



YOUAccess

FROM TRUST TO CHANGE: How YOUAccess Supports Youth-led Advocacy

MAY 2019

At PAI, we believe youth-led organizations are integral to improving the policy and funding environment surrounding adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (AYSRHR). To that end, we created YOUAccess, PAI's signature youth-focused project where we engage directly with and provide advocacy technical assistance and funding support to youth-led organizations.

PAI recognized that governments and global initiatives were highlighting AYSRHR, but that young people and youth-led organizations were often absent from the conversations that inform commitments, policies and programs aimed at improving AYSRHR. We know lack of involvement from young people makes it more difficult to achieve the outcomes governments are trying to realize through their commitments and policy development. A key means of bridging this achievement gap is to invest in youth-led organizations and provide them with the technical assistance to influence AYSRHR policies and budgets within their own country contexts. Youth-led organizations are well-positioned to take on this challenge. They understand firsthand the needs of these populations and the changes that are required to improve AYSRHR. However, they lack the support to meaningfully engage in existing policy and advocacy processes and mechanisms.

PAI's partnership model helps youth-led organizations participate in and drive policy change. Our model is one that is grounded in trust, flexibility and transparency. PAI's approach is unique in that the goals and objectives are created by the partner, with support and guidance from PAI along the way. YOUAccess is specifically designed to provide youth-led organizations with dedicated advocacy funding and technical assistance. The organizations we have partnered with do not typically receive dedicated funding for advocacy, much less have the opportunity to design and implement their own advocacy strategies for prioritizing AYSRHR. For many partners, this was the first time they received dedicated and sustained funding as well as continuous technical assistance to implement an advocacy strategy of their own design.

To enrich and sustain their advocacy capacity, PAI hosted Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) strategy workshops to help partners hone their advocacy approach and develop their workplans. Our ongoing support included regular and consistent touchpoints to collaboratively address challenges and provide guidance as they implemented their plans. We jointly brainstormed strategic shifts and approaches to best target decisionmakers and achieve results. The combination of funding and technical assistance was essential to helping partners achieve their objectives. All partners reported that without YOUAccess' advocacy technical assistance and financial support, their work would have been less impactful—and in some cases, nonexistent. By investing in youth-led organizations and strengthening their capacity as advocates, we have proven that young people can shape policies and budgets in a way that other adult advocates cannot.

When young people are supported to meaningfully engage in policy and budget conversations and decisions, it:

- **Strengthens advocacy capacity:** Building a cohort of informed young advocates who understand the policy process empowers them to share their experiences and connects them to decision-makers, leading to policies and budgets that are reflective of the needs of young people.
- **Results in more responsive policies:** In both AYSRHR and broader sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) conversations, adolescent and youth-specific language is prioritized and more relevant when young people are part of strategy development and implementation. A recent literature review of youth engagement in policy processes found that policy initiatives led by young people had a strong policy impact.¹
- **Increases access to information, services and supplies for young people:** If policies and budgets are more reflective of the needs of young people, they will have a greater impact on improving access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies.

¹ Shephard, D.D. (2017). How Young People Influence Policy: A Literature Review. OxfamNovib. Retrieved from: <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/za18zxdk1p4whlmcbpp0q5i0no537wkw>

Investing in youth advocates yields positive short- and long-term outcomes. In the short term, PAI is ensuring our youth-led organizational partners have the advocacy tools and funding necessary to actively participate in spaces with key stakeholders, including with government officials and adult advocates. This allows them to make the case for prioritization of AYSRHR. We have also seen their increased voice and influence lead to more allies championing the participation and involvement of youth-led organizations in advocacy strategies. In the long term, PAI is helping to support the development of the next generation of SRHR advocates.

What follows are examples from select YOUAccess partners designed to illustrate the positive change that occurs when young people are part of or leading AYSRHR advocacy.

STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY CAPACITY

MESSI Côte d'Ivoire, a youth-led organization headquartered in Abidjan, partners with Ivorian civil society organizations (CSOs), youth movements and government ministries to advocate for accessible and free family planning services for young people. In partnership with YOUAccess, MESSI identified an opportunity for budget advocacy at the subnational level. Specifically, the objective was to get the mayor of the Plateau District to sign a commitment allocating funds for the procurement of contraceptive supplies for adolescent health clinics.

With technical assistance from PAI, MESSI's advocacy team developed an advocacy plan using the SMART process. The foundation of the plan was engagement of CSOs as well as young leaders close to the decision-makers. Importantly, MESSI's advocacy plan incorporated "gut checks" from local stakeholders whom they were able to convene using funds from YOUAccess. This new advocacy process was deployed twice as the initial decision-maker was removed from office and ultimately replaced in local elections. Having an established advocacy process allowed MESSI to quickly recalibrate after the change in government.

"YOUAccess gave us the opportunity to bring important stakeholders together to discuss issues that are important to young people. That convening power has helped us influence policy spaces even if we're not at the table."

- MESSI STAFF MEMBER

Despite the election and resulting shift in its strategy, MESSI was still able to achieve two supplemental and distinct wins:

- 1 Creating a consortium of allies whom it convened, allowing MESSI to leverage its connections to access policy spaces; and
- 2 Reinforcing its relationships with Ivorian decision-makers who have recognized the importance of MESSI's engagement.

Without YOUAccess support, MESSI's advocacy process would have looked very different. For one, there was a need for advocacy skills building, as the organization had never focused on changing policies or government accountability. For new advocates like those within MESSI, without a strong advocacy framework, communicating with policymakers may have been a more convoluted process. Next, YOUAccess funds gave MESSI convening power that was crucial to establishing the organization as a contributor to the policy space, rather than a mere token. Having dedicated funds to bring stakeholders together gave MESSI the ability to shape the conversation and emphasize the needs of young people. The honest and transparent relationship between PAI and MESSI ensured the MESSI team felt comfortable shifting its approach when its initial decision-maker was removed from office. Finally, MESSI's convening power allowed it to leverage allies' connections to gain quicker access to the decision-maker, a process that would have taken much longer without established relationships. Having these governmental connections allowed MESSI to become a player on the subnational level and become the voice to remind the decision-makers of youth priorities.

DEVELOPING MORE RESPONSIVE POLICIES

Since the inception of Family Planning 2020 (FP2020), the government of Ethiopia has committed to expanding youth-friendly family planning services. To translate the commitments into action, it developed the Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy (2016-2020). The government of Ethiopia sought the help of Talent Youth Association (TaYA), a youth-led sexual and reproductive health organization in Ethiopia, in implementing the strategy in a way that ensured the needs of adolescents and youth were represented and reflected.

With YOUAccess funding and advocacy assistance, TaYA shared information about the Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy and conducted consultations with young people, adult allies and government officials to develop Youth Engagement Guidelines. TaYA and PAI worked in close partnership to ensure the consultations resulted in guidelines that reflect the needs of young people and strengthened partnerships between young people and adult allies. TaYA used its connections and knowledge of the sexual and reproductive health landscape in Ethiopia to lead the advocacy effort, while PAI provided advice about parties to include in the consultations, feedback on the guidelines and approaches to ensure a variety of stakeholders were engaged. TaYA successfully achieved its objective of helping to develop guidelines that reflected youth voices through a locally driven, collaborative process that was respectful and illustrative of how to meaningfully engage young people.

Supporting a youth-led organization to lead the development of the guidelines allowed for the needs of young people to be accurately represented. TaYA was able to capitalize on its connection with young people throughout Ethiopia to include a range of youth perspectives in the guidelines. Youth-led organizations like TaYA are uniquely positioned to advance this work because they are respected by both their peers and policymakers, but they do not always have the necessary support to be successful.

“When young people are not engaged meaningfully in the policymaking process, the policy tends to be irrelevant to the needs of the young people. This leads to policies that cannot bring about the desired outcomes for youth.”

– YORDANOS T. WOLDE, PROGRAM COORDINATOR
TALENT YOUTH ASSOCIATION (TAYA)

PAI provided TaYA with funding and technical assistance to implement its advocacy strategy, but equally important, PAI and TaYA developed a partnership that was rooted in trust and flexibility. This empowered TaYA to ask for guidance when it faced challenges and allowed for PAI and TaYA to identify solutions together, resulting in a stronger and more successful advocacy campaign. Because TaYA had dedicated funding for this opportunity, it was able to develop a plan to incorporate the experiences of young people who do not typically have their voices represented in government policies and strategies. In addition to the creation

of the guidelines, TaYA built the capacities of a cohort of young people who are now aware and excited to help improve young people’s access to health services in Ethiopia.

Without financial and technical assistance, it would have been more difficult for TaYA to influence the development of the guidelines. The organization also would not have had a trusted advocacy partner to strategize with when it faced challenges. Staff would have had to volunteer their time and would not have been able to elevate the perspectives of a diverse group of young people. TaYA would not have been able to share information about the strategy and forthcoming guidelines with the young people who are impacted. And ultimately, the guidelines would not have been as reflective of the realities that young people face, which would make them harder to implement.

While guidelines informed by young people represent a step in the right direction, TaYA and other young people must now shift their focus to ensuring they are implemented. PAI will continue to provide financial support and technical assistance to strengthen TaYA’s capacity for accountability, to develop and execute a dissemination plan for the guidelines and to form a coalition to better coordinate young people to engage with policymakers.

INCREASED ACCESS TO INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPLIES

In Kenya, Women Promotion Centre (WPC) saw an opportunity to improve adolescent and youth friendly health services through the implementation of the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (NASRHP), but it were unsure where to start. As part of the YOUAccess partnership, PAI hosted a three-day advocacy workshop with the objective of providing WPC with the tools to develop an advocacy strategy that was targeted and realistic. While WPC has advocated for policy change in Kenya before, the strategic guidance PAI provided helped WPC hone its advocacy approach and determine that asking the government to implement the entire strategy right away would not lead to success. Instead, WPC prioritized the actions in the NASRHP and focused its advocacy on fast-tracking youth centers. To do this, it took a three-pronged approach.

Because of the work of WPC and its partners, the government of Kenya has a better understanding of the sexual and reproductive health needs of young women in Kenya, and it has prioritized the establishment of youth centers and created a task force for the implementation of the NASRHP.

First, WPC held a convening with stakeholders to analyze the current policy landscape and determine what was needed to create youth centers for AYSRH. Participants identified lack of political will as a key barrier to implementation. They recognized that politicians make commitments to AYSRHR because it is popular, but there is little accountability. They formed a task team to refine their priorities and identified young politicians, like the member of parliament for Kibera, who believed AYSRHR was important and could help make connections at the Ministry of Health to push for the implementation of youth centers.

WPC then hosted roundtable discussions and forums with young people, key decision-makers from the Ministry of Health, the County Assembly, religious leaders and police. The fora were safe spaces for open dialogue and resulted in the stakeholders better understanding the unique needs of young people. They identified solutions to the implementation barriers of the NASRHP and helped to create the political goodwill needed to implement the policy. Discussions like these that challenge power dynamics, discrimination and stigma are uncommon but allowed for young women to be engaged in the process of determining how to implement the NASRHP. WPC developed a position paper highlighting opportunities to continue dialogue between young women and policymakers who now recognize the importance of advancing AYSRHR.

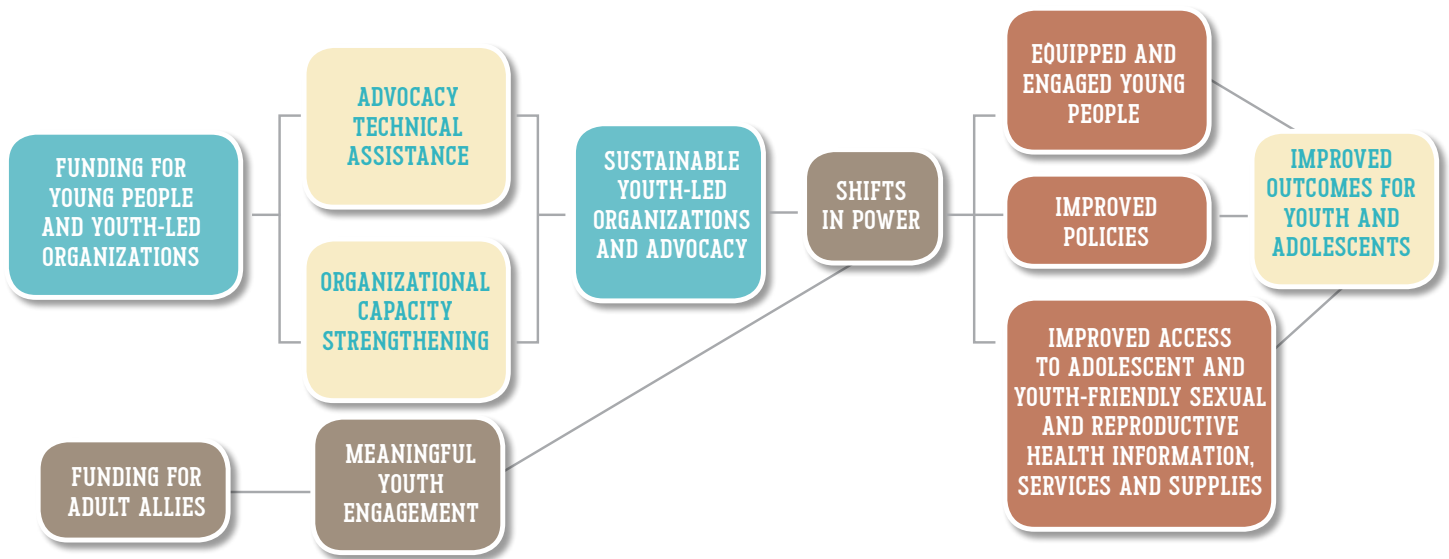
Finally, WPC held one-on-one meetings with key officials from the Ministry of Health, members of parliament and the Senate. WPC presented its position paper and shared how implementing the NASRHP would have positive impacts. The government stakeholders increased their commitment to young women in Kibera and fast-tracked the youth-friendly SRHR centers. Because of the work of WPC and its partners, the government of Kenya has a better understanding of the sexual and reproductive health needs of young women in Kenya, and it has prioritized the establishment of youth centers and created a task force for the implementation of the NASRHP.

WPC indicated that key to its success was the assistance provided to them through YOUAccess. In addition to financial support, PAI shared advocacy expertise with WPC that it used to leverage its connections and understanding of the local context to achieve its advocacy objective. The technical assistance provided by PAI helped WPC to identify an opportunity that was timely and provided funds to act. But there is still more work to be done. PAI and WPC will continue to partner on the implementation of the NASRHP with a focus on increasing the number of youth centers and ensuring the centers are providing the information and services that young people need. WPC plans to build on current momentum by strengthening the advocacy capacity of young people outside of Kibera in an effort to ensure that all young people in Kenya have access to youth-friendly health services, regardless of where they live.

THEORY OF CHANGE

PAI has developed and refined our theory of change for improved AYSRHR based on the outcomes of our youth partnerships in recent years. We believe an approach that focuses on both advocacy technical assistance and organizational capacity strengthening of youth-led organizations will lead to locally driven and sustainable youth-led advocacy. We also believe that adult allies need support to know how to meaningfully engage young people and shift their thinking to see young people as an asset.

Currently, PAI focuses our investments on supporting advocacy technical assistance, and as illustrated by the previously referenced examples, we have seen success. However, for real, transformative change to occur, youth-led organizations must also be supported to strengthen their organizational capacity. PAI believes that investments in both these areas are essential for improving AYSRHR and ensuring that youth-led organizations meaningfully engage in AYSRHR commitment and policy development as well as program implementation over the long term. If not, important opportunities to improve AYSRHR may be lost.



NEXT STEPS

As governments and global initiatives continue to include adolescent and youth as priorities, they must also meaningfully engage them. We have the evidence to show that youth-led organizations make a positive impact when they have the skills and opportunity to create change, but when we do not engage youth-led organizations in commitment and policy development as well as program implementation, we miss opportunities to improve AYSRHR.

PAI will continue to support youth-led organizations as they push their governments to deliver on AYSRHR commitments, support policy development and implementation for AYSRHR-specific policies and advocate for funding for AYSRHR priorities in their national budgets in the coming years. We have found that continued investments help to strengthen advocacy capacity and produce more impactful results. Investing in youth-led organizations results in positive change that helps to empower the next generation of leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN AYSRHR POLICY AND BUDGET ADVOCACY

- 1 Programs should be youth-led:** Young people should not only be part of AYSRHR conversations, they should be driving them. Goals and opportunities should be identified by the youth-led organization and supported by adult allies.
- 2 Adequate and flexible funding should be made available** for youth-led organizations to achieve their goals. Young people's time should not be volunteered. Funding should be sufficient to cover program activities and staff time and should address issues of organizational capacity identified by the youth-led organization, not the funder.
- 3 Partnerships should be built on trust and flexibility:** As youth-led organizations build their capacity, they need flexibility to try new ideas without fear that a setback will negatively impact their funding. As many youth-led organizations are newer to policy and budget advocacy, they need to have trusted partners they can turn to for guidance and redirection when things don't go as planned.
- 4 Technical assistance should be provided** to youth-led organizations in a manner that reflects their needs. Technical assistance providers should take into consideration the needs of the youth-led organization and tailor their support to the needs of the partner.
- 5 Make connections with adult allies** who can create space for youth-led organizations. Adult allies should allow their youth counterparts to take the lead but also be there to provide help when needed.

