



MODULE 2

Conceptual Framework of Youth Participation and Youth-Centred Approach in IPPF

This module is for EDs, board members, staff, managers, adult volunteers, young volunteers and anyone who is involved in (the coordination of) YCA in the organisation

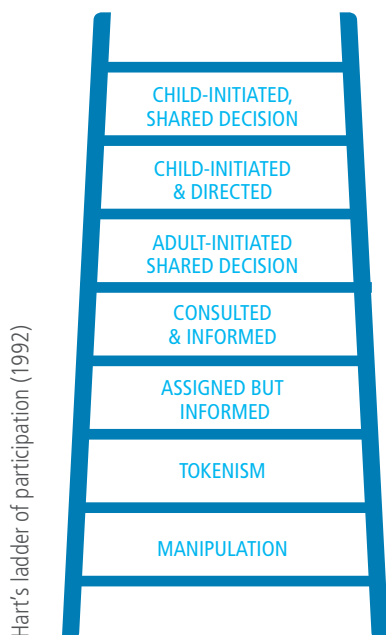
The new strategic plan has mainstreamed IPPF's focus on young people across all its outcomes, including youth leadership, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), youth-friendly services and volunteering.

To guarantee that our youth programming remains strong and effective while successfully achieving the desired strategic outcomes, we need to systematically embrace young people as equal partners and key agents for change in all our work, as well as making young people central to the functioning of the organisation. This approach will be beneficial at different levels.

You are probably already familiar with IPPF's ideas and concepts on youth participation and a youth-centred approach. Regardless of how much you know and how much experience you have with the concepts, it is important to have a shared understanding of youth participation and YCA, to ensure everyone is on the same page and get to the maximum benefit from this approach.

This module is a bit different from the others. Because of its descriptive nature, it will not use the icons used in other modules.

For your ease, this module is organised in a Q & A format



Q1. What is youth participation?

UNICEF started the discussion what youth participation is in 1992 with John Hart's [Children's Participation - From Tokenism to Citizenship](#). It highlights two important characteristics about true youth participation. Firstly, participation is not an either/or phenomenon. Simply having a young person present does not in itself result in participation. Young people must have a certain level of empowerment, responsibility and decision-making power to participate meaningfully. Secondly, the quality and type of the equal partnership between youth and adults is important.

In his book, Hart presents the Ladder of Participation. An example of participation at the lower end of the ladder is to include young people in a program discussion panel without giving them any role in the management, administration, or decision-making about the program. The integration of young people into many levels of an organisation, such as serving on boards or steering committees as well as participating in day-to-day decision-making, are examples of the highest levels of participation.

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and YouAct have developed the concept of Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP), which means that young people can participate on equal terms with adults, or work independently, in organizations and in all stages of programming and policy-making, from design, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. But for this to happen, mechanisms must be in place to allow young people to have an active role and have their voice heard and respected. Where participation of young people is truly meaningful, it benefits the young people, the program, policy or organisation and society.: **Flower of Participation**

Q2. Why is youth participation important?

Before we can understand the concept of youth participation more deeply, we need to understand *why* we need youth participation. Although we would like to think at IPPF that we no longer have to make the case for youth participation, this is sadly not the reality. Many, even within IPPF, need to be convinced of the merits of youth participation and the reasoning often has to be framed in the terms most acceptable to the specific audience – i.e. economics, health outcomes, educational outcomes, human rights, youth development, etc. So, here are a few of the lines of argumentation that can be pursued.

1. Human rights perspective:

- The right to participate is part of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC); articles 5 & 12
- This right is important for the implementation of other rights of CRC
- Participation is part of 'Sexual rights' and the IPPF Declaration

2. Developmental perspective

- Participation = learning
- YP has a positive influence on health outcomes

3. Programmatic perspective

- Enhances relevance and acceptance of youth programmes
- Improves effectiveness and delivery

4. Social good perspective

- Builds self-confidence and self-esteem
- Promotes active citizenship

Q3 What are the obstacles to youth participation?

At a personal level:

- lack the self-confidence and competence to speak up among young people
- the attitudes of adults are often not conducive to youth participation

At a structural, institutional level:

- Overly bureaucratic and hierarchical structures and processes in an organisation
- A lack of willingness to adapt to the needs and wants of young people
- adult use of internal jargon that young people do not understand

At a social/cultural level:

- cultural expectations related to respect/age hierarchies; the expectation that young people should not contradict adults or should only speak when spoken to
- gendered hierarchies; girls and young LGBTI people are not respected or not seen as full members of the organisation



Case study

When IPPF introduced 25 % youth participation at Governing council (the global board), we invested a lot in the capacity building for the young board members. They held workshops on how to speak in public; gave workshops on important issues in SRHR, and prepared each board meeting with them. After two years the new structure of the Governing Council was evaluated. The adult members all responded very positively to the change. They felt that much more open discussions were happening and were happy that the young people had put issues like sexual diversity, abortion and sexual rights of young people on the agenda. The young board members had a very different view, they felt that they were not really listened to, that they were sometimes caught up in the politics and the hierarchical structure of Governing Council.

One thing became clear, we had invested in young people to speak up, but not in adult board members to listen and to respect young people.

Q 4. What is a youth-centred approach?

- Instead of referring to participation, some organisations refer to working with a 'Youth-Centred Approach' (YCA). A youth-centred approach is the policy of adopting Youth Participation by structurally integrating it at all levels of decision-making, and across all phases of programs and services. IPPF defines a youth-centred approach as a youth-centred organization systematically placing young people at the centre and recognising them as diverse and autonomous rights-holders. A YCA endorses the right of young people to contribute within the organisation, to relate to other young people and adults, to communicate openly and to express themselves. A youth-centred approach gives young people the freedom to experience, think, explore, question and search for answers. It values young people's work and input. The organisation's role is to provide an enabling environment in which it can nurture young people's talent, maximize their potential and enable them to thrive.
- A youth-centred approach requires democratic organisation that aims at implementing processes where all parties are involved, regardless of their position in the organisational structure. Young people participate in proposing solutions and mechanisms to better achieve the institutional mission and objectives. A democratic organisation provides opportunities for participation, open dialogue, self-assessment, team work and consensus-building. Flexible mechanisms are put in place to incorporate young people's ideas and recommendations.

Q 5. What is Youth Participation and a Youth-Centred Approach in the IPPF?

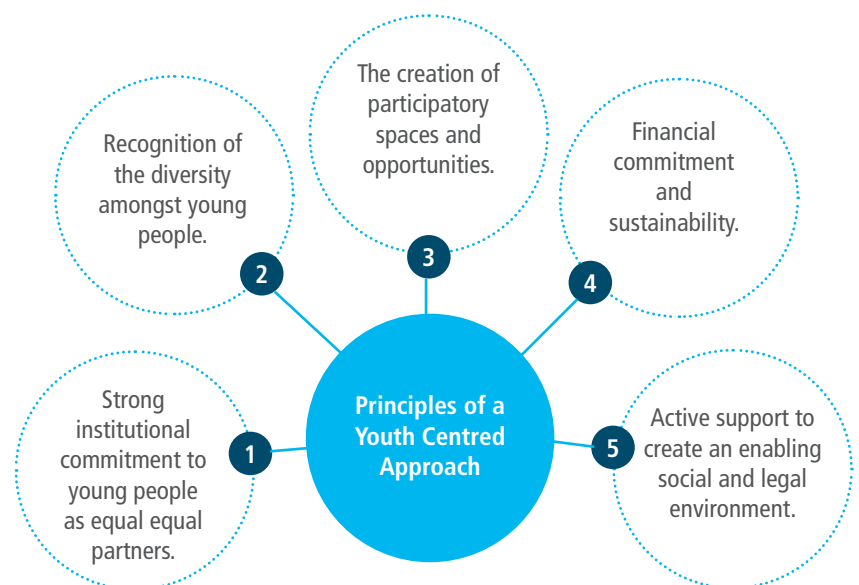
IPPF is currently working across a continuum of approaches to promote youth participation in programmes. For some staff, young people are still primarily seen as clients and targets, while, for others, young people are decision-makers and advocates. Among the many benefits that IPPF stands to gain from a more structured and Federation-wide commitment to young people's participation is increased cohesion and strengthening of our programmes as well as ability to deliver on our goals and targets.

Based on the lessons learned from the past, we believe that the best way to move forward is to see young people as equal partners, whether they are our clients, beneficiaries, volunteers, youth group members, board members or young staff members. To achieve this, IPPF has built on its progress, advancing from a youth-friendly organisation with a strong focus on youth participation to become a **youth-centred organisation**.

IPPF defines a youth-centred approach as:

An organisation that meaningfully places young people at the centre and recognises them as diverse and autonomous rights-holders. A youth-centred approach puts young people and rights at the centre of its theory of change, and continuously considers how and where to engage young people and staff as leaders and experts to drive forward access to rights for all young people. Youth-centred organisations ensure that all members, staff and volunteers have an equal and respected voice in making decisions and taking action.

IPPF's youth-centred approach systematically places young people at the centre of our programming and recognises them as diverse and autonomous rights-holders. We endorse the right of the young people in the organisation, at all levels, to contribute, make connections and to openly communicate and express themselves. We afford young people the freedom to experience, think, explore, question and search for answers. We value young people's work and input, and we see our role as nurturing young people's talent to maximize their potential and to enable them to develop and grow. We seek to work with youth, rather than for youth; to ensure young people hold decision-making positions in the organisation, and to integrate youth issues into our organisation's business model.



Support for Youth Leadership

IPPF has a longstanding commitment to young people and is a global champion for young people's sexual rights. Young people increasingly account for the bulk of services delivered by IPPF MAs, and we work with and for young people globally through programs focusing on education and social change. For IPPF, youth leadership includes both developing leadership programmes with young people, reviewing our existing work and identifying how it can promote youth leadership more effectively. To support greater youth leadership, IPPF commits to:

Creating youth leaders inside the Federation: We invest in new youth leaders within IPPF by establishing systems and processes that identify and attract youth leaders in the field of SRHR, and provide them with opportunities for engagement, including specific approaches to engaging and building the capacity of young people.

Supporting existing young staff to grow: We will support young staff as they gain professional experience to map out a career pathway for themselves in the Federation or in the movement.

Strengthening youth groups and youth networks: We support self-organising youth groups and their connections to youth networks. Moreover, we commit to ensuring personnel are in place to coordinate the youth networks - identifying key people in each network to coordinate communication - and to establishing efficiency in getting feedback and spreading awareness of opportunities, projects and resources.

Q 6. What is the difference between a youth-friendly and a youth-centred approach

Youth friendly	Youth centred
<p>Young people are seen as risk takers (behavioural change approach)</p> <p>Project approach, where young people's sexual and reproductive health rights are addressed mainly in the scope of a specific, time-limited project</p> <p>A youth focus is not strongly reflected in the Member Association's core priorities or strategic and annual plans.</p> <p>Youth programmes are financed through specific project-based funding rather than core funding.</p> <p>Communication is one-way from the Member Association to young people, without systems for youth-adult dialogue. Messaging is oversimplified and looks mainly at biomedical aspects of young people's sexual and reproductive health.</p> <p>The motivation to participate and advance projects is based mainly on the capacity of the Member Association to pay young people and youth programme staff and often relies on individual charismatic leaders rather than institutionalised leadership for youth programmes.</p> <p>Health services for young people are delivered in a disease- or service-specific manner (ex: HIV testing and treatment or specific contraceptive methods). The range of services offered to young people is limited and is not tailored to specific needs of diverse groups of young clients.</p> <p>Service provision is focused on bio-medical aspects of reproductive health and family planning, which may include bias against very young clients or clients who are not married or who are not heterosexual.</p> <p>Tokenistic or ad hoc youth participation in decision-making, without formal systems and structures for meaningful youth participation and decision-making power beyond the lifespan of a given project</p> <p>Youth-friendly services and information and/or comprehensive sexuality education are viewed as separate add-ons to the member association's core business, rather than an integral part of their organisational identity, plans and ways of working</p>	<p>Young people are seen as the agents of change</p> <p>Young people are seen as sexual beings</p> <p>Youth centred branding/logo</p> <p>Young people (of all genders and representative of their diversity) participate in strategic and annual planning exercises, including budgeting, and participate in project and programme designs.</p> <p>Strategic and annual plans feature youth issues as priorities; appropriate programme resources and budgets are allocated to youth programmes.</p> <p>Young people (of all genders and representative of their diversity) hold decision-making positions and staff positions in the organisation and these positions are institutionalised in the organisation.</p> <p>Health services are integrated, affordable and accessible to young people, so they can access a full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including psychological and emotional support, as well as bio-medical services, without stigma or discrimination based on sex, age, sexual orientation, type of work, income, religion, ethnicity or disability, etc.</p> <p>Youth issues are prioritised and meaningful youth participation is introduced as standard in all programming.</p> <p>Youth-centred approaches are not tied to specific donor support and are integrated into the organisation's business model, which includes social objectives.</p> <p>Staff are trained and have youth-friendly and non-discriminatory attitudes. Regular supportive supervision is available for staff and volunteers.</p> <p>Programmes look at the drivers of change in the community</p>

Q7. What are the benefits of youth participation?

For our young volunteers: it contributes to the overall development of young people, opening them up to new experiences, transforming their perspectives and empowering them to make decisions, including decisions about their sexual and reproductive health

Research shows that youth participation improves young people's:

- Social competences, including responsiveness, flexibility, empathy and caring, communication skills, a sense of humour and other social behaviours
- Problem-solving skills, including the ability to think abstractly, reflectively and flexibly, as well as the ability to arrive at alternative solutions to cognitive and social problems
- Autonomy, including a sense of identity, an ability to act independently and to exert control over one's environment
- Sense of purpose and future, including having healthy expectations, goals, an orientation toward success, motivation to achieve, educational aspirations, hopefulness, hardiness and a sense of coherence. Blum Healthy Youth Development as a Model for Youth Health Promotion https://www.goodfellowunit.org/sites/default/files/HEeADSSS/Blum_1998.pdf

For the Member Associations: it will support them to design and implement effective and relevant programmes and interventions, increase their credibility in the eyes of young people, but also among policy makers and donors, as well as ensuring that the MA meets the diversity of needs and wants of young people, and remains flexible to the changing needs of young people

For the community and society, we work in as MA: the approach supports the development of young people to become active citizens who take action for social justice. Providing the opportunity for young people to develop their leadership skills can pave the way for a life-long interest and commitment to sexual and reproductive rights. Finally, a more structured and Federation-wide commitment to young people's participation helps boost cohesion and strengthen our programmes.

Q8. How does an MA become more youth-centred?

To support the transition to a more youth-centred approach, we have identified five guiding principles, which we believe underpin the approach:

1. Strong institutional commitment to young people as equal partners
 2. Recognition of the diversity of young people
 3. The creation of accessible and inclusive participatory spaces and opportunities
 4. Financial commitment and sustainability
 5. Active support to create an enabling social and legal environment
- Module 4. The roles of young volunteers/youth group in the MA



Conditions for a successful youth-centred approach

- Young people can contribute best when they are allowed to construct their own understanding of information and material by critically engaging with personal experiences and information.
- Use of a collaborative approach: all parties involved are aware that the success of the process requires common goals, sharing and regular communication to achieve the desired results. Working in isolation, avoiding exposure to others' views or insisting on imposing one-sided solutions to complex real-life situations will lead to failure in a coaching relationship.
- Accountability: All adult staff, volunteers and young people commit to specific activities or practices for which they agree to be accountable to each other.
- A commitment to provide safety and to do no harm: a youth-centred approach cannot work if any of the parties involved fear negative repercussions from the process e.g. after sharing information about their areas of improvement or challenges. Ensuring smooth horizontal communication between the MA and young people will support the creation of a safe space conducive to comprehensive youth participation. Furthermore, safety also requires that adults and young people in the organisation set and maintain clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries with regard to physical and virtual interactions.
- Consent: nobody can be forced to participate in a youth-centred organisation. All involved need to understand and explore the benefits of this process before committing to it.

Like any significant cultural shift, a youth-centred organisation does not spring up overnight, rather it needs to be nurtured over time. There is no one-size-fits-all method of introducing and maintaining a youth-centred approach. Any YCA needs to be adapted to the context of the MA and the goals and objectives of the organisation

Q9. What are the core principles of youth participation/youth centredness?



Democracy- for youth participation to succeed, an MA must have regulatory frameworks of democracy and equality that support young people to participate. The culture of the organisation must allow young people not to have to fit into the organisation, but rather to belong to the organisation and be able to make changes. As this is not always the case, MAs need to invest in training and raising awareness among staff and volunteers. (See module 1)

Social inclusion; all groups of young people within a society should feel valued and important and have the possibility to participate.

Gender equality -young people of all genders and identities enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including decision-making in all aspects of programming and different sexual behaviours, aspirations and needs of all people are equally valued and favoured

Voluntarism- young volunteers work to make a meaningful contribution to a better and more effective organization and other young people in their community

Passion- young and adult people in the MA believe in the importance of youth participation and in the right of young people to be involved in the programme/organization

Accountability; MAs have the obligation to account for working in partnership with young people and accept responsibility for them.

Q10. What are the key elements of youth centredness

What is needed to go on the journey towards an MA that is youth-centred? There are at least ten essential elements that will help to make successfully embed a YCA and youth participation in an MA:

a. Leadership buy-in: commitment from decision-making bodies and senior staff at an organisation is essential to ensure a sustainable YCA. This commitment helps to promote a YCA at all levels, and guarantees that human and financial resources are allocated to support effective and sustainable implementation.

b. The right institutional culture: institutional culture refers to conventional ideas, values, practices and standards that permeate the everyday lives of an MA's members, as well as the institutional frameworks, policies and leadership supporting it. A good institutional culture acknowledges the agency of young people and encourages youth participation and youth centredness.

c. Policies in place The MA should have robust policies in place to support and regulate youth participation, including IPPF youth policies; e.g. 20% of staff members should be under 25, child protection policies, policies and regulation on (youth) volunteering; roles and responsibilities.

e. A positive attitude towards learning and being open to a different approach whereby young people are an equal partner – integrated into the organisation's work to transform it and ensure more impact is achieved.

f. Resilience – the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, recover from and adapt to internal and external changes (incremental or sudden), ensuring that the organisation's mission remains at the heart of all its work.

g. Promotion of teamwork and transparent communication: embracing a youth-centred approach requires the participation of many actors. An organisation that promotes collaboration and horizontal communication among its members will be more likely to have a strong commitment to youth participation and motivated staff.

i. Human and financial resources systems and processes: A youth-centred approach requires trained and committed managers, (support) staff and volunteers. Having in place human and financial resource systems and processes ensures adequate training and capacity building, support and recruitment, as well as comprehensive employee and volunteer orientation.

g. Work with equal partners and other community stakeholders: engaging partner organisations and community members at different stages ensures that young people have an extensive support network and reduces barriers to becoming a volunteer for the organisation. Some organisations have positive experiences working with community and religious leaders or influencers (traditional or social media) to create support for youth participation as they play a critical role in the dissemination of messages and often serve as role models.

Understanding power dynamics: Many MAs are not new to power dynamics within their organisation, especially between young people and staff and between young people and adult volunteers and the board and senior management. Acknowledging power relationships will be crucial to developing successful youth participation and youth-centredness program! (for more information go to **Power dynamics and culture in the organization**)

Self-reflection: The MA must be able to identify where it stands and where it needs to improve with its youth participation and members. Developing a solid yet a flexible plan on how to work and give young people equal opportunities is essential. **What are your competencies as staff member/adult volunteer working in equal partnership with young people in your MA?**



References

IPPF:

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- [Young at heart , 2017](#)
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- Annette Fitzsimmons, Max Hope, Charlie Cooper, Keith Russel (2011) Empowerment and participation in youth work, Learning Matters LTD.
- [DFID \(2010\) Youth Participation in Development](#)
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