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USAID'S HEALTH EVALUATION AND APPLIED RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT (HEARD) PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assessment of Positive Youth Development (PYD) Including the Experience and Contributions of YouthPower

NOVEMBER 2020

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ASSESSMENT

Positive Youth Development (PYD) engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD promotes building skills, assets, and competencies; fostering healthy relationships; and strengthening the enabling environment. USAID's YouthPower Project was designed to facilitate cross-sectoral youth programming through PYD principles and practices. At the conclusion of YouthPower in 2020, USAID commissioned this assessment of the status of the PYD approach globally, YouthPower's role in facilitating PYD uptake, and strategic considerations looking forward.

The assessment took place between June 2019 and July 2020. Specifically the assessment examined the extent to which the PYD approach is understood and utilized by youth development partners in the field; successes and challenges of YouthPower's experience with PYD programming and its role in advancing PYD; and key considerations for expanding uptake of the approach globally. The assessment complements three recent USAID-commissioned studies: USAID Youth in Development Policy Implementation Assessment; the YouthPower systematic review of PYD programs, and the soon to be published Review of Youth Power Activities. This report also provides a "deeper dive" into two key areas of PYD that are of particular interest to USAID: youth engagement, and youth systems. Assessment results will inform USAID on how to effectively support PYD through future youth development investment, including YouthPower 2.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

This assessment used a mixed-methods approach, drawing from quantitative and qualitative data collection, including a survey of stakeholder perceptions (N= 575). In addition, key informant interviews (N=26) and focus group discussions (n=5) were conducted from Washington, DC and in Kenya, Uganda and

Indonesia in partnership with local research teams to develop a more nuanced understanding of successes, challenges and future directions for deepening PYD. Stakeholder respondents included USAID staff from headquarters and Missions, government leaders, implementing partners (IPs), and youth.

In addition, **two rapid reviews** were conducted to supplement the primary data collection. A rapid review of 1) **the youth development donor landscape**; and 2) **YouthPower Implementation Requests for Task Order Proposals (RFTOPs)**. The review of the donor landscape in youth development in LMICs was conducted among selected donors in the youth space to explore how PYD has been taken up by donors. The RFTOP review systematically examined the extent to which USAID called for the utilization of systems approaches for achieving sustainable PYD outcomes. An adapted scoring rubric harmonious with The Youth Systems Collaborative Learning Framework was used for the RFTOP review.

FINDINGS

A. Adoption and integration of the PYD approach.

Uptake of the PYD approach was perceived to be increasing within USAID and among USAID IPs, yet further evidence of PYD implementation by government and local stakeholders was less apparent. There was however, some concurrence on many of the components of PYD such as positive social norms, safe spaces, youth engagement, and building skills assets and competencies that are more widely adopted by youth stakeholders including donors and international and national youth-led and youth-serving NGOs. Nonetheless, respondents indicated that more efforts are needed for broader national level understanding, commitment and implementation. YouthPower Task orders have facilitated promulgation of PYD in programming including involving youth in the design, implementation and monitoring of program progress. However, inclusion of the PYD approach

and terminology in youth programming other than YouthPower remains inconsistent. The Assessment found that not all USAID/USG youth programming aligns with PYD approaches and terminology. Perceptions of widespread adoption of PYD by national stakeholders and government were limited.

B. Factors that influence uptake. Cross-sectoral programming that underpins the PYD approach remains challenging with both donor and government programs largely focused on siloed sectors with different and often incompatible organizational cultures, funding streams and inherent bureaucratic and structural challenges. Respondents reported that holistic workforce development programs involving education and health dimensions are strategic and should be further developed. PYD implementation including youth engagement has also been progressively understood over time. The more complex elements of PYD were reported to be less fully implemented, often because implementer understanding in these areas lags and the time, resources, and planning needed to adopt a truly holistic youth centered, cross sectoral approach to their programs is difficult. Further, understanding the developmental life course and the significance of the timing of investments along various stages of a young person's age span may run counter to USAID's sectoral priorities and funding cycles. Finally, there was a perception among respondents that PYD programs and opportunities may not have extended far beyond better resourced, urban, educated youth who are easier to reach than lower-income, less skilled youth in rural areas. Limited funding for youth programming has further limited uptake of the PYD approach.

C. YouthPower's Role in Facilitating Uptake of PYD:

YouthPower contributed significantly to the uptake of PYD. Key informants note a marked shift in the way the USAID Missions think about youth in recent years due to YouthPower. Contributing factors include professional development of USAID Mission youth points of contact and IP staff, and the use of YouthPower tools and resources (especially PYD research, toolkits, frameworks and measurement guidance) to increase understanding of concepts and terminology and uptake of PYD among

stakeholders. Communities of Practice managed by YouthPower Learning were highly appreciated by NGOs.

D. Youth Engagement. YouthPower seeks to promote meaningful youth engagement from program design to implementation, and evaluation. To meaningfully engage young people requires a shift in ways of partnering from the start of activity design. The assessment found that youth engagement in YouthPower activities has increased but more efforts are needed as most respondents state that true engagement has only been partially achieved. USAID/Indonesia's Mitra Kunci activity created a platform for youth and the private sector to work together with government on creating employment opportunities is a strong example of how a YouthPower activity can successfully engage youth. Yet despite notable examples, there remains a lack of significant uptake by PYD stakeholders of youth engagement. Within USAID, "buy-in" to PYD was consider "passive" and more focused on teaching youth than collaborating with them as partners. Youth engagement at the global level is supported by a number of efforts to increase engagement of youth such as the Mandela Fellowship program for Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). At country level, the YouthLead international youth network and platform managed by YouthPower is also helping to give power to youth voice through networking, resource sharing and opportunities. While LMIC government investment in youth engagement is increasing, for example through youth advisory committees and designated funding, a myriad of obstacles limit access and effectiveness. In many contexts, governments still see youth as a "risk" rather than as an asset for development.

E. Youth systems: Creating an enabling environment for youth.

There is broad agreement that the building and strengthening of sustainable youth systems has not yet been achieved in the USAID-funded youth development field, though it is, however, seen as critical to USAID's Journey to Self-Reliance. Youth systems work requires a shift in focus from supporting direct delivery of health, education and social services for youth as beneficiaries, to improved coordination through

networks and partnerships among multi-sectoral public and private sector entities, with full engagement of communities and youth who are recognized as advocates and change agents. The Kenyan K-YES activity that brought together local government, the private sector, and youth under County Youth Employment Compacts to discuss and find solutions for youth employability is a positive example of systems work.

To gauge the progress of a systems approach to PYD means complementing outcome measurement with qualitative approaches to detect and report on changes in the enabling environment. Most YP Request for Task Order Proposals (RFTOPs) did not require a full analysis of systems dynamics including barriers, bottlenecks and lack of coordination, with a few notable exceptions such as the Community, Family and Youth Resilience (CFYR) activity that identifies the “complex array of risk and protective factors” as root causes of youth involvement in violence, as well as the uniqueness of each country context in the affected region. Increasingly IPs are building ownership and accountability by working with, and bringing together diverse country-level stakeholders in YouthPower activities, although country-level coordination of service delivery for youth programs and policies remains a priority gap area. Capacity building and development of institutional relationships are noted in the RFTOPs analyzed, but are often not grounded in a capacity assessment and thus not sufficiently focused. Likewise, efforts to create shared monitoring and evaluation platforms, and use ICT solutions such as dashboards or searchable databases are limited. The review also found limited attention to other factors that influence uptake of youth system work including lack of: donor collaboration; support for responsive and adaptive, iterative approaches; encouragement of local leveraging of funds; and emphasis on policy.

F. Strategic considerations: PYD Programming in the time of COVID-19. Health is a major issue for young people during the COVID pandemic due to isolation from peers, and in some cases exposure to violence, abuse and harmful practices such as early marriage. As a result, young people will arguably bear the brunt

of the significant social, economic and mental health effects of this ongoing health crisis. USAID should put youth at the center of its COVID response around three pillars: educating, employing and engaging youth. Investment in distance learning and short-term support for youth self-employment is urgently needed, as well as continuing engagement of youth for community-based COVID response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Support better uptake of PYD concepts, evidence, and practical guides/tools and increased strategic monitoring, evaluation and research through YouthPower and beyond.** This requires improved research to test and document the efficacy of the PYD approach. It also necessitates: (a) knowledge management feedback loops between program implementation and research, evaluation, guidance; (b) development of PYD clear, language appropriate materials; (c) facilitate efficient delivery of consistent, high-quality PYD training for national stakeholders; (d) enable USAID Missions to gain a more accurate understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in embracing PYD in their youth-focused and youth-integrated programming; (e) deepen understanding of PYD through training and technical guidance; and (f) cross-link YouthPower's knowledge management platform and other knowledge and project repositories.
- 2. Support a deeper understanding of youth as change agents/youth engagement** by (a) co-creating practical models or mechanisms for youth engagement at the country-level through a joint efforts; (b) increasing youth participation and leadership of PYD-related research and evaluation; and (c) leveraging networks of young leaders and youth returning from higher education exchanges to be partners on programs.
- 3. Develop more effective holistic and cross-sectoral youth programming** by (a) strengthening cross sectoral programming linking health, education and workforce development programs; (b) facilitating cross-sectoral PYD activity design within Missions by both providing incentives for sector experts to collaborate

on holistic programming; and (c) providing professional development to better enable USAID, IP and country-stakeholder teams to collaborate better cross-sectorally.

4. Support systemic approaches to youth development (or youth system strengthening) at the country level.

Specific measures suggested include: (a) improving knowledge of systems analytics and terminology among USAID and its partners; (b) assuming a stance of experimentation and self-reflection as donors; (c) avoiding over-reliance on “the numbers” to evaluate the success of systems activities; (c) deepening understanding of and support to the role of intermediary

organizations that play a critical role in youth systems work; (d) exploring the use of shared monitoring and evaluation platforms for systems work; (e) identifying, tracking and supporting progress of system change efforts that are already locally initiated and owned; (f) identifying and building on local assets to build a more comprehensive youth system; (g) developing global, peer-to-peer exchanges to support the adaptive learning required for successful systems change; and (h) focusing on systems change to yield promising new areas of intervention.