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# The Importance of Youth Engagement in Policy Development and Implementation

## Introduction

Young people in Ethiopia face many barriers to accessing youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies, such as stigma, distance to health facilities and misinformation. Talent Youth Association (TaYA) has been working to address these and other barriers through advocacy with the Ethiopian government. The organization saw that most of the policies put in place do not respond to the actual needs of adolescents and youth because young people were not engaged in the development of the policies.

## Program Description

With financial and technical support from PAI's YOUAccess Fund, TaYA created a strategy to advocate for the inclusion of meaningful and inclusive youth participation in policy development and implementation. TaYA knew that policies that include young people in its development and implementation processes would accurately reflect the needs of adolescents and youth and, ultimately, be more successful. To do this, it built a coalition of youth-led organizations and young people. TaYA convened regular meetings with young people and government stakeholders and held workshops to help young people learn how to engage in the policy development process.

At the request of TaYA, PAI helped staff hone their advocacy skills to ensure they were able to advocate for youth engagement when the opportunity came. PAI assisted TaYA to strategize different approaches when addressing policymakers and anticipate objections to questions. In 2021, the Ethiopian government decided to develop an Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy. It was a prime opportunity for TaYA to ask the government to include consultations with young people in the strategy development process, to which the government agreed. The coalition of young people that TaYA had been working with was able to share its experiences as part of consultations for the strategy development process. The resulting strategy reflected the group's comments and included the importance of involving young people in strategy implementation.

***“From our experience, we’ve seen that most programs and policies are not responding to the best interests of adolescents and young people because young people were not there when the policies and strategies were designed, so that’s why we have been very active in promoting meaningful and inclusive youth engagement. The Ministry of Health has now started to integrate a meaningful youth engagement.”***

— DR. LEILENA SHIMELES, TaYA

## Results

The Ethiopian government's Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy included consultations with young people and addressed their unique health needs.

TaYA supported the development of a cohort of young people who were well-equipped to share their experiences accessing health care in Ethiopia.

TaYA successfully advocated for the inclusion of young people in consultations for Ethiopia's Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Health adopted a meaningful and inclusive youth engagement strategy in which TaYA took part in the development.

## Lessons Learned

When given the opportunity to engage in policy development and implementation, young people can provide valuable information that helps to create well-informed policies.

Building a cohort of young people who can speak to their experiences is essential for the policy development process.



Talent Youth Association is dedicated to addressing the health and well-being of adolescents and young people, to create an enabling environment for them to grow and thrive. More information can be found at [www.tayaeth.org](http://www.tayaeth.org).

PAI works with policymakers in Washington, D.C., and our network of global partners to advocate for accessible, quality health care and advance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, youth and at-risk communities. More information can be found at [www.pai.org](http://www.pai.org).

YOUAccess provides financial and technical support to youth-led organizations to advocate for increased funding and improved policies on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights in low- and middle-income countries. More information can be found at [www.pai.org/projects/youaccess](http://www.pai.org/projects/youaccess).