

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

INSIGHTS DRAWN FROM GOOD PRACTICES ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN COVID-19 RESPONSE



Photo: Training of volunteers on hand-washing.
© Action Aid Ghana

THE CASE STUDIES FROM FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, BANGLADESH, GHANA, GUINEA BISSAU, JORDAN, AUSTRALIA, AND ASIA SOUTH-PACIFIC REGION DEMONSTRATE GOOD PRACTICES BY YOUTH-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE.

THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED IN THESE CASE STUDIES PROVIDE USEFUL OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR ORGANIZATIONS AIMING TO SUPPORT YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORT MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN RESPONSE TO FUTURE PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES.

ADDRESSING CAPACITY BARRIERS

Capacity challenges amongst youth participants have been faced by most of the organizations, and were addressed by strategies for building the youth's capacity to be well-resourced in engaging within COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE).

- Limited knowledge about Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) amongst the youth volunteers going out to remote islands in Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) posed a challenge. It was addressed by the inclusion of an RCCE component into the COVID-19 awareness training, including lessons on how to develop community action plans.
- In the project implemented by Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network

(MYAN) in Australia, the fully online modality of the multi-media training and mentoring (due to COVID-19 restrictions) presented an initial difficulty, which was tackled by developing an online community for the participants to serve as a space where they could belong and engage with each other.

- A difficulty faced by youth researchers from Asia South-Pacific (ASPBAE) was the access to technology, which further isolated marginalized youth from engaging with their communities and member organizations. The initiative addressed this challenge by providing physical spaces with access to the internet, and an adequate digital infrastructure to accommodate groups to attend online training sessions.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL NORMS BARRIERS

In many instances, gender and social norms such as parental and community disapproval presented barriers to their involvement. The project organizers dealt with these challenges by communicating to parents and youth about the activities and reassuring them about the respectability and relevance.

- Parental concerns posed a difficulty in the youth leadership initiative by Dar Abu Abdallah (DAA) and UNICEF Jordan, and this challenge was dealt with by inviting parents to the training sessions to keep them informed of all activities. The youth organizations likewise focused on building resilience and empowering their members by being a part of the supportive

network, which in turn reinforced their commitment to the projects.

- The prevalence of societal norms about the engagement of young women outside of the home posed a challenge for BINDU Movement in Bangladesh, when young women had to go to the field and talk to communities about COVID-19. This challenge was addressed by the mutual support of young women belonging to BINDU to stay strong in their commitment to help. In several cases, local social norms presented an obstacle related to the community's acceptance of the COVID-19 risk communication messages. In addressing these barriers, the projects aimed at

supporting the young volunteers to build productive relationships with the local leaders who were important gatekeepers and nodes in influencing other community members.

- Traditional beliefs in Ghana represented a difficulty in convincing

community members about the dangers of COVID-19. To resolve this barrier, the youth gained the support of traditional authorities who promoted the relevance of the project and helped to promote the acceptance of the risk communication efforts.

ADDRESSING OTHER CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Additional difficulties, for example posed by funding, were resolved creatively by the project organizers in their respective initiatives:

- For Young Urban Women's Movement Ghana, one of the obstacles was the short timeframe of the project because of the limited funding that was available. This difficulty was overcome by the youth's efforts to actively promote the spread of COVID-19 related information further through their family members and networks.
- For Dar Abu Abdallah and UNICEF Jordan, a difficulty in enabling the youth to develop COVID-19 RCCE projects was the context of scant resources. This challenge was overcome through the provision of a small-grant scheme for the young volunteers' projects which allowed the youth to have responsibility and ownership, and thereby increased their agency.
- Limitations in innovative thinking in entrepreneurial project development was another obstacle faced by Dar Abu Abdallah and UNICEF Jordan, which the organizations addressed by an active engagement and supervision of the participants. This ensured that the ideas generated were responding to the specific needs of the community and were adapted to the local context, making the most of local strengths and opportunities.

The good practices include Case Study 1: UNICEF Pacific supports Micronesia Red Cross Society (MRCS) youths in the fight against COVID-19 in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) - Micronesia Red Cross Society and UNICEF Pacific, Federated States of Micronesia; Case Study 2: Young Women Raise-Awareness and Generate Income in Combating COVID-19 – BINDU Women Development / BINDU Nari Unnayan Sangathan and UN WOMEN Bangladesh; Case Study 3: Youth-Led Risk Communication and Outreach for Rural Communities - Young Urban Women's Movement, Ghana; Case Study 4: Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Leading to Outreach for COVID-19 Awareness - UNICEF Guinea-Bissau; Case Study 5: Youth Leadership Skills and Economic Empowerment Amidst the COVID Crisis - Dar Abu Abdallah (DAA) and UNICEF Jordan; Case Study 6: 'Day in the Life' Video Series of Young People During the Pandemic – Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), Australia; Case Study 7: Youth-led Action Research on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Marginalized Youth, Asia South-Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).

The case studies have been selected by the Youth Engagement Subgroup YES! of the Collective Service (UNICEF, WHO, IFRC, GOARN) as an initiative of UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the Collective Helpdesk with the support of UN WOMEN and the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, as part of an open call for good practices to document, analyze, and promote youth engagement and youth leadership across countries and regions.