

Introduction

The Swahili proverb, “Youth development will be brought about by youth themselves,” illustrates YouthNet’s belief that only through active participation and empowerment will youth be able to make safe, informed, and responsible decisions regarding their reproductive health and to contribute effectively to programs.

We believe a new paradigm is needed – one that moves from tokenism to one that truly engages young people as full partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of strategies and programs. While most youth projects involve adolescents to some extent, it is rare that they are involved in significant ways throughout the course of a program.

The *Youth Participation Guide* seeks to increase the level of meaningful youth participation in reproductive health (RH) and HIV/AIDS programming at an institutional and programmatic level. The target audience includes senior and middle management, program managers, staff involved in implementing activities, and youth who may be engaged at all levels of an organization’s work.

The *Youth Participation Guide* also hopes to foster individual and institutional commitment to involving youth in meaningful ways. While designed for working with youth RH and HIV projects, this *Guide* can also be adapted for use in other types of youth development programs.

Structure of the Guide

Section I. Conceptual Overview

This short essay provides an overview of the key conceptual issues regarding youth participation. It addresses why youth participation is important, both from a “human rights” perspective put forward by UNICEF and others and from an “impact on program results” perspective.

Section II. Background Handouts

This section provides in-depth information on the subtopics involved in youth participation in the form of background reading and handouts for facilitators and participants.

Section III. Institutional Assessment and Planning Tool (IAPT)

This section helps organizations evaluate the level of youth participation in their institutions and plan for greater youth participation in the future. It assumes that organizations want to

explore meaningful youth participation but need guidance. This section includes a tool for conducting an assessment of institutional youth participation and a process to utilize the assessment results to develop a work plan for involving youth at the institutional level.

Section IV. Youth-Adult Partnership Training Curriculum

The training curriculum is designed to build the skills of individuals and organizations to engage and involve youth and adults more fully in youth RH and HIV/AIDS program design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The curriculum emphasizes how youth-adult partnerships strengthen youth RH and HIV/AIDS programming by facilitating a process that builds a better understanding of the different needs and styles of youth and adults in the workplace. For those groups with sufficient time, it contains a section on planning specific activities for greater youth involvement. It includes a presentation, which is a set of printed slides at the end of the section.

Those intending to use the Guide should review Section I and Section II thoroughly before implementing the IAPT (Section III) or the Youth-Adult Partnership Training Curriculum (Section IV).

How to Use the Guide

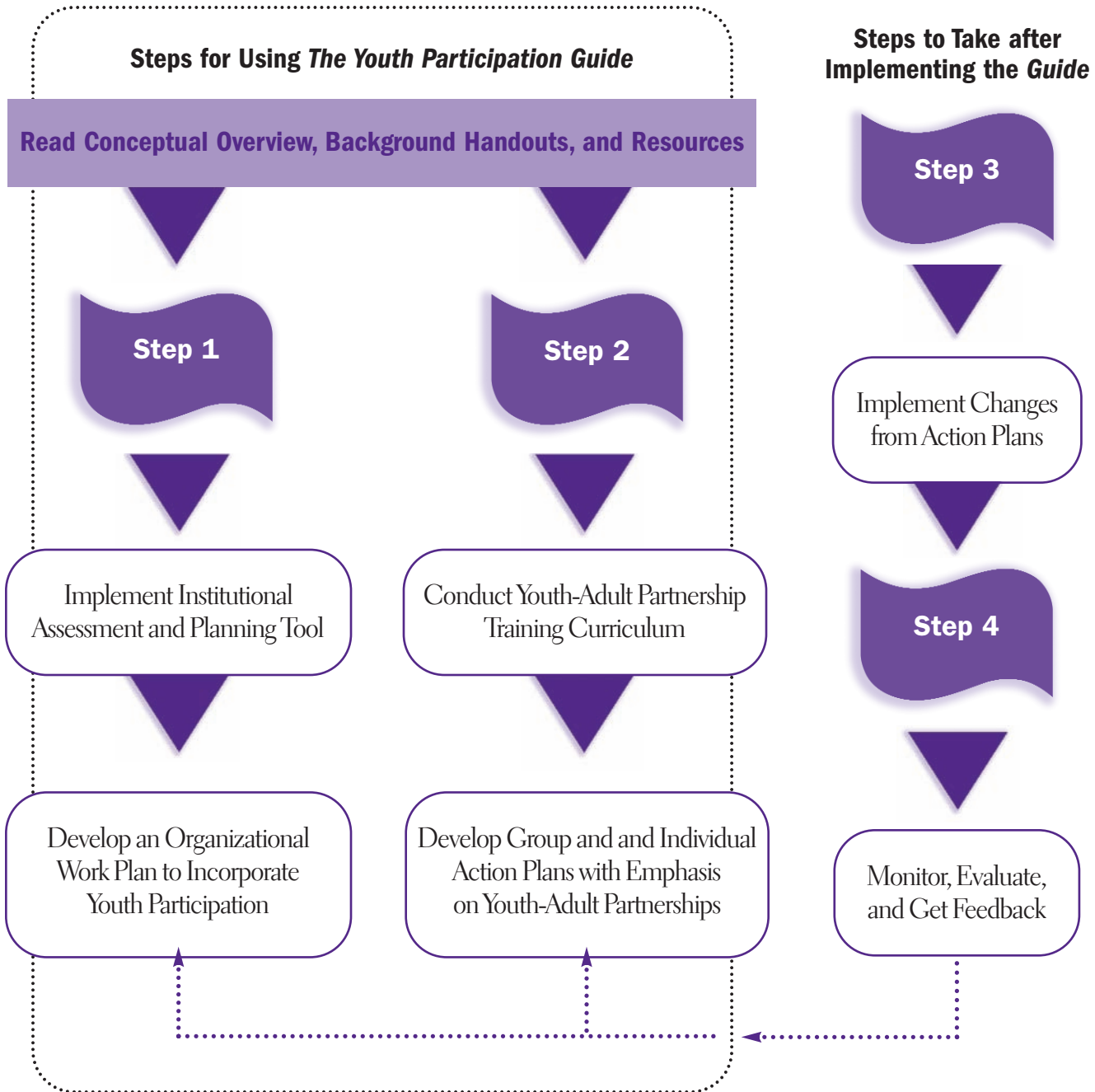
Those intending to use the *Guide* should review Section I and Section II thoroughly before implementing the IAPT (Section III) or the Youth-Adult Partnership Training Curriculum (Section IV). Facilitators who do so will be better equipped to lead discussions and address participant concerns and questions. In addition, the project coordinators encourage managers of organizations considering the use of the *Guide* to read through all of the sections. This will give them a better understanding of what youth participation is and how better to achieve it for their organizations.

YouthNet recommends that an organization use the IAPT first and later, at a separate training event, use the Youth-Adult Partnership Training Curriculum. Participants using the assessment and planning tool and those in the curriculum training event might overlap but could include different people. Based on availability of time and resources, YouthNet encourages organizations to adapt or alter the suggested agendas to meet their individual needs. Both the assessment and planning tool and training curriculum include suggested agendas for varying lengths of time.

The IAPT is designed to assist an organization in assessing its commitment to youth participation. Since all institutions could benefit from a periodic assessment of youth involvement, taking the time to use this tool would be useful in interpreting findings and planning for increased participation. The work plan in this tool focuses on institutional issues and can build upon past successes with youth involvement as well as identify new goals.

The Youth-Adult Partnership Training Curriculum builds upon the institutional plan for youth participation. It emphasizes developing approaches and skills that youth and adults need to work together and communicate more effectively. It includes participatory exercises to demonstrate how to improve communication and partnerships.

Steps for Incorporating or Strengthening Youth Participation



Institutional and Programmatic Work Plans

Institutional Assessment and Planning Tool. With its emphasis on institutional planning for meaningful youth participation, this tool helps develop work plans related to an organization's goals and activities.

Youth-Adult Partnership Training Curriculum. The action planning process in this curriculum provides an opportunity to develop programmatic activities that integrate youth-adult partnerships. The action plans may draw upon the work plans developed in the institutional assessment and planning process, with more emphasis on establishing ways youth and adults can work together.

Foundation for the Guide

The *Guide* is based on a foundation that acknowledges both the challenges and benefits of adults and youth working together. During a review of studies and programmatic trends for the preparation of the *Guide*, some common barriers and benefits to significant youth involvement emerged.

Benefits of youth participation include:

- ◆ Improving relevance and effectiveness of programs
- ◆ Enhancing the participants' sense of ownership in programs
- ◆ Building the leadership capacity of young people
- ◆ Stimulating new, creative, synergistic ideas and energy from both adults and youth in program development
- ◆ Establishing credibility of youth-oriented ideas and youth-directed implementation
- ◆ Helping adults better understand and value young people's perspectives and contributions and vice versa
- ◆ Helping adults recognize young people's capabilities and experiences and vice versa
- ◆ Helping youth acknowledge adults as allies and vice versa

Barriers to meaningful youth participation include:

- ◆ High turnover rates of youth
- ◆ Additional costs, including training, transportation, equipment, space, materials, etc.
- ◆ Different management style preferences
- ◆ Different types of schedules
- ◆ Different communication styles
- ◆ Failure by institutions to plan adequately for organizational capacity to accommodate both adults and youth

Suggested Guidelines for Facilitators

Ideally, a two-person team of a youth and an adult should lead the implementation of the assessment and planning tool and the youth-adult partnership curriculum. It is critical to have both a youth and an adult facilitator so that both points of view will have equal weight and provide a positive model of a youth-adult partnership to participants. The facilitators could come from within the institution or be consultants with training experience.

The youth and adult facilitators should take turns when leading Sections III and IV of the *Guide*. Depending on the needs of the participants or organization, the facilitators should decide which sessions will be youth-led or adult-led, being careful to divide the responsibilities equally. Ideally, participants should be composed of approximately equal numbers of youth and adults, as well as a balance of males and females. Accommodations for participants with special needs or handicaps should also be taken into consideration.

Facilitators must be well prepared. They should read and digest the materials before the workshops, including the conceptual overview and background handouts. Each facilitator should be knowledgeable about all sections of the *Guide* and be able to provide participants with the correct information and materials necessary for them to participate effectively in the activities.

As a team, the facilitators should **pay close attention** to the following:

- ◆ Check the discussion questions/exercises/activities and adapt them to the local setting if necessary. The questions/exercises/activities in the *Guide* provide general guidance. However, the facilitators are encouraged to use their own style and determine how best to modify both the assessment and planning tool and the training curriculum in order to meet the needs of their particular group.
- ◆ Review the instructions for each session thoroughly so that both facilitators are comfortable with the steps.

- ◆ Do a practice session before conducting the sessions.
- ◆ Make the exercises and activities as engaging as possible to enhance learning.
- ◆ Remain aware of the time and keep to the schedule. Ensure sufficient time for group sharing and discussion, but be aware that some participants may want to talk a lot.
- ◆ While remaining as flexible as possible, recognize that participants' time is valuable. Keeping participants after the allotted time is not fair.
- ◆ Remember, it is okay if every participant does not get to comment on each issue. Include as many comments as possible, but keep the discussion and schedule moving.
- ◆ During small-group work, be sure to inform participants how much time they have. Always give a five-minute or a two-minute warning for the groups to finish up.

The activities in the *Guide* are designed to foster active participant involvement as well as to draw from participant knowledge, skills, and experiences. Therefore, the facilitator's role as a resource and guide is crucial and includes helping to create an environment where participants can learn as much from each other as from the facilitators. Rather than lectures, the *Guide* provides experiential activities, designed to help participants gain information, examine attitudes, communicate through dialogue, build consensus, develop and practice skills, and develop concrete follow-up activities. Facilitators should guide the participants in processing what they are learning and in discussing how they can apply it.

Definitions

The *Youth Participation Guide* uses the terms **youth**, **young people**, **young adults**, and **adolescents** interchangeably – all referring to people 10 to 24 years of age, unless otherwise specified. The terms **youth participation** and **youth involvement** are also used interchangeably; the term **youth-adult partnership** is used in a narrower sense, referring primarily to the interactions that take place between youth and adults within a professional environment. Youth-adult partnership is one aspect of youth participation. In contrast, youth participation or youth involvement refers to broader institutional issues such as what roles youth play in an organization. Definitions of youth are related to context, culture, programmatic goals, objectives, and other factors.

