

Executive Summary: Meaningful Youth Participation in EngenderHealth—A Baseline Assessment

2021 Report

In line with EngenderHealth’s ambition to strengthen its values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and to better integrate Meaningful Youth and Participation (MYP) within the organization, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality conducted a baseline assessment on MYP with EngenderHealth staff.

This assessment included a review of organizational policies, online surveys, and focus group discussions to understand young people’s¹ perception of MYP and to understand both young and adult staff’s needs and ambitions for integrating MYP within the organization.

To achieve this, CHOICE utilized the Flower of Participation (Figure 1), a tool that uses the metaphor of a blooming flower to describe the different elements and forms of MYP and how MYP can grow and flourish.

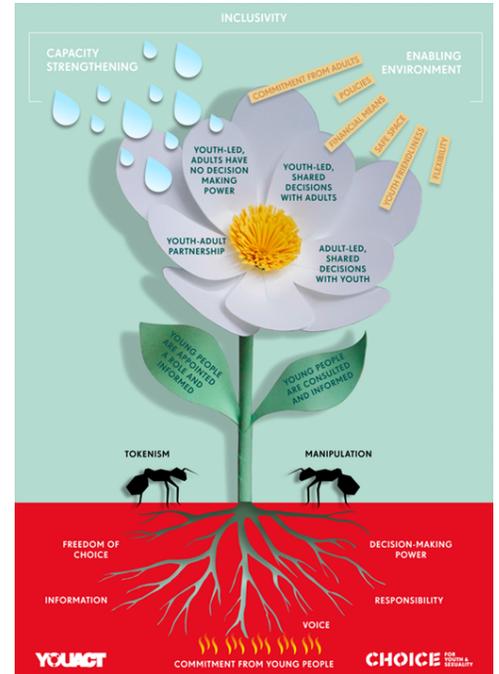


Figure 1: Flower of Participation

Key Findings

Presence of the Core Elements of Meaningful Youth Participation

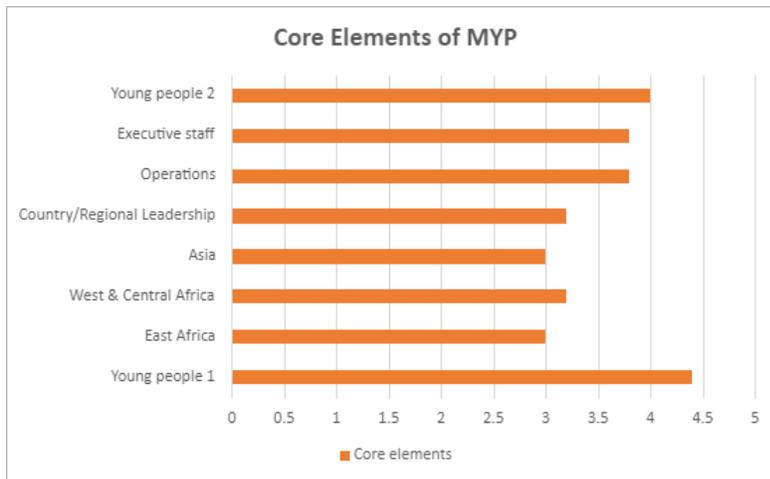


Figure 2: Average score of perception of staff on all core elements of MYP (as measured through the MOTs).

Out of the 25 participants that participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs), 20% were under the age of 30, and fall under the definition of young people. Out of this group, 68% identify themselves as female and 32% as male².

According to the Flower of Participation, there are five core elements of MYP: **freedom of choice, information, voice, decision-making power, and responsibility.** The stronger and

¹ Young people or youth in this study refer to all EngenderHealth staff, interns, volunteers, and beneficiaries under the age of 30 years old.

² Both CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and EngenderHealth find binary reporting to be limiting in nature and would like to explore ways to be more inclusive across the gender spectrum in the future.

more present the core elements are, the more MYP can flourish in an organization or program.

Based on eight FGDs conducted across different country and organizational teams, country offices based in Asia and East Africa scored the core elements a three on a scale of five (Figure 2), this score being the lowest amongst all the FGDs. On the other hand, young people (group 1) or young staff scored the elements 4.4, rating the core elements the highest amongst all FGD groups.

The focus group discussions indicated more discrepancies in perceptions of staff towards the existence of MYP for programmatic staff in country office versus executive or managerial staff in the headquarters or other departments. Although young staff in both groups rated MYP higher than the rest, it is important to note that young people's sample size was quite small (20% as noted above), and many staff felt youth was quite underrepresented within the organization.

Overall, the intention to strengthen MYP in the organization exists but staff members seek support, expertise, recommendations, and trainings on how to further incorporate youth participation in their work.

Presence of the Preconditions to Meaningful Youth Participation

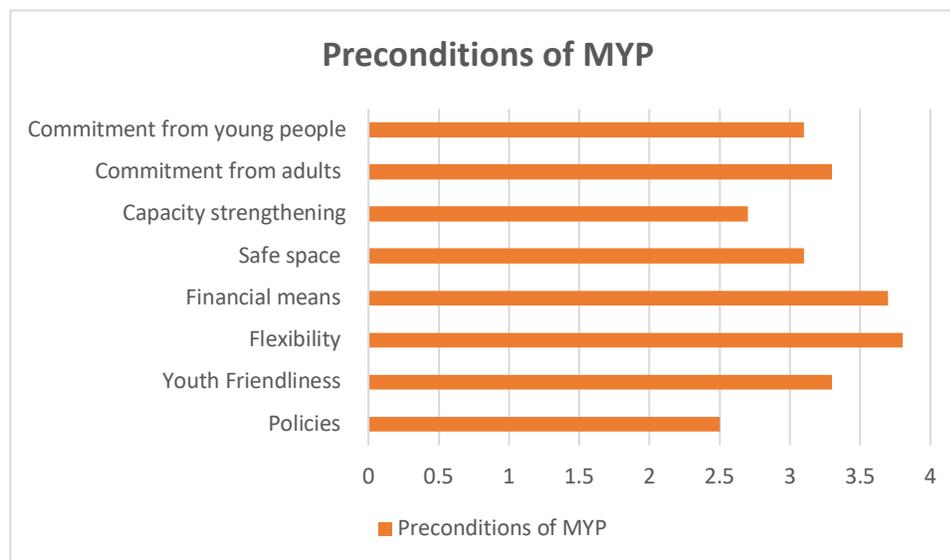


Figure 3: Average score of perception of staff on all preconditions of MYP (as measured through the MOTs).

The FGDs also assessed certain preconditions of MYP that need to be met for MYP to flourish in any organization. The preconditions measured included: **policies, youth-friendliness, flexibility, financial means, safe space, capacity strengthening, as well as commitment from adults and young people.**

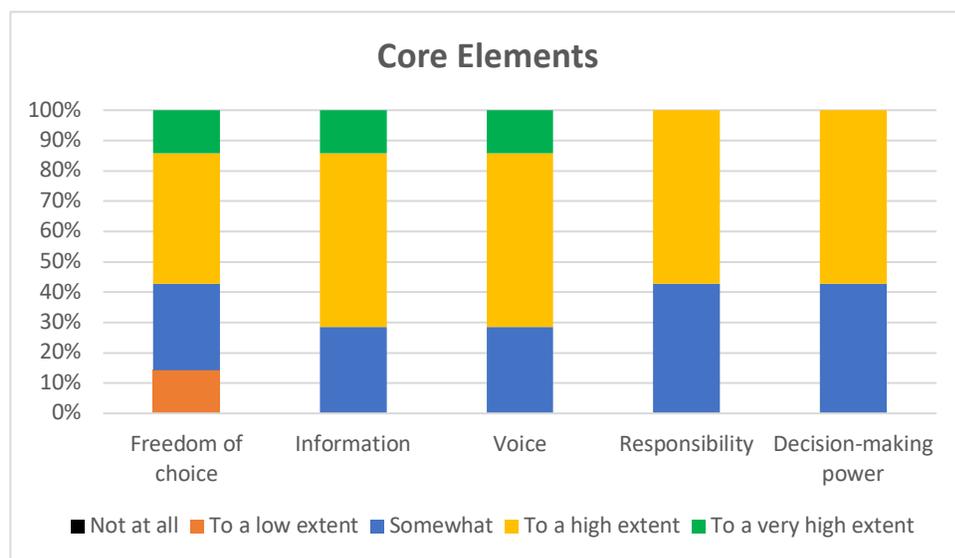
During the eight FGDs, relevant policies, capacity strengthening opportunities, and existing safe space were the three preconditions which received the lowest scores. In comparison, financial means, flexibility, and youth friendliness scored higher. A key insight would be to focus on strengthening these preconditions and improving safe spaces for young staff while providing capacity strengthening support for their meaningful participation and growth in the organization, all of which need to be backed by youth-friendly and enabling policies.

As with the core elements, young people scored the preconditions on the higher end of the scale. In comparison, adults in the organization seemed more critical of youth participation. One hypothesis is that young staff might feel adequately supported by the organization, but as adult staff

noted, the positions young people hold are mostly entry-level, internship level, or voluntary. Again, it is important to note that their sample size when compared to adults is quite low and might not provide a holistic view of young staff's perception with regards to MYP in the organization.

Overall, both young and adult staff were in favor of improving MYP within the organization and felt that although the intention is present, there is still need for improvement and to formally institutionalize MYP within the organization.

Young Staff's Perception of Their Own Participation



At the time of this baseline assessment, there were 21 young staff (under 30) within EngenderHealth who received an online survey to understand their perception of their own participation in the organization. Out of the nine young staff that filled in the survey,

Figure 4: Aggregate score for the presence of core elements as rated by young staff.

55.5% identify themselves as female and 22.2% as male³, while

the rest did not indicate a preference³.

When looking at the core elements (Figure 4), freedom of choice showed varied responses, with about 42% young people responding that this core element was either present to a low extent or somewhat present in the organization, specifically when it came to participating in organizational programs and activities. When asked how much responsibility young staff were given, about 42% of respondents felt they would like more responsibility in handling their own tasks. When it came to assessing their contribution to decision-making within the organization and its programs, 42% of respondents felt they were only somewhat involved, indicating a big scope for improvement.

Young staff's perceptions of the preconditions of MYP were also measured through the survey (Figure 5). When it came to capacity strengthening, about 49% of respondents felt that more could be done in terms of receiving adequate training and capacity strengthening to meaningfully participate in the organization and its program. Support of young people by financial means also

³ Both CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and EngenderHealth find binary reporting to be limiting in nature and would like to explore ways to be more inclusive across the gender spectrum in the future.

scored high, but one respondent noted that this was only done sometimes, indicating scope for improvement.

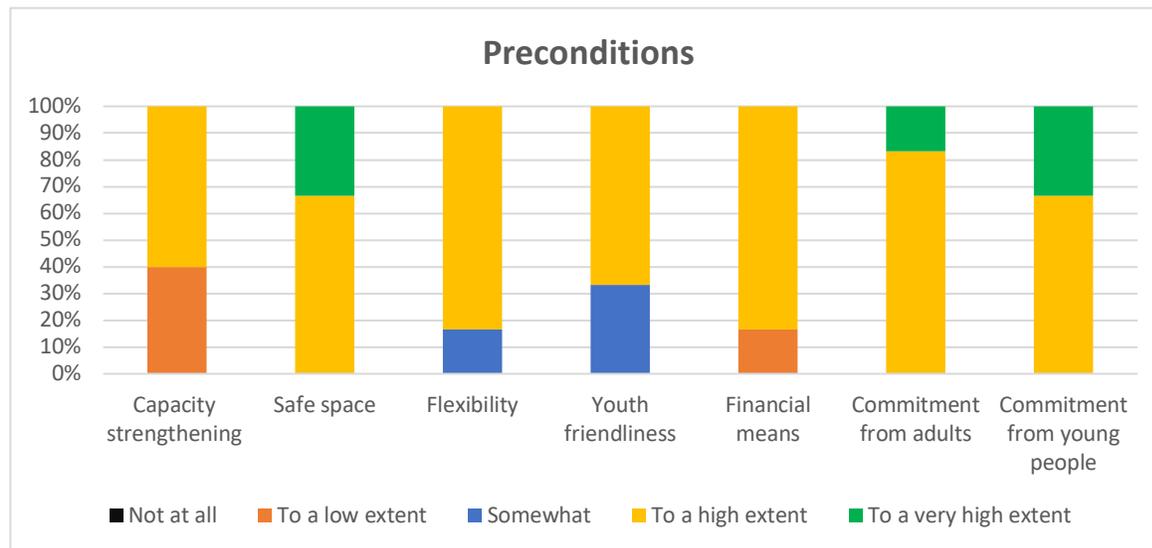


Figure 5: Aggregate score for the presence of preconditions of MYP as rated by young staff

An overall assessment indicated that more than 80% of the respondents felt their role in the organization was important to a high or very high extent. When it came to how young people felt about their contribution to the goals of the organization, 100% of the respondent answered that they were contributing to a great extent.

In an open question on youth participation, one respondent mentioned: “... I am exposed and consulted by the management in most of the youth trainings and opportunities, and I am trusted to represent the organization in most youth activities within the program and outside the program; I feel so valued and important with regards to youth participation.”

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGENDERHEALTH

The following is a set of specific recommendations and best practices for EngenderHealth to adopt. These are derived from qualitative learnings gained during the discussions with EngenderHealth staff, as well as CHOICE’s prior experience working on Meaningful Youth Participation in previous programs and other Youth-Adult partnerships⁴:

1. MYP requires commitment from everyone. Create an organizational Meaningful Youth Participation policy and systematically adopt the [Flower of Participation](#) to implement, monitor, and regularly evaluate MYP in both organizational and programmatic work.

⁴ Youth-Adult Partnership (YAP) is a partnership in which both young people and adults are equally involved and share power. It is one of six existing forms of MYP, as shown in the Flower of Participation. To find out more about YAPs and why they can be crucial in strengthening MYP, read the [YAPs toolkit here](#).

2. MYP is a mutual responsibility. Scale up value clarification and trainings on MYP to keep the dialogue on MYP going, to turn recommendations into actions, and to incorporate MYP both organizationally and programmatically.
3. Elect a youth representative amongst staff or within the internal Gender, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion champion group who are trained in MYP to represent the voice and needs of young staff within the organization.
4. Ensure language, information, and knowledge sharing is inclusive of all youth and represents the different realities of all youth (youth with disabilities, different sexual identities and orientations, different economic or educational backgrounds, and more).
5. Recruitment and procurement committees must focus more on youth and create opportunities for young people where suitable (for example, in programs that specifically work on adolescents and youth issues). Inclusive recruitment policies must be complemented with a structured mentorship program and adequate capacity strengthening to support young staff's professional growth.
6. Use existing EngenderHealth youth structures (for instance, the internal Adolescent and Youth SRHR Community of Practice) to create a safe space for young staff so they can come together and share their needs and learnings, or discuss the need for a separate Youth CoP within the organization.
7. Ensure adequate budget for integrating and scaling up MYP and other forms of support (mentorship, capacity strengthening, and networking opportunities).
8. Invest time and resources to build trust between adults and young people. Organizations should build in sufficient time and finances for young people and adults to not only work together, but to create professional and personal bonds as well as to understand the benefits of youth-adult partnerships.
9. Have clear objectives and indicators to measure youth contribution and influence (both internally and externally) and link progress in MYP to the broader impact of AYSRHR programs.
10. Consider diversity within young people and create strategies to engage marginalized youth. At the programmatic level, develop specific strategies to engage marginalized young people in recruitment opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This baseline assessment summary and full report is authored by Pragya Singh, Programme Coordinator at CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality. Ana Aguilera, Deputy Director of Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health at EngenderHealth contributed to the development of this report. CHOICE and EngenderHealth staff, including Danielle Garfinkel, Jannemiek Evelo, Juliana Jaramillo, Renu Golwalkar, Roos van Kreij and Traci Baird also provided expertise. Meghan McClure provided editorial support for the content of this report.



This publication was made possible by funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Its contents are solely the responsibility of CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and EngenderHealth and do not necessarily represent the official views of any funder.

More in-depth analysis and key insights on how youth perceive their participation and the presence of the core elements and preconditions of MYP can be found in the full report. For a copy of the full report, please contact: info@engenderhealth.org and info@choiceforyouth.org.

