



EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING
NEW YOUTH ADVOCATES

GO!

A GUIDE TO BECOMING A
YOUTH ADVOCATE

GO!

EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES

A GUIDE TO BECOMING A YOUTH ADVOCATE





THIS GUIDE

What do we mean when we talk about empowered young people? Empowered young people are leaders of their own lives, assured examples in their community and a positive influence on their peers. By meaningfully involving them in the process of shaping the world they live in, young people can be voices for change, amplifying the rights and aspirations of their peers. This guide offers advice, hints, and tips on how you can be empowered through investing in youth-adult partnerships. It is intended as a handy pocketbook for advocacy events or meetings. Please use it as a resource and reference guide. For you and your peers it offers an introduction to the world of advocacy. For adults and organisations it gives some straightforward advice on how best to work with young people in a meaningful way.



RIGHT HERE
RIGHT NOW

EVEN WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ADVOCACY IS STILL CHALLENGING

IT'S A RIGHT NOT A PRIVILEGE

Thanks to many international agreements and treaties young people have a right to participate. So let's make sure they're in the best possible position to fully exercise that right in a meaningful manner.

ADVOCACY spaces can be quite intimidating. Navigating through labyrinthine advocacy procedures and processes, even with support, can be hard for young people who might not feel comfortable in such an alien environment.

STILL TOO OFTEN, meaningful youth participation is done in a tokenistic manner. Having young people present without giving them a meaningful role in the preparations and follow-up is, unfortunately, still common practice.

ADVOCACY spaces are complex and often do not allow space for meaningful youth participation. Getting your voice heard requires a certain level of confidence and boldness. Only by investing in the empowerment of young people to develop that voice can we ensure their full and effective participation.





8 STEPS

Engaging in advocacy is about convincing people. It's about convincing them that a certain topic requires their attention over other topics. It's about showing them why they need to do something about it. To make this case to policy makers it's crucial that you prepare. That means collecting the right information and data. Thinking about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Knowing how to respectfully argue your point and make useful, concrete, recommendations. In this booklet we will prepare you for this process. We will offer advice and tips to build your confidence and help you voice your messages. You will learn how to adapt them according to the time and place. Adapting your messages and strategies on the spot is one of the most crucial skills advocates need. But above all, advocacy requires practice and application. This 8-step guide aims to help you develop your skills as you prepare to enter the world of advocacy for the first time.

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01

TALK TO YOUR YOUTH CONSTITUENCY

You're not just a lone voice among decision-makers. You have the unique and important opportunity to represent the voices of your peers. Even if you have experience working with young people and have a good understanding of the issues you face, you can enhance the impact of your messages by consulting young people at the start of your preparations. Not only does this enrich what you will talk about and help prioritise content, you can also gather real-life examples and stories that will strengthen your advocacy. This is important for creating a sense of urgency, and for illustrating how agreements and policies are sometimes disconnected from what's happening in your community. Moreover, policy makers are often more open to listening if you introduce where your messages come from.

**TARGET
WHERE YOU
CAN HAVE
THE MOST
IMPACT**

BEFORE deciding to attend an international event, always first consider where you can have most impact. Advocacy at the international level can influence policies at national level. Your participation sometimes leads to strengthened relations with key players at national level and the opportunity to participate in translating these international agreements to national policies.

HOWEVER, it's important to be aware that international negotiations are highly political and outcomes are always a compromise between countries. Ultimately, impact should happen at local level. So if your resources are slim, focus your energy on national level advocacy and collaborate with advocates who attend international negotiations.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER 1

There is no one right way to engage in advocacy. Many factors influence the outcomes. It's good to know that sometimes the result is out of your hands and that setbacks are part of the job. But by discussing beforehand the potential challenges, you can better manage expectations and avoid losing confidence and focus in the face of inevitable challenges.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER 2

Make a link with your experience at local level and the stories of peers from your community. It's a good strategy for those moments when you don't have an answer ready or are not completely informed about a particular topic. Remember, you are the expert on youth issues!

02

GET YOURSELF A MENTOR

It can be very helpful to have a mentor, especially if you're new to a particular event. This person is preferably someone from your country and the organisation you are affiliated with. Even if you are supported by an international NGO, you will need someone who knows your country context and who can advise you on safety and security measures such as which language to use in your advocacy and how to approach your government. Although advocacy often means being bold and pushing for change, the most important thing is to keep yourself safe! Try and develop a relationship with a mentor you can trust, who has the right experience so he or she can advise you well and potentially open doors. Advocacy is something you learn mostly by doing. Having someone that you can ask questions to and evaluate your progress with, is very helpful and can contribute a great deal to your learning curve.

SAFETY & SECURITY TIPS

BECOME familiar with community ethics when doing consultations and ensure you behave respectfully, in accordance with norms and values of the local context.

WHEN approaching policy makers or other key players, try to not get emotional or personal. Remember they are simply doing their job. Focus your message on their position and not on the person themselves.

GET acquainted with the right terms of use in your advocacy, sometimes words can mean different things in different contexts.

ALWAYS seek consent for using individuals' and organisational names so as not to jeopardise someone's safety or the position of an organisation.

03

DECIDE ON YOUR PRIORITIES AND INTENDED REACH

Setting your advocacy priorities depends on several factors. To ensure your message has legitimacy it should reflect the realities of young people in your country. Talk to your peers about what's going on in their lives that needs to be addressed at national level. Match these with the theme of the event or meeting you are attending. In order to gain an understanding of the theme and history of a particular event it requires a lot of reading and talking to your mentor and other people with prior experience addressing the topic. If you get the opportunity to talk to your government during international events, try to broaden your advocacy beyond the outcomes of the negotiations at hand. Make links around follow-up and implementation at national level. This increases the likelihood of follow-up happening and shows that you're thorough and engaged. It might even open doors for participation in follow-up efforts. Before you participate in national or international negotiations or policy discussions, decide on who you want to reach. Do you want your government to showcase best practices of policy implementation? Or do you want them to speak out about a particular issue? Be clear on your intended reach and keep this in mind during your engagement.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S REALITIES: PAINT A PICTURE

YOUR DAY-TO-DAY EXPERIENCES:

challenges you face, is there a gap between what a policy says young people should get and what the reality actually is?

YOUR OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES:

what do you and your peers think about a particular topic?

YOUR PRIORITIES:

what issues do you think should be prioritised in policy making and implementation?

PERSONAL STORIES:

a call to action demonstrating urgency, including an emotional appeal to persuade decision-makers.

04

DECIDE ON YOUR GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Once you know what advocacy priorities are important to you and your peers and relevant to the upcoming meeting or event, it's time to narrow these priorities down to specific goals. Consider where you can have most impact: your goal might be the inclusion of a reference to youth rights in an international agreement or a specific change in a national policy. Or perhaps your aim is to increase meaningful youth participation in decision-making at the national level. Key to formulating goals and recommendations is understanding how your national context relates to the priority issue of your target audience. Be careful with recommendations that push too strongly on taboo topics. Pushing for new, more progressive, narratives about certain issues is a delicate balance. Always discuss with your mentor first what issues are no-go's when talking to your government. Formulate strategies and entry-points that can be used when addressing more sensitive issues. As you become more experienced, you will develop 'strategic thinking' and learn to balance between what's acceptable and realistic and what's bold and progressive.

GOOD RECOMMEN- DATIONS

THEY are actionable, meaning that they address a specific action your target audience needs to undertake. **THEY** address a responsibility of a government, such as change in policy, implementation of a particular policy or generating public support for an issue. **THEY** are realistic; sometimes it's more strategic to focus on smaller changes as there is a higher chance of governments agreeing to it.

THEY are supported by evidence; it is more convincing if you can prove why a change is needed or effective. **THEY** reflect the realities of young people; efforts are made to involve young people and listen to their needs and priorities.

05

USE THE DATA

Using data to support your messages is very important if you want your target audience to take you seriously. Data backs up your argument. If it's visual it can be even more compelling. It paints a picture of why the change in policy you are suggesting is needed. You can link complex topics through data. How an absence or formulation of a particular policy impacts an existing problem in society. For example, if information on sexual health is not guaranteed for adolescents in national legislation it leads to a high number of teenage pregnancies. Data allows you assess the effectiveness of national policies. Sources of data such as United Nations reports or national statistics offices are useful. Also refer to the input given by young people in your consultations as this really strengthens your voice and adds legitimacy. Painting your reality through storytelling is also a good way to appeal emotionally and more fully illustrate the urgency of your policy recommendations. It's also useful to consider how your target audience benefits from the suggested change and collect data to support those claims as well.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER

When you're in a new place talking to high-level government officials, you might find yourself lost for words. You wouldn't be the first person this has happened to! Equip yourself with some conversation starters and practice communication techniques before arriving at the event or meeting. It's also good to be aware that you usually only have a brief moment to pitch your message, so effective preparation of your message is important. Remember, you're always much more aware of the way you feel and behave than other people are, so just go out there and give it a try!

WHY ARE STORIES A POWERFUL TOOL FOR ADVOCACY?

Stories and strong narratives can inform, activate, and inspire. After you have written something ask yourself does it:

INFORM: Is there a challenge in society that needs to be addressed? Don't wait, it's time to tell people about it.

ACTIVATE: A call to action that addresses something your target audience can take forward to address the issue.

INSPIRE: A personal story people can relate to.

If your story does all three, it has the potential to stick with people and inspire action. Practice it with your peers, see what connects on an emotional level. And remember; always seek consent for using other people's stories.

06

IDENTIFY YOUR ALLIES

In unity there is strength, and because advocacy goals often take a movement to be successful, it is important to identify who your allies are. It could be other youth advocates or NGOs working on the same issues, or non-traditional allies such as corporate companies and journalists. Strong pressure from the public has always been an effective way to convince governments. In order to generate that concerted pressure, forming the right partnerships is crucial. Those based on mutual respect, with both parties acknowledging each other's priorities and space, are often the most productive. Sometimes other people in that partnership are more experienced and dominate the space. It's good to be aware of this challenge. Openly address any issues around your collaboration. Identify your strengths and the different ways of doing things you and your organisations can bring. It's easier to work together when both sides recognise how they compliment each other. Always keep in mind that advocacy is also about networking and building goodwill, not just with your target audience but with your allies as well. So make sure to invest in them and avoid making solo runs. Remember, there is strength in numbers!

07

GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

How you get your message across is different depending on the occasion. It ranges from providing technical language for policies, to convincing governments they must do more to implement policies they already have. To multiply the power of advocacy efforts, using social media and other communication tools can be very effective. Advocacy is always stronger if large numbers of the public pledge to support your message and there is recognition in society of the problems that young people face. Communication strategies are effective when they make issues or ideas stick in people's minds. Do this by sharing your stories. Who do you know that has been impacted by a particular issue? Make use of video messages. Do you know someone who has a connection to a well-known personality? Ambassadors can champion your issues at events. And always keep safety in mind when communicating. Don't endanger yourself or the position of your organisation when publicly speaking out about a particular issue. If in doubt ask your mentor for advice.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER

Advocacy spaces are often full of people with many years of experience. They are used to working in specialised language, or jargon. This can be disorientating and a bit intimidating. It is not always necessary for you to copy that language in order to try fit in. Sometimes it's better to stay true to yourself. You can stand out by making use of your own unique traits and vocabulary. Keep it simple and direct in order to connect. Talk about the topic in a passionate way. More often than not policy makers appreciate a breath of fresh air.

08

COMMIT TO BEING ACCOUNTABLE

Being accountable for what you agreed to do is important for any advocate – experienced or not. This entails trying your best to achieve your goals, being transparent to your partners, and taking your role as a civil society representative seriously. As a young person, you have a unique insight into the world that you and your peers live every day. This gives great power when representing their voices. With that opportunity comes responsibility. You need to keep your peers informed about the progress and results of your work. Feeding back and jointly evaluating the results with them sheds a light on your work and provides a learning opportunity for everybody. Reflecting on your approach allows you to adjust for next time. It's about being as effective as possible. Accountability is not just about participating in a single event or meeting and feeding back the results and what you've learned. It's about monitoring the follow-up and implementation of the goals and agreements you have advocated for. Finally, if you want to convince others that young people are able and willing to have a meaningful role in decision-making, showing them through action is always the best way to achieve this!



I am the expert on
youth
issues.

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dance4life is committed to co-creating all its resources with young people and their adult allies, to move away from assumptions about what young people want and need while contributing to their empowerment. We would like to thank those who have participated in this co-creation process for their invaluable input: Esenam Amuzu (Ghana), Dani Alffian (Indonesia), Saad Haroon (Pakistan), Victor Rasugu (Kenya), and Saru Shilpakar (Nepal).

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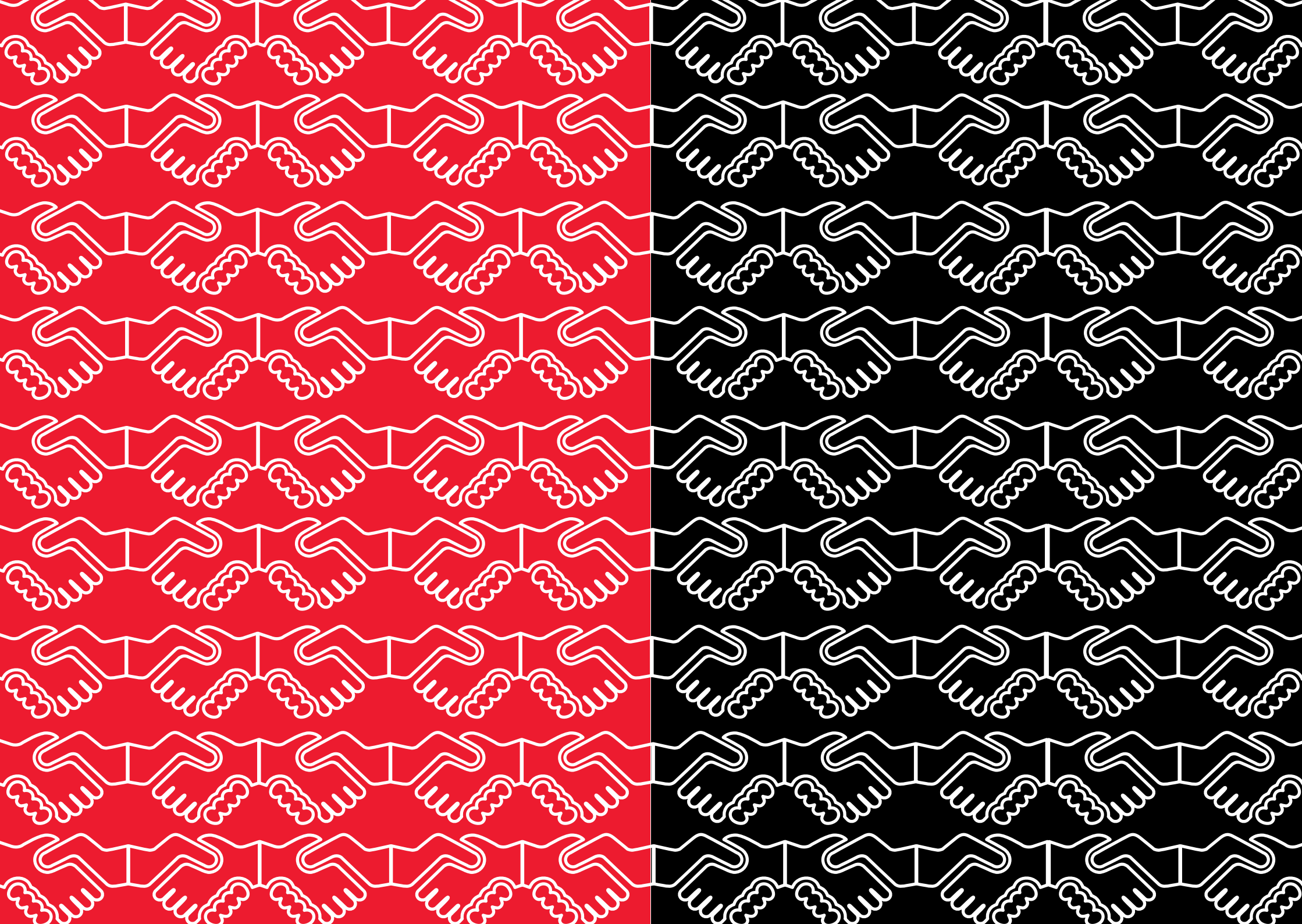


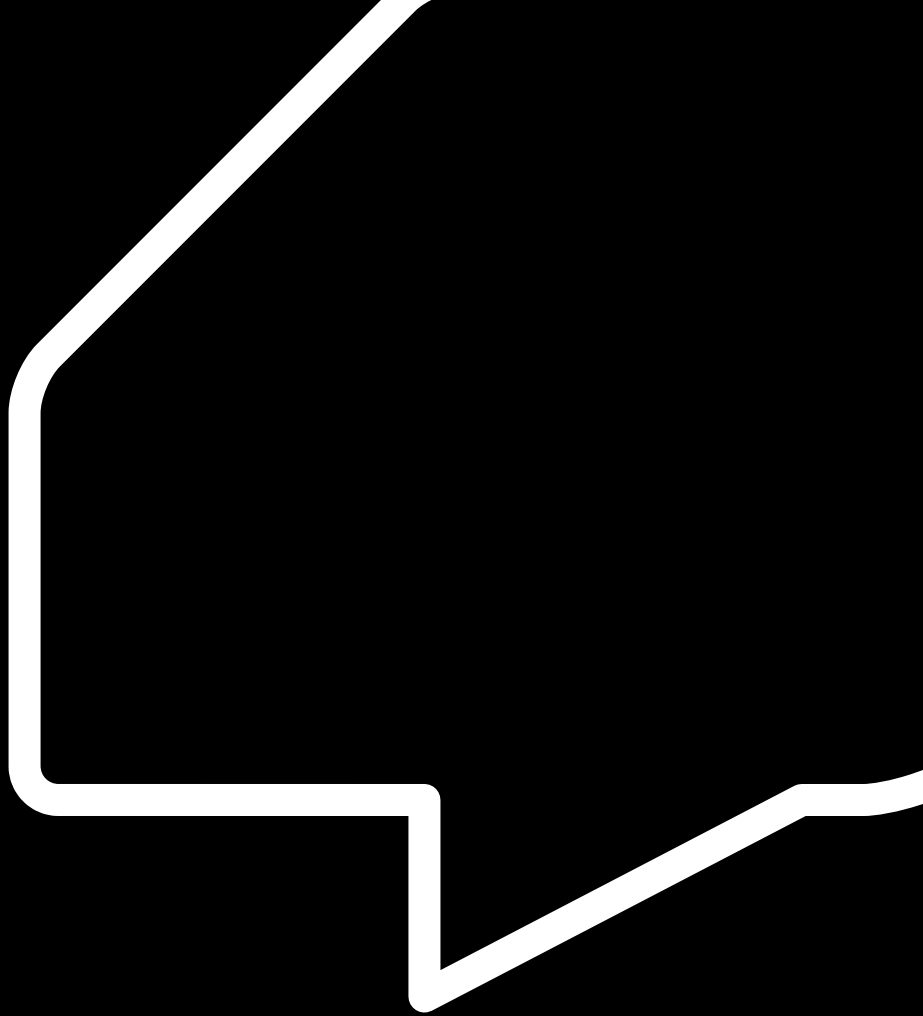
CHOICE FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY



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involve me



8 STEPS

If you are focusing on youth issues, then there's only one way of ensuring that your messages reflect young people's needs and priorities: work with them and listen to them, every step of the way. It sounds straightforward but in practice youth participation is more often than not addressed on a superficial level. We need to dig deeper to find out what affects them, what matters to them and what moves them. This guide will explain how you can make your efforts more substantive and empower young people throughout their participation in advocacy. This information can also be used by more experienced youth advocates when they are supporting newer champions. By following these 8 steps, your contribution to the empowerment of youth advocates will be enhanced and enriched.

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01

CONSIDER THE BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are change-agents not only a target group. This cognitive shift is important. After all, young people constitute half of the world's population. Youngsters who are active with youth groups at community level, such as peer leaders and community workers, have valuable insights and experience that they can bring to the table. By combining your advocacy expertise with their knowledge of what's happening on the ground in the lives of their peers a powerful force for change is shaped. It gives a face to statistics and shows how national and international policies are sometimes disconnected from what's really at stake at community level.

02

ENSURE INCLUSIVITY

Age, gender, background and religion – these are concepts of inclusivity with which most of us would be familiar. However inclusivity is multi-layered. It can also refer to different learning styles and diverse personalities. Including young people with these different characteristics and ensuring that they are all equally able to participate is just as important as engaging those from different genders and backgrounds. Failing to accommodate these less visible differences is a common challenge that occurs in advocacy spaces, where there is willingness to engage young people meaningfully, but insufficient attention for their diversities. Some young people, as is the case with adults, are bold and confident by nature, whereas others need to be empowered before they feel comfortable enough to raise their voice. Keeping an eye on these differences and responding accordingly is an important element to ensure and maintain well rounded inclusivity.

BE INCLUSIVE

ENCOURAGE young people to do consultations to inform their advocacy messages. **APPOINT** more experienced young people in mentoring roles and ensure transfer of knowledge and experience. **SPEND** time on team building so young people feel comfortable enough to ask questions and raise concerns.

REPLACE jargon with relatable real-life examples. **ACCOMMODATE** and facilitate group dynamics – don't preach or talk down to anyone, be a facilitator instead of a teacher. **DON'T** let judgemental comments hang in the air, address them and facilitate dialogue about them.

03

BE A MENTOR

Advocacy environments at both national and international level, with their experts and complex dialogue discussions, can feel intimidating to a young person. Take time to sit with them, especially first-timers, to talk through what they find exciting and what they are worried about. A detailed orientation to the actual space is often overlooked, but in many cases very helpful. Explain beforehand what the event will look like and what can be expected in terms of attendees and the venue. Being clear about what is expected from participation is important to avoid unnecessary uncertainty. As an experienced advocate, you can advise them on other issues around appropriate language and interactions when talking to government representatives. Or which key players in government are more likely to listen about a particular topic. Safety and security measures should also be taken into account. Being a mentor means opening up dialogue between you and a young person to pass on skills that are crucial to enable empowerment. Being able to practice conversation techniques and provide understanding on how to deal with setbacks instills the confidence needed during those moments when it really matters.

04

BE OPEN TO MUTUAL LEARNING

Discover creative ways to share your expertise while learning from the young person you're working with. It's not simply just transferring knowledge and skills, but challenging preconceived notions and ways of doing things. Being open to questions and alternate ideas might just lead you to consider some new approaches. If you always draft policy briefs for advocacy events, maybe there's other ways to get your message across. How can your policy data be more effectively communicated with a youth advocate's help? The same for drafting priorities or recommendations – input from less experienced advocates can shed new light on an issue and provoke innovative and critical thinking. If the topic of the event is about youth issues, young people can provide a compelling view into the present-day realities of youth. However if input from youth advocates is not quite translating into applicable messages and actions, your expertise is very helpful. Just make sure that young people remain central to the process as ideas develop and emerge.

CREATE A MUTUAL LEARNING MINDSET

NEVER assume that the way you understand something is the way it is meant. Always check! **BE** transparent about the process – explain what you're doing and why you're doing it. **TAKE** new ideas seriously, even if they're not quite as you envision things. Postpone judge-

ment. **TRIAL** and error: discuss the implications of ideas with an open mind-set and don't be afraid to let young people find out for themselves if things work (or not). **REMEMBER** sometimes failure is the best way to learn.

05

EVALUATE AND PRACTICE

Continuous on the job evaluation is not something everyone is used to, but it is very important to the learning process of newer advocates. Take a moment daily to sit down with them and reflect on the day: What were their aims? How was their experience? What are they proud of? What did they find difficult? Discussing this can give them new confidence for the next day as it allows them to digest some of the uncertainties they faced. It is quite possible that new youth advocates might deliver statements or meet with their government the first time they attend an event. Most people - regardless of age - find this exciting at the beginning. Practicing how to deliver a statement or how to approach and respond to your government is a good way of building confidence and contributing to the empowerment of young people. Being thrown in at the deep end, in combination with sufficient support and opportunities for reflection, can be an effective way of putting into practice what they've learned.

CONFIDENCE BUILDERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

PEER-TO-PEER mentorship: it is crucially important to have more experienced young people mentoring first-timers. **ORGANISE** youth pre-meetings prior to advocacy events, to be able to convene with other youth and discuss topics in a safe space. **ONGOING** capacity building that includes skills-building and regular moments for reflection. **BE** clear about expectations to avoid uncertainty about performance. **ALWAYS** paint the bigger picture and explain why engagement in a particular event is important and what it can lead to.

06

SHOWCASE YOUTH LEADERSHIP

One of the best ways to create support for meaningful youth participation (and getting other people to adopt the practice as well) is to show that young people are more than willing and capable to engage. Small contributions can create a more youth-friendly environment: appoint young people to leadership roles, give them a chance to speak on behalf of your organisation and prepare them well for advocacy events. Use your network to promote youth leadership by linking young people to your government representatives and NGO allies. Include some of the ways in which you invest in youth empowerment in your discussions with them. Oftentimes, people are willing to engage youth but unsure how. Explain to them that investing in young people's capacity is not just beneficial to them but to society as a whole. Impart that meaningful participation requires young people to be empowered through participation and experience as opposed to just being present. All of this contributes to a shift in mindset and, eventually, to an environment that is more supportive of youth leadership.

07

FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of youth participation in advocacy is more than just empowering young people to take part in decision-making. It's about building sustainable structures through which they can continue to take part in dialogue about their priorities. For example, setting up a youth working group that reviews and monitors the implementation of an international agreement at country level, or participation of young people in existing governmental committees focussing on relevant topics. Sustainability also means moving beyond capacity building of young people, and creating an organisational environment that is responsive to youth leadership. This involves educating all staff on meaningful youth participation, implementing an inclusive hiring process that ensures young people are well represented, and removing barriers in the internal policy environment that stand in the way of true youth participation.

SUSTAINABLE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

HAVE young people represented in the governing body of your organisation and make sure they have a say. **ORGANISE** regular feedback meetings to discuss young people's leadership in your organisation and its activities. **BUILD** young people's capaci-

ty so they can continue to spread messaging even after their engagement in advocacy has ended. **APPOINT** a focal person who looks after meaningful youth participation in your organisation and activities. **EARMARK** funding for capacity building and participation of young people.

08

MONITOR AND MEASURE

By this stage you've done everything possible to empower young people and enhance youth leadership in your advocacy activities. But you also want to track the progress you're making for reporting purposes and to learn from and improve your work. Traditional reporting methods can be daunting and time-consuming. Think of ways to make collecting data and monitoring more fun. What about an online app (complete with instructions) which sends the data directly to your M&E staff? Or, if you're not that tech-savvy, maybe an interactive exercise at the end of each day that focusses on gathering information and provides an opportunity for reflection as well? Try not to just measure output and outcomes, but also focus monitoring on youth participation itself. To what extent was it meaningful? What dimensions are relevant to measure the level of meaningful participation? What can you do differently next time to make it more meaningful? And always remember there is only one way to learn about the barriers that young people face to participation – ask them!



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