project, activity, and individual. They agreed on the importance of regularly orienting staff and volunteers to these materials to ensure quality project delivery and improved performance.
- 9. Promote equitable pay practices.** YLOs value equality in remuneration. When recruiting and interviewing staff, YLOs believe that job interview questions that ask about the youth's salary received from previous positions should be avoided as they perpetuate discrimination, particularly gender discrimination. Other initiatives that YLOs can consider for salary equity include researching equitable pay for similar positions in the area, ensuring salary transparency for all employees, and including salary ranges in the job description when advertising for a position.

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