

# Meaningful youth engagement in evaluation



## Multiplying the transformative power of evaluation

Lessons from UNFPA experience

UNFPA EVALUATION OFFICE  
2023





This publication is accompanied by a short film that chronicles the insights and experiences of young and senior professionals involved in the evaluation. Utilizing video documentation by young people during the evaluation process, the film provides a comprehensive summary of this journey and lessons in youth engagement in evaluation.

The publication and film can be accessed at [unfpa.org/evaluation](https://unfpa.org/evaluation).

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# Foreword

The United Nations Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda and follow-up Policy Brief 3 (April 2023) and Policy Brief 11 (September 2023), recognize youth as key drivers of new solutions to the world's most pressing needs. From leading climate action to ushering technological innovations to standing up for justice and dignity for all, youth are at the forefront of social mobilization, including in the field of evaluation. Youth are often underrepresented, however, in evaluation practice, processes and decision-making, with often tokenistic participation.

Policy Brief 3 provides a breakthrough by recommending meaningful youth engagement as a requirement in all United Nations decision-making processes. Policy Brief 11 underscores the importance of amplifying young voices and nurturing their leadership potential, as part of the vision for UN 2.0. Applying this guidance to evaluation, we must facilitate greater diversity, representativeness and preparedness in youth engagement in evaluation. This is a smart and transformative solution with many dividends. Investments in engaging and building the capacities of youth in evaluation advance national evaluation capacities, which in turn accelerates the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. This effort entails strengthening intergenerational and multi-stakeholder partnerships with youth in evaluation.

Over the years, the UNFPA Evaluation Office (EO) has made concrete efforts towards supporting youth engagement in evaluation in meaningful and purposeful ways. Since 2018, the EvalYouth Global Network has partnered with the EO creating multiple opportunities for young people to engage in evaluation. Both UNFPA and the EvalYouth Global Network recognize that for this support to be truly transformative, the evaluation community must create an enabling environment, raise institutional and individual capacities for youth engagement in evaluation, and develop demand- and supply-side initiatives. The EO has applied this systemic vision in a practical way, as shown in several examples in this resource.

Learning from these experiences, in 2021–2022 EO broke new ground during the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth. The evaluation marks a significant milestone as it engaged youth as co-managers via an innovative Youth Steering Committee. The EvalYouth Global Network, with its extensive network of young and emerging evaluators, supported the EO in identifying young professionals to join the Youth Steering Committee, as well as evaluators for the country case studies conducted in this evaluation. For the first time in the United Nations system, young people were involved in the evaluation as contributors, evaluators and key informants and, above all, they were involved as co-managers and co-decision makers. This meant EO had to concede and share power with young people in a formal institutional process; in this case, a centralized evaluation to be presented to the Executive Board.

The evaluation greatly benefitted from the rich engagement of young people through its various phases. The Youth Steering Committee shaped the evaluation approach and methodology from the perspective of young people and allowed for an intergenerational exchange of ideas and learning. Youth engagement also improved the evaluation's credibility and usefulness through the contributions of young evaluators and the insights from young professionals at UNFPA. Above all, the experience strengthened an intergenerational relationship between the senior evaluation team and young people. The resource ahead captures this unique experience and the lessons learned in engaging youth in this evaluation.

These lessons will be useful to evaluation commissioners, evaluation managers and evaluators themselves. This learning will help them navigate through what works and what can be done better to enhance the meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation. We hope the effort to cross-fertilize our experience will motivate the evaluation community towards more deliberate and purposeful practices to accelerate youth engagement in evaluation, a transformative solution to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.



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*The world today has the knowledge and resources required to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But transformative changes will simply not be possible at the scale required without the buy-in and contributions of a wide range of actors. This is especially true of the 1.2 billion young people alive today.*

– The United Nations Secretary-General's [Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3](#) on “Meaningful youth engagement in policy and decision-making processes”

## A. Why should we engage youth in evaluation?

Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been severely disrupted by escalating humanitarian situations, increasing inequalities, the climate emergency and the impact of COVID-19. Among the 8 billion people today, many people are at a significant risk of being left behind. Advancing towards the SDGs requires increased ambition, the pursuit of bold and innovative solutions, and the implementation of transformative interventions. Evaluation is a key transformative solution, which can help accelerate and deliver on the promise of the SDGs by 2030.

With the world population younger than ever before, meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation can turbocharge the transformative power of evaluation. This can help get the SDGs back on track. The United Nations Secretary-General's [Our Common Agenda](#) emphasizes the need for intergenerational solidarity across all spheres to address the complex and interconnected global crises we face today. Youth play a vital role in identifying new solutions that can secure the breakthroughs necessary for fast-tracking the delivery of the SDGs.<sup>1</sup> However, when it comes to participation in accountability processes, public policymaking and decision-making, youth remain largely invisible.<sup>2</sup>



*We commit to setting a global benchmark for youth engagement.*

– The United Nations Secretary-General's [Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 11](#) on UN 2.0, “Forward-thinking culture and cutting-edge skills for better United Nations system impact”



Meaningful youth engagement in evaluation offers an opportunity to reflect on development interventions from the perspective of young people themselves, ensuring that these interventions are responsive to their needs. By amplifying youth voice and agency, meaningful youth engagement in evaluation leads to positive development outcomes. It also enhances their technical and leadership capacities in evaluation and strengthens national evaluation capacities. Engaging young people in evaluation recognizes them as change-makers and leaders in building a more sustainable and inclusive world. When empowered in evaluation, youth drive innovation, introduce new ways of working, improve the relevance, credibility and usefulness of evaluations – and ultimately augment the power of evaluation to transform people's lives.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3, Meaningful youth engagement in policy and decision-making processes.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## What is meaningful youth engagement?

“Meaningful adolescent and youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually respectful partnership between adolescents, youth and adults, whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people’s ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programmes, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and world.”

– Definition by the [Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement \(2018\)](#)

## Meaningful youth engagement should be/should have

- ✓ Rights-based and safe
- ✓ Resourced
- ✓ Voluntary
- ✓ Diversity and inclusion
- ✓ Institutionally mandated
- ✓ Transparent
- ✓ Informative
- ✓ Youth as partners
- ✓ Designated
- ✓ Accessible
- ✓ Reciprocal accountability

These are guiding core principles for meaningful youth engagement in [Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3 \(2023\)](#).

## B. How is UNFPA meaningfully engaging youth in evaluation?

The [UNFPA Evaluation Policy](#) and [UNFPA Evaluation Strategy 2022–2025](#) prioritize building youth capacities and increasing their meaningful engagement in evaluation. In pursuit of this vision, UNFPA follows a systemic approach, focusing on strengthening the enabling environment, increasing supply-side initiatives by strengthening the individual capacities of young evaluation professionals, and increasing the demand-pull by strengthening the institutional capacities to meaningfully engage youth in evaluation. The key to actualizing this framework is incubating and scaling up innovation and strengthening multi-stakeholder and intergenerational partnerships in evaluation.

Delivering on this framework and aligned to Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3, UNFPA is expanding youth participation in evaluation decision-making at all levels, partnering with youth in evaluation processes and advocacy, and facilitating greater diversity, representativeness and preparedness of youth to engage meaningfully in evaluation. Below are key initiatives undertaken by the UNFPA Evaluation Office (EO) to facilitate meaningful youth engagement in evaluation.

### Building an enabling environment for youth engagement in evaluation

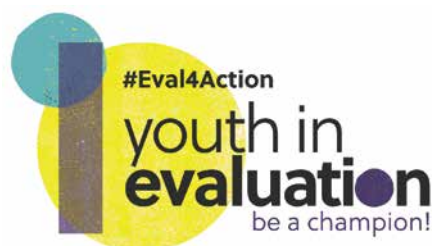


#### Eval4Action advocacy campaign

Launched in 2020, the Decade of Evaluation for Action ([Eval4Action](#)) advocacy campaign is co-led by the EvalYouth Global Network, Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation and EO, with more than 160 partners. Enhancing intergenerational solidarity and partnerships with youth in evaluation through sustained advocacy co-driven by young evaluators is a key focus of the campaign. Together with regional Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) and EvalYouth regional chapters, Eval4Action has launched volunteer-driven communication hubs in seven regions. The hubs comprise nearly 50 volunteers, with young evaluators in the lead, stepping up evaluation communications and advocacy.

## Youth in Evaluation initiative

The [Youth in Evaluation](#) initiative was launched in 2022 and unveiled at a prominent event by UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem. As a dedicated priority stream of the Eval4Action campaign, it aims to amplify the global momentum and commitment to meaningful engagement of youth and young evaluators in evaluation. The event also marked the release of the [Youth in Evaluation manifesto](#), available in six languages, which serves as an intergenerational call to action for enhancing meaningful youth engagement in evaluation. Remarkably, the manifesto has garnered nearly 900 signatories. The manifesto is supported by the Governments of Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria and Uganda. It is also supported by the evaluation offices of the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, UNFPA, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank and four of the regional CLEAR Centers for Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and South Asia, among others.

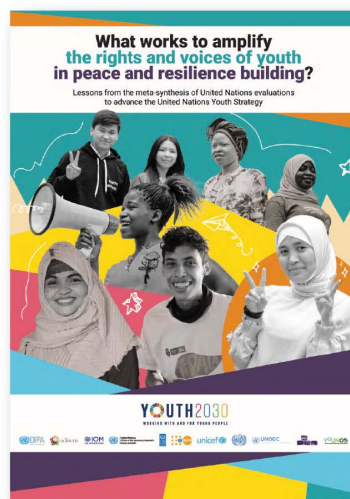
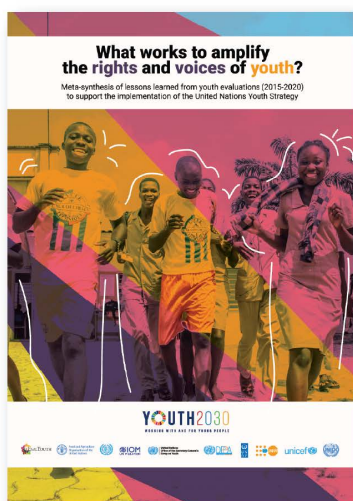


To provide a tangible framework for delivering on the manifesto's commitments, Eval4Action facilitated an inclusive and intergenerational process to co-create [standards for enhancing meaningful youth engagement in evaluation](#). The standards serve as a road map for improving practices and accountability in engaging youth in evaluation. Tailored standards and self-assessment tools have been developed for six target groups including academia, governments, international organizations, the private sector, VOPEs and youth organizations. See further details in section E.

The launch of the standards took place during the first [Youth in Evaluation week](#) in April 2023, which focused on increasing intergenerational solidarity for transformative evaluation, aligned with Our Common Agenda. About 50 events, including seven global events and three Twitter Space events, were held worldwide during the Youth in Evaluation week, attended by more than 1,700 participants. Building on the momentum generated by the April launch, task forces supported by Eval4Action are advocating for the adoption and implementation of the standards.

## Delivering evidence on what works to meaningfully engage with youth in development processes

The EO co-convened an inter-agency knowledge collaboration to produce two meta-syntheses that capture lessons learned from United Nations evaluations in order to advance the implementation of the [United Nations Youth Strategy](#) (also known as Youth2030). The first meta-synthesis, [What works to amplify the rights and voices of youth?](#) was released in 2021. The second meta-synthesis, [What works to amplify the rights and voices of youth in peace and resilience building?](#) was released in 2023. Several youth-led organizations participated in the reference groups of the exercises, including the EvalYouth Global Network, the United Network of Young Peacebuilders and YOUNGO, the official Children and Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.



## Strengthening institutional capacities for young evaluators

### Advocacy with evaluation offices in the United Nations system to advance youth in evaluation

In 2023, the EO advocated for and now convenes the first United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) intergenerational working group on young and emerging evaluators (YEEs). The group is mapping the engagement of YEEs among UNEG agencies, reigniting a partnership with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to deploy YEEs as young evaluation professionals in the UN system, and is advocating for the institutional adoption of the standards for enhancing meaningful youth engagement in evaluation.



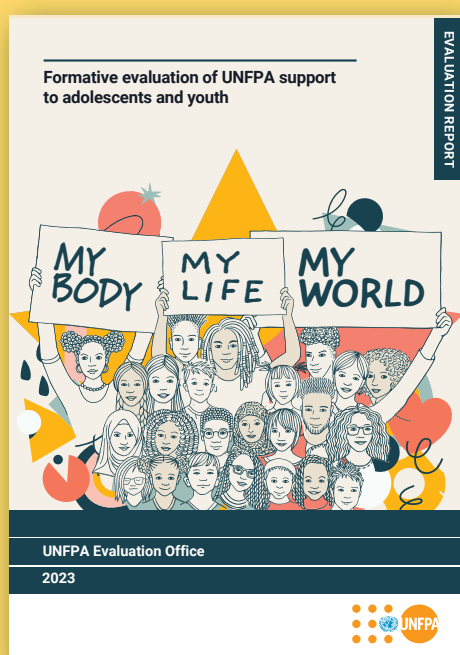
### Strengthening EvalYouth networks

The EO has signed a partnership agreement with the World Bank's Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI) aiming to enhance national evaluation capacities, specifically for YEEs. In this regard, the EO supports the EvalYouth Global Network's strategic priorities. This includes the implementation of the EvalYouth global mentoring programme; the organization of annual EvalYouth virtual conferences; the launch of new country chapters and the dissemination of a toolkit on enhancing the engagement of YEEs in VOPE governance, governance structures and leadership roles. The EO also supports several EvalYouth regional and national chapters.

### Strengthening individual capacities of young evaluators

As part of the partnership with GEI, the EO has developed a comprehensive training pack on career development in monitoring and evaluation in six languages. The development of the training pack was led by a youth group. In partnership with EvalYouth, the EO also supports peer-to-peer career advisory sessions for emerging evaluators. The EO supported the participation of YEEs in the VOPE governance through the [VOPE Leadership Boot Camp](#) organized by the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation. The EO also regularly sponsors capacity building sessions for YEEs during evaluation conferences and provides bursaries and scholarships for YEEs to attend the learning and networking sessions. The EO also annually supports 'winter schools' for young evaluators.

## C. How were youth meaningfully engaged in the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth?



Applying a systemic approach to enhancing youth engagement in evaluation and learning from the various experiences above, in 2021–2022 the EO undertook a significant innovation. The EO engaged youth in all phases and in various capacities during the [formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth](#). The sections ahead detail this breakthrough experience, as well as the lessons learned in engaging youth during the management and conduct of the evaluation, from an intergenerational perspective.

### The innovation

The formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth engaged young people throughout the evaluation in different capacities through various evaluation phases.



For example, the EO:

- Established a Youth Steering Committee to oversee and make decisions together with EO during the evaluation process – a first-time pilot initiative
- Recruited 14 young evaluators from the countries selected for in-depth case studies to conduct data collection and analysis
- Consulted the young professional network (also known as “Tangerines”) at UNFPA in the evaluation’s data validation processes
- Sought the views and perspectives of 832 young people as key sources of evidence.

**Table 1:** *Youth engagement in the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth*

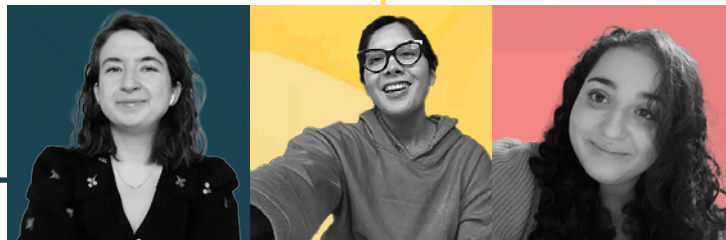
<b>Evaluation phase</b>	<b>Role of young person</b>	<b>Responsibilities of young person</b>	<b>Opportunities for intergenerational exchange/ learning/collaboration</b>
All	Youth Steering Committee member	Act as advisors/decision makers who help conceptualize, guide and oversee the evaluation process together with the EO	Youth Steering Committee collaborate with senior evaluation managers to take decisions on the conduct of the evaluation
Data collection	Key informant	Act as critical sources of evidence and insight for the evaluation	Adolescent and youth rights-holders of UNFPA interventions participate in focus group discussions led by senior and young evaluators to better capture the youth perspective
Data collection, analysis and reporting for country case studies	Young evaluator	Conduct in-person data collection and analysis for country case studies	Young evaluators work in intergenerational teams with senior evaluators to conduct data collection and analysis
Analysis and reporting	Evaluation Reference Group member	Contribute inputs and feedback to the data analysis and validation process	Young professionals at UNFPA are consulted by senior evaluators to ensure the evaluation captures their inputs from a youth lens.

There has been much learning and reflection throughout this experience. With regular feedback meetings, survey, vlogs and internal discussions, the EO has documented intergenerational learnings and reflections, leaning into the experience of the young people themselves as well as those of the evaluation managers and senior evaluation team members. The EO and the Youth Steering Committee surfaced seven key learnings on what worked and what could be improved in engaging young people in evaluation processes.

This learning aims to help evaluation commissioners, managers and evaluators who are interested to start engaging youth in their evaluation processes. It also will be of interest to those who are already engaging youth in evaluation and are looking for ideas to take this engagement to the next level.

## Youth Steering Committee for the formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth

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## D. What have we learned about meaningfully engaging youth in evaluation?

### Lessons learned snapshot

- 1 Power sharing** Be intentional in re-balancing power relations to allow for meaningful participation
- 2 Space** Create space for young people to engage
- 3 Diversity** Inclusive, transparent selection enhances the diversity of youth in evaluation
- 4 Clarity** Clarity on the purpose of youth engagement sets realistic expectations
- 5 Integration** Integration of young people throughout the evaluation process enhances their contributions
- 6 Learning** Dedicated space for learning supports youth role and engagement in evaluation
- 7 Empowerment** Meaningful engagement builds capacities and empowers youth

## 1. Be intentional in re-balancing power relations to allow for meaningful participation

Inherent in undertaking participatory work with young people are the relational power dynamics at play. Often, power imbalances between young professionals and more senior members of the evaluation team and commissioners can lead to an environment that stifles the voice, creativity and out-of-the-box thinking of young people. In addition, other power relations exist such as gender, class and race. For example, gender inequality may hinder a young woman from taking a leadership role on the evaluation team, especially in particular local contexts.

To rebalance power dynamics, it is necessary to establish a dedicated platform for young people such as a Youth Steering Committee to accompany the evaluation. From the UNFPA experience, the creation of such a committee served to reimagine the power relations that exist by creating a space where young people can be equal partners in making decisions, where their inputs are valued and respected, and where they can exchange ideas and are able to collaborate in a safe and open way. Through a dynamic dialogue with Senior Management and governing bodies such as an Executive Board, the Director of the Evaluation Office can manage the potential political risks of power-sharing. In the case of young evaluators, senior evaluators can shift the power balance by co-creating with young evaluators from the start of the evaluation, supporting young evaluators to participate in decision-making throughout the process, and creating spaces for reciprocal learning between the young evaluator, their peers and senior evaluators.



*It was critical to have the Youth Steering Committee constituted throughout this evaluation process. The voices of youth should not just be heard from a respondent perspective but also from a decision-making avenue. This is where real change will stem from when the voice of youth is integrated at all levels.*

—Wanjiku Gathoni Munyiri, Youth Steering Committee member

## 2. Create space for young people to engage

There is often a reluctance or hesitancy to work with young people owing to the varied cultural, social and political norms and contexts. Stereotypes and beliefs may also contribute to negative attitudes in around engaging young people in a technical or decision-making capacity. Senior evaluators may be unwilling to hire young evaluators as they perceive their inexperience as a burden to their workload or they do not see the added value.

From the UNFPA experience, the evaluation managers built-in mechanisms in the evaluation from the start to formalize and create space for youth engagement in the exercise. The mechanisms included:

- Formalizing a stand-alone objective to enhance the engagement of youth in Terms of Reference of the evaluation
- Allocating specific funds to facilitate youth participation
- Establishing a Youth Steering Committee for young people to oversee and make decisions alongside evaluation managers
- Creating intergenerational teams composed of a senior evaluator and a young evaluator to conduct country case studies.

In integrating these components into the evaluation, it is important to showcase the multiple benefits of youth engagement in evaluation. As mentioned above, there are several benefits to engaging young evaluators and these benefits need to be communicated in the Terms of Reference of the evaluation, but also advocated by the evaluation manager to the evaluation team and relevant stakeholders. Formalizing youth engagement in the evaluation process creates a foundation for inclusion and respect, and allows for the transformation of traditional social norms and beliefs around young people and their ability to participate in evaluation processes.

*Bringing more senior evaluators and young people together in such a project where all ideas from young people are welcomed allows mutual mentoring as well, which is one of the most impressive outcomes/learning points of this process.*

—Erva Nur Cinar, Youth Steering Committee member



### 3. Inclusive, transparent selection enhances the diversity of youth in evaluation

Youth are not a homogeneous group; rather, they have multiple, layered and rich identities. Every evaluation should have inclusive approaches to engage relevant stakeholders, including the diverse identities of young people. In the UNFPA evaluation, selection processes were held for the members of the Youth Steering Committee and young evaluators to conduct the country case studies. Learning from this exercise has shown that a dedicated, inclusive and transparent selection process is critical to ensure the selection of different groups of youth, including those groups that are least represented or left behind, to participate in different opportunities in the evaluation whether it be as a key informant, a young evaluator or as a Youth Steering Committee member.

From the UNFPA experience, the evaluation manager identified which voices among young people would be relevant and useful to the evaluation (e.g. young people with specific technical backgrounds, geographic representation, etc.) and set up a selection process to target those individuals. A large part of ensuring an inclusive and transparent selection process is dependent on the outreach efforts to solicit applications. Some ways to open up the process and reach a diversity of young people include the following:

- Preparing a vacancy announcement in a language and format that is accessible for all, such as young people with disabilities or using vernacular languages
- Intentional targeting of specific groups of youth, such as young women, young people from the global south and indigenous youth
- Disseminating the vacancy announcement across different channels and platforms used by young professionals
- Identifying youth-led and youth-focused networks and organizations that can facilitate outreach to hard-to-reach young people.

EvalYouth is a youth-led evaluation network that the UNFPA Evaluation Office worked in partnership with to identify young and emerging evaluators in each of the countries that would be undertaking an in-depth case study in the evaluation. Partnering with EvalYouth in the selection process allowed UNFPA to leverage their far-reaching networks of qualified young and emerging evaluators and also helped to improve the efficiency of the selection process. A common challenge in selection processes is allocating sufficient time and resources to the process. Often when selection processes do not build in the time needed, it can lead to a less diverse, less qualified pool of applicants or tokenism.



*The diversity of the members in the Youth Steering Committee as well as their backgrounds created a sort of mosaic and complementarity between us. It even involved the underrepresented evaluators from Tunisia, which allowed discussing the evaluation topic on the other side of the globe.*

—Sana Ben Salem, Youth Steering Committee member

## 4. Clarity on the purpose of youth engagement sets realistic expectations

Often when working in intergenerational teams, if the purpose of the youth engagement is not clearly outlined or understood, the extent of the engagement can be limited. Communicating the purpose of youth engagement in an evaluation should involve relaying the benefits of including young people in the evaluation process, and outlining the specific goals for youth engagement, the roles and responsibilities of those involved, and the resources required to ensure youth engagement is a success.

In the UNFPA experience, the evaluation manager communicated the purpose of youth engagement in the Terms of Reference of the exercise and later to the evaluation team that was recruited. To ensure full understanding and engagement by the senior evaluators, the Director of the Evaluation Office personally participated in the initial meetings to clearly state that meaningful participation of youth is an organizational priority with high expectations. He also guided and provided oversight of the engagement. Building an understanding of the role and importance of young people in the evaluation not only created the necessary buy-in and support at all levels but also set up realistic expectations for all involved.

Articulating the purpose of the engagement will also define the specific roles and responsibilities of the young person and manage the expectations of those involved. It is important to establish clear ways of working for all team members, not only the young person. When the roles and responsibilities of a young person are not clear, it may lead to feelings of subordination, exploitation or tokenism. Moreover, when working in teams, often there are power dynamics at play that are rooted in discrimination (e.g. ageism, sexism, racism or elitism) and these can negatively impact a young person's experience in an evaluation. Consider questions such as the following: Is the engagement in the form of a traditional mentorship where the young evaluator is the mentee paired with a senior advisor who will play the role of an advisee or are the young and senior evaluators working as co-evaluators with equal responsibilities and decision-making roles? If the young person is a member of the Youth Steering Committee, will they take part in decision-making about the evaluation and how will they engage with the evaluation managers? It is critical to establish a shared understanding of how the team communicates and makes decisions.

In the UNFPA experience, while the roles and responsibilities of the young people (Youth Steering Committee members and young evaluators) were clearly outlined in their Terms of Reference, there was still some confusion among some young evaluators on their role in relation to the senior evaluator. In this instance, a dedicated discussion on the roles and responsibilities between the young evaluator and senior evaluator was necessary to ensure both were clear about their roles, expectations and power relations – and what this would look like in practice. The experience also suggested that it is beneficial for the evaluation manager to meet and check in with the young professionals to actively ensure their engagement is not tokenistic, but rather is empowering and responsive to their needs while also promoting learning and collaboration among the evaluation team.

*Clarity is key in understanding your role, but it is also very important to let young evaluators know that the scope of work can be expanded or reduced because evaluation processes can be challenging and rely on a variety of factors and dynamics that may change over time.*

—Mohammed Suhuyini Zakaria, Youth Steering Committee member



## 5. Integration of young people throughout the evaluation process enhances their contributions

For meaningful engagement, young people should be included in the entire evaluation process, from the conceptualization of the evaluation to its dissemination and facilitation of its use. When planning how and when to involve young people in evaluation, it is often easier to limit engagement to specific points in the evaluation process rather than integrate their participation throughout. To this point, the meaningful integration of youth requires time and resources that need to be factored into the evaluation timeline and budget from the onset of the exercise.

In the UNFPA experience, young people were involved in different stages of the evaluation. This approach impacted the manner and extent of their engagement. Members of the Youth Steering Committee were involved at the onset of the evaluation, while the young evaluators, were brought in near the end of the inception phase. In their opinion, this limited their engagement and ability to contribute to the evaluation. If they had been involved at an earlier stage, the young evaluators said they would have had the opportunity to engage in the evaluation's planning and design and would have been able to contribute more to the development of the methodology. Additionally, engaging the young evaluators from an earlier stage would have allowed them to participate in broader discussions on the conceptualization of the evaluation, which would have led to a better understanding of its complexity and scope. Finally, it is essential that young people be involved in disseminating the evaluation and facilitating its use as this allows them the opportunity to share their own stories and advocate for change.



*Youth participation should be there since the planning stages to devise how our participation will be at every stage of the process, and to give equally important input to the process.*

—Gabriela De Jesus Cipriano Flores, Youth Steering Committee member



## 6. Dedicated space for learning supports youth role and engagement in evaluation

Often a factor that inhibits youth engagement in evaluation is the lack of experience, knowledge or skill needed to conduct evaluations, especially those of a complex nature. While there are young people who are professionals in evaluation, their capacities and knowledge may vary depending on the training and opportunities available to them. In addition, not all young evaluators have experience in evaluations of such a large scale and would need some technical guidance and support in their conduct. When engaging young professionals in evaluation, the roles created should be respectful of the skills, experiences and competencies of young people.

In the UNFPA experience, the opportunity to work with young evaluators presented an opportunity to build the technical and leadership capacities of these young professionals. In the evaluation, mechanisms were developed to strengthen the capacity of the young evaluators. For example, prior to the conduct of a country case study, the senior evaluator held a training session for the young evaluator briefing them on the evaluation as well as methodological aspects including data collection methods and tools. Regular communication proved useful, as did using different platforms and methods such as Slack and WhatsApp groups to foster interactions, contributions and learning. Other mechanisms could be explored such as peer-to-peer learning and exchanges and regular capacity building sessions based on the thematic areas of the subject to be evaluated. Another avenue to explore would be to have the young evaluator set clear individual learning objectives for themselves, e.g. to develop technical skills such as data collection and analysis or softer skills such as leadership, problem solving and decision-making. The young evaluator would discuss these learning goals should be with the senior members of the evaluation team so that they could plan to support them in achieving those goals during the evaluation process.

In addition, documenting the experience of youth engagement proved valuable for learning and experience sharing, internally and with external stakeholders. This documentation process also strengthened the feedback loop among senior and young evaluators on the quality of youth engagement during the evaluation. Documentation requires advanced planning at the start of the evaluation, to build in the necessary mechanisms and processes to capture lessons from the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders.



*It would be useful to have more interaction within the Youth Steering Committee, to learn more from peer-to-peer coaching by hearing/discussing the opinions of other youth. Participation among Youth Steering Committee members has not always been equal, whereas it would be nice to be more interactive with each other so that the cohesion is improved and therefore easier to work on tasks.*

—Lina Al-Hassany, Youth Steering Committee member



## 7. Meaningful engagement builds capacities and empowers youth

Allowing young people the space for engagement and learning has multiplier effects on their empowerment. The engagement of youth in evaluation is critical to ensure their voice and perspectives are considered and taken into action. Moreover, the ability to work alongside a team of evaluation professionals can become a rich learning and empowerment exercise for young evaluators.

During the UNFPA evaluation, a survey was conducted to gather feedback from young people engaged in the exercise. Young people reported that they have greatly benefited from the exposure of working on a complex global evaluation with the United Nations, collaboration with their peers, the experience of working with an international organization, and the experience of working with a diverse group of people and perspectives. In particular, the young professionals noted that their opinions, ideas and inputs were fully appreciated and valued, which was especially important in an evaluation that addresses issues around adolescents and youth. The young evaluators also reflected on their interaction with young people who were key informants in the focus group discussions they conducted. Being young evaluators who spoke the same language and grew up in the same country context helped to bridge an immediate and genuine connection to the young respondents, they said, resulting in more open and candid discussions and thus improving the overall quality and validity of the data.

Interaction with senior evaluators was another important component of youth engagement from the UNFPA experience, with the aim to strengthen the capacities and skills of young people through their work with senior evaluators. It was important to create an environment where young evaluators felt supported to be able to stand on their own and feel empowered. This element of the experience was largely positive, as reported by young people though there were some lessons learned. Interaction can be a challenge if senior evaluators are less open to mentoring/training when young evaluators require more support than what is resourced for, or when time constraints and deadlines of the evaluation do not allow for capacity building activities. In these cases, mechanisms for feedback and reflection are needed to ensure young evaluators are still empowered by the exercise. These can include focus group discussions, or a survey of young people on their engagement, or a one-on-one discussion between the senior evaluator and young evaluator on their experience.



*Youth's work and meaningful involvement feed back positively into motivation, empowerment and experience. This drives more involvement and professionalism.*

—Gabriela De Jesus Cipriano Flores, Youth Steering Committee member



## E. How can the lessons be used in a practical way?

This paper presents seven lessons that can be used alongside the [standards for enhancing meaningful youth engagement in evaluation](#). Together, the lessons and the standards serve as useful tools for interested institutions, evaluation commissioners, evaluation managers and evaluators to enhance meaningful youth engagement in their evaluation practices. In particular, the standards provide guidance and pathways for academia, governments, international organizations, the private sector, VOPEs and youth organizations to initiate and advance the meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation. The standards also serve as an accountability mechanism for the delivery of the commitments in the [Youth in Evaluation manifesto](#).

The standards cover six dimensions, namely, leadership and accountability, practice, advocacy and capacity development, knowledge management and communication, human resources and financial resources. In each of these six dimensions, the standards are organized into four categories – minimum requirement, approaching minimum requirement, meeting minimum requirement, and exceeding minimum requirement – displaying a spectrum. The seven lessons can be utilized as practical guidance and ideas to meet, and often exceed the requirements of the standards. For specific examples of how the lessons align with the six dimensions, please refer to Table 2.

### Six dimensions of the Youth in Evaluation standards



Leadership and accountability



Practice



Advocacy and capacity development



Knowledge management and communication



Human resources



Financial resources

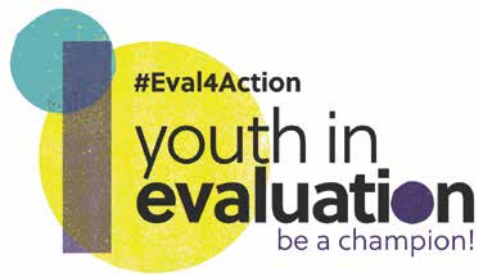
The standards also include a self-assessment guide and rating scale for assessing the implementation of the standards. All organizations interested in meaningfully engaging youth in evaluation are encouraged to adopt the standards and to share the self-assessment by 31 March each year, by writing to [contact@eval4action.org](mailto:contact@eval4action.org).





**Table 2: Linking six dimensions of the standards to the lessons**

Dimension	Definition	Applicable lesson(s)	How the lesson(s) support implementation of the standards
Leadership and accountability	Leadership in the organization is committed to youth in evaluation	<a href="#">Lesson 1</a> <a href="#">Lesson 2</a> <a href="#">Lesson 4</a>	<p>When leadership builds an understanding of the role and importance of young people in the evaluation it not only creates the necessary buy-in and support at all levels, but it also sets realistic expectations for all involved. Further, by creating space and formalizing youth engagement in evaluations and allocating resources for this effort demonstrates a strong institutional commitment of the organization</p> <p>In addition, when evaluation leadership shares power with young people in an evaluation, it equalizes power dynamics. Young people feel supported and safe to participate in decision-making and are able to collaborate more openly in particular on interventions that directly affect them</p>
Practice	The organization's evaluation guidelines and tools include youth participation in all evaluation phases, focusing on the diversity of youth	<a href="#">Lesson 2</a> <a href="#">Lesson 3</a> <a href="#">Lesson 4</a> <a href="#">Lesson 5</a>	When there is clarity on the purpose of youth engagement in evaluation at the outset, followed by clear and concrete mechanisms for engagement throughout the evaluation process, and transparent and inclusive selection of a diversity of youth to participate in all phases of evaluation, the benefits of youth engagement in evaluation are enhanced
Advocacy and capacity development	National governments and local partners are mobilized to meaningfully engage youth in evaluation	<a href="#">Lesson 7</a>	When young people work with experienced evaluation professionals, collaborate with their peers, gain experience of working with an international organization, it builds their capacity and empowers them
Knowledge management and communication	The value of engaging youth in evaluation through communications and knowledge management is promoted	<a href="#">Lesson 6</a>	When the youth engagement process and lessons along the way are systematically documented and communicated, it supports cross fertilization of experiences
Human resources	Access of young professionals to the evaluation labour market is facilitated	<a href="#">Lesson 6</a>	When mechanisms are developed to strengthen youth skills during the evaluation process, it builds their technical and leadership capacities as young professionals, facilitating greater access to evaluation jobs and improving their overall career outlook
Financial resources	Necessary resources are allocated to support the meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation in the annual budget	<a href="#">Lesson 5</a>	When sufficient time and budget for youth engagement are built into the evaluation exercise at its onset, it displays leadership commitment and supports youth's meaningful engagement in evaluation



## Youth in Evaluation Manifesto

### **A call to action to meaningfully engage youth and young evaluators in evaluation**

We, the members of the global evaluation community, including governments, parliamentarians, Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs), United Nations agencies, evaluators, academia, the private sector, and the development sector,

**Recognize** that young and emerging evaluators are actively contributing to shaping the global evaluation culture, and are multiplying the transformational power of evaluation to build a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable world framed by social justice and equity;

**Accept** our role and responsibility in nurturing and supporting the meaningful engagement of youth and young and emerging evaluators in evaluation processes and in evaluation advocacy, in order to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

**Commit** to undertake strategic and concerted efforts to build the professional capacities of young and emerging evaluators;

**Commit** to advocate for and as well as to enhance real and meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation, focusing on the diversity of youth, by collaborating with youth in the design, development and use of the evaluation. This includes engaging youth and young and emerging evaluators in all phases of the evaluation, including as:

- **Key informants**, to provide perspectives and evidence during the evaluation data collection, with a special focus on underrepresented youth groups
- **Co-evaluators**, who conduct the evaluation together with senior evaluation team members
- **Advisors**, who contribute insights to key deliverables of the evaluation process
- **Decision-makers**, who co-lead and co-guide the evaluation process together with the commissioners and/or managers of the evaluation process
- **Advocates** for the use of the evaluation

Acknowledge that meaningful engagement of youth and young and emerging evaluators in evaluation is an ongoing process, and not a one-time effort, which requires reflection on the process and using lessons for action and change.

**We/I commit to be a champion for youth in evaluation!**

[Sign the manifesto](#)



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