



A young Libyan from Ajdabiya spreads awareness about COVID-19 prevention best practices.

Youth Democracy, Human Rights & Governance Cross-Sectoral Initiative

Under the USAID Global Elections and Political Transitions (GEPT) award, the [Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening \(CEPPS\)](#) is facilitating an initiative to explore the intersections of DRG and other youth development sectors, gathering practitioners, donors and young leaders from across the world. This initiative is both a forum and learning community exploring cross-sectoral challenges and opportunities to connect young people’s political participation with improved development outcomes.

Exploring the Intersection of Youth, Democracy, Health and Humanitarian Responses

Young people are among a growing demographic who are uniquely impacted by health inequities and related threats created by disaster, climate change, and disease outbreaks. The impact of health and humanitarian crises, particularly on young women and people with disabilities, is often overlooked, as is their power to make change and actively contribute to public health initiatives. Likewise, young people are often the target of public health policies and programs, however they often have limited opportunities to shape these efforts or lack the political knowledge and organizing skills to ensure successful delivery. Globally, only six percent of young people under age 35 are elected representatives, which greatly reduces their ability to tackle health disparities directly through legislative action.

Investing in the health and well-being of young people creates benefits across development sectors and enhances support for future generations. When young people are able to express their needs through democratic processes, collaborate with adult decision makers, play leadership roles in response to humanitarian crises, and organize for just and equitable health-sector reforms, sustainable development outcomes are more likely.

Key Challenges

- Maintaining a ‘Do No Harm’ approach, including young people’s physical and mental health, while balancing opportunities for young people’s participation in health programs and as advocates during humanitarian crises;
- The politicization and co-opting of access to health and wellness and the distribution of humanitarian assistance;
- Quarantine measures and stay at home orders imposed during health pandemics hinder citizen’s abilities to exercise their civic and political rights, such as access to healthcare and freedom of movement or assembly;
- Perceptions and stereotypes that young people are uninformed and lack capacity. Additionally, humanitarian response efforts are dominated by patriarchal attitudes and fail to listen to, be accountable to, and be accessible to young women;
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of how political systems shape health systems, including oversight over the Ministry of Health, healthcare reform, and the development and implementation of health policies; and
- Challenges to engagement at the national level in the health sector include ageism, a lack of understanding of how to meaningfully engage youth, and lack of political will and investment in young people.

Tinatin Revazashvili, a young woman with a disability and member of both the Coalition for Independent Living and the Paralympic Committee of Georgia, recommends that DRG and health programs focus on building young people’s knowledge about local and national tax policies. Increasing young people’s understanding of how tax dollars are used can inform their advocacy efforts around access to health care and public services, especially for young women and young people with disabilities who face increased barriers to accessing health care during health and humanitarian crises.



Key Recommendations for Health & Humanitarian Practitioners

- Conduct a political economy analysis and explore the socio-political impact on health inequities as part of program design, implementation and participant engagement;
- Incorporate youth leadership in the collection of data and evidence and create safe spaces for young people to disseminate and share findings with policymakers, such as town halls or policy forums;
- Encourage and evaluate youth participation in the policy-making process or other decision-making spaces, which is often where service delivery is discussed. Civic engagement opportunities, such as youth participation on advisory councils and committees, can provide an entry point for participation and create an opportunity for mentorship;
 - Support relationship-building between young people and decision makers;
 - Evaluate youth participation in any policy-making process (coalition, advocacy campaign, etc.) or civic activity to ensure that the activity is empowering for diverse groups of young people;
- Integrate content around young people's political rights and civic engagement into health-focused training programs. Include tools such as community mapping, policy analysis, and guidance for working with local and national governments;
- Incorporate an advocacy toolkit for participants of health and/or humanitarian assistance programs that provides them with strategies on identifying priorities, sharing their stories and advocating for local solutions; and
- Work with young people to develop training modules for young and/or newly elected local officials on health disparities and opportunities for greater responsiveness from the government.

“Training and engaging young people in a direct service role in health and humanitarian response is insufficient. Training and engagement should include an analysis of root causes, community mapping, policy analysis and guidance on how to work with local and national governments to address these challenges. Health and humanitarian organizations should be encouraged to add these concepts, using a positive youth development framework, into their programming with young people.”

Key Recommendations for DRG Practitioners

- Explore deliberative democracy mechanisms, such as citizen-led forums or citizen assemblies, to think through solutions for complex health policy challenges;
- Connect gaps in health and humanitarian programs to governance challenges, such as around the ineffective delivery of health services in a community or the absence of funding for community needs;
- Undertake a power analysis to understand young people's intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly young women and persons with disabilities, and recognize young people's priorities when creating strategies to engage them that “do no harm” and alleviate double burdens;
- Identify opportunities to support and promote youth-led information campaigns, which contribute to stemming disinformation, increasing trust, and reducing the likelihood of community transmission of illnesses, such as COVID-19;
- During a crisis, help youth-led organizations connect to local, regional and national coalitions focused on crisis response, and establish strong communication channels. One key way of doing so is by ensuring youth organizations are represented and participate during meetings);
- Integrate volunteering initiatives or professional development opportunities like internships at organizations or decision-making bodies to build the skills of young people interested in increasing their communities' access to health and humanitarian services;
- Partner with young people who work or volunteer in public health and medical institutions, mutual aid networks, academic and research institutions, and frontline work to support crisis response efforts; and
- Work with young people to understand and monitor restrictions on freedom of association and assembly, both offline and online. Although physical assembly may be restricted during a crisis, young people can track whether states take measures to ensure access to the internet or move citizen participation processes online such as community fora or policy development.

Highlighted Resources for Practitioners

[CEPPS White Paper: Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 through DRG Assistance](#)

- Responses must focus on integrating an inclusive, intersectional gender analysis into all interventions to ensure that the specific needs, risks, barriers and priorities of women and other marginalized communities are fully considered, that all responses are gender sensitive and inclusive and that these voices are amplified in decision-making.

[Shifting power to young people – Leading and driving solutions in humanitarian action](#) – Restless Development

- Engage young people in all areas of resilience building: identifying risks, vulnerabilities and capacity; increasing access to basic rights and services; increasing access to and understanding of information and knowledge on risk; strengthening collective action and social cohesion; and influencing policy and institutions (advocating for change, to tackle the root causes).
- Work with established platforms such as women’s groups and forums to ensure access, voice, leadership and safe spaces for young women in these networks. Work with young women to define what their needs in these spaces are, and work with adults to ensure their buy-in and support.

[Improving Health Outcomes through Strengthened Governance](#) – Health Policy Plus

- Malawi youth empowered to engage in the country’s Global Financing Facility Taskforce: In 2018, a youth champion for reproductive health rights joined Malawi’s Global Financing Facility taskforce as a civil society representative and used what she learned at an HP+ training to conduct a situation review and bottleneck analysis to help the task force identify cost-effective priority health interventions for vulnerable populations.
- In Zambia and Tanzania, the Samasha Medical Foundation worked with local civil society organizations to scale up the Motion Tracker, a civil society-led process developed by the foundation that promotes joint accountability for family planning and reproductive health between government and civil society. Quarterly stakeholder meetings and media outreach have increased transparency around progress toward meeting FP2020 goals and supports coordinated efforts among diverse stakeholders.



Protazia Kamdambo, founder of Dream Regrowth Initiative in Malawi, works to prevent child marriage on multiple levels, including with local villages on community education and government officials on policy reform. She suggests that young people work with the government ministries, technical working groups, and local civil society organizations to engage in advocacy around health prevention and education. Protazia also suggests helping young people gain relevant skills, such as understanding and developing policy. In her work, Protazia summarizes child marriage policies and has them interpreted into local languages to better ensure equitable access to information for all citizens.

Additional Resources

- IFES: [Covid-19 Briefing Series](#)
- WHO: [Engaging Young People for Health and Sustainable Development](#)
- Management Services for Health ([Leadership, Management & Governance](#) (LMG) Project)
- [Advocating for Change for Adolescents! A Practical Toolkit for Young People to Advocate for Improved Adolescent Health and Well-being](#)
- USAID: [Better Governance, Better Health: The Evidence](#)
- Brookings: [Youth or consequences: Put youth at the center of COVID-19 recovery](#)
- Youth Participation in Health on [YouthPower.org](#) and COVID-19 on [YouthLead.org](#)

CALL TO ACTION

1. When implementing a youth DRG program or initiative during a crisis, integrate action items that include safety and mental health guidelines, such as a checklist.
2. Write a letter, call, or tweet at your elected leader and advocate for young people to be consulted and involved with the design and implementation of post-COVID-19 recovery policies and strategies.



Israel Bimpe, a Mandela Washington Fellow and Pharmacist from Rwanda, uses his experience in healthcare advocacy to push for health system transformation around universal access to medical products and youth engagement. Israel recommends that civil society organizations include youth civic and political leaders in the development of health and humanitarian programs and create convening spaces to promote cross-sectoral dialogue. Israel also recommends that donors include youth political initiatives, such as coalition building and grassroots community organizing, as key metrics in health programs to stimulate a research agenda and assess impact and long-term sustainability.

Continue to Engage with the Youth DRG Cross-Sectoral Initiative

- Network with youth development thought leaders, practitioners, and donors across sectors;
- Discover effective approaches and updates related to youth political participation and leadership within a Positive Youth Development framework; and
- Identify lessons learned and promising practices related to youth political participation and cross-sectoral programs.

For more information, please contact CEPPS partners:

Rachel E. Mims rmims@ndi.org | Neetha Tangirala ntangirala@iri.org | Ashley Law alaw@ifes.org | Alyson Kozma akozma@cepps.org

This Initiative is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.