

**RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT**



Executive Summary

Walking the Talk: FP2020's Approaches to MYE

An external assessment conducted by Restless Development



Image courtesy of FP2020

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INTRODUCTION

The Family Planning 2020 Secretariat underwent a strategic review in 2015, which led to an expanded interest in supporting better and more meaningful youth engagement. To improve current and future efforts, FP2020 collaborated with Restless Development to assess current Meaningful Youth Engagement (MYE) initiatives and activities. This brief discusses topline findings and recommends concrete next steps to FP2020 that will improve the quality, depth, and strength of MYE across its programs and partnerships.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment was conducted by Restless Development staff, with the support of a consultancy team, and a 3-member Youth Panel. Data was compiled through a desk review, semi-structured interviews and a short online survey. Interviewees included FP2020 Secretariat Staff; FP2020 Focal Points (youth and older adult representatives); FP2020 Reference Group Youth representatives; Youth-led Organization representatives and representatives from funding and key external partners.

The central question the assessment aimed to answer was: To what extent have initiatives of the FP2020 Secretariat created conditions that facilitate meaningful youth engagement across:

- organizational structure and strategy?
- partnerships with youth-led organizations?
- rights-based advocacy and communications?



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Young People & FP2020: What's happened so far?

Organization structure & Platforms for MYE



Global Reference Group

The highest levels of FP2020's governance is the Reference Group which has had a youth seat since late 2015. This was expanded to two seats for young people representing Youth-led Organizations in 2017. They serve as a critical link between the Reference group and youth networks.



Youth Focal Points

Over 40 young professionals from Youth-led Organizations serve as official Youth Representatives or Youth Focal Points at the country level of the partnership. They join representatives from government, civil society and donor agencies serving as liaisons with institutions and wider family planning communities in their countries.



Youth Representation at Regional Focal Point Workshops

Focal Points are convened during FP2020 Regional Workshops every 18 months. As of May 2019, the Secretariat ensures that Youth Focal Points are formally represented in all of these regional workshops.

Resources & Capacity Building



Rapid Response Mechanism

The Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) provides resources in response to urgent, time-bound opportunities in FP2020 focus countries. FP2020 encourages youth-led organizations to apply and actively funds youth-led organizations, on an ongoing and rolling basis.



Capacity Building

FP2020 hosts regular webinars and workshops for its stakeholders, which are attended by representatives of YLOs. Each year, several webinars and workshops are designed with a youth-focus and in collaboration with young people and Youth Focal Points.

Youth-led Advocacy and Communications



Global Advocacy Strategy and Policy Dialogue

Young people were engaged in a variety of global, regional and national meetings and events to ensure an alignment and agreed strategy between the partnership and youth-led organizations.



Global Consensus Statement on MAYE

FP2020 co-developed the Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement which has more than 250 organizational signatures and an accountability process is actively being rolled out.



Youth as Commitment Makers

On International Youth Day 2017, FP2020 launched its first ever round of commitments to the goals of the initiative, which were made by YLOs. So far, six youth-led organizations have made commitments. These commitments outline the tangible steps young people are taking to bring rights-based family planning to their communities.

Top Line Findings

WHAT'S WORKING WELL?

YOUNG PEOPLE APPRECIATE WHAT FP2020 IS DOING ON MYE

- Overall, the young people interviewed reported their satisfaction with the level and type of engagement with the Secretariat and stated their belief that the Secretariat was consistently approachable, helpful, responsive and open. Nearly two thirds (67.5%) were aware of positive outcomes in relation to the Secretariat's efforts to facilitate MYE and appreciated the Secretariat's efforts to advocate for MYE beyond simply a right to participate. Young people see the Secretariat as truly invested in MYE and appreciate the Secretariat's efforts to strengthen the knowledge and skills of youth leaders around the world. Many respondents cited increased confidence, knowledge, skills, and visibility, and mentioned that young people are increasingly recognized as FP leaders and career professionals. This is especially true for young people with specific ties to the Secretariat, such as youth focal points, youth Reference Group members, and youth grantees.

FP2020 IS CONTRIBUTING TO MAKING THE CASE FOR MYE

- More nuanced discussions of MYE that explore the rationale as well as the results of MYE have contributed to deepening youth engagement in family planning programs. In fact, the Secretariat is actively forging new links and connections between youth advocates and family planning decision-makers, which many young people see as essential to their ability to promote the FP agenda. Such linkages also provide an opportunity for young people to demonstrate their expertise, contribute insights and generate alternative solutions to entrenched challenges.

FUNDING FOR MYE IS ESSENTIAL

- FP2020's Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) provides small grants to youth-led organizations that enable their participation in efforts to hold governments and institutions accountable to their commitments. FP2020's willingness to invest tangible resources in MYE showcases the value of MYE and the importance of providing funds that support the participation of young people in decision-making, policy development and advocacy efforts which improves their ability to influence decisions and actions related to addressing the needs of young people.

WHERE CAN FP2020 DO BETTER?

Given FP2020's organizational commitment to MYE is relatively recent, the Secretariat has made great strides, while also revealing key gaps where improvement is needed.

PUTTING YOUTH IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

- Focal point workshops and reference group meetings, while more inclusive of youth, are still designed and led by older adults who hold more influential positions within FP2020.

BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN YOUTH AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

- Disinterested and/or disrespectful older adult stakeholders who appear unwilling or unable to engage with young people have a dampening effect on the enthusiasm and confidence of youth leaders to present new ideas and perspectives. On the flip side, young people in high-level representative roles often feel they are held to higher performance standards.
- Lingering mistrust and simmering tensions between government and youth stymie MYE at the country level, in part due to strong cultural norms and perceptions around appropriate behaviors for young people. Agreements made in regional or country meetings regarding more attention to MYE are often not followed through reinforcing and amplifying mistrust and tensions.

DIFFUSING GLOBAL SUCCESS TO THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

- YLO partners and Youth Focal Points report their struggle to translate the international momentum of FP2020 to their countries and communities, and lack clarity on how they can exert influence or take actions as a Focal Point or as a partner.

INCREASING THE DIVERSITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE BEING ENGAGED

- Certain groups of youth remain underrepresented and diversity is limited. For example, many youth-led organizations work in other sectors and the language used by the family planning community is often not very "youth friendly."
- Young people who have been appointed to positions within FP 2020 as Reference Group Representatives or as focal points may be seen as more "elite" and less representative of youth in their countries.
- Only registered organizations are able to apply for RRM grants, which excludes many YLOs which may not be formally registered as NGOs.

MAKING MYE THE BUSINESS OF ALL SECRETARIAT STAFF

- Although the topic and concept of youth cuts across nearly all aspects of the FP2020 Secretariat, few staff have been given clear roles and responsibilities (for example, in their work plans or job descriptions) for ensuring MYE. The Secretariat is yet to develop long-term strategy that will empower today's youth as the next generation of FP leaders, and will mobilize the next generation of youth leaders and YLOs in terms of organizational capacity building, sustainable funding or support for networks.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the main conclusions and recommends actions to achieve a bolder agenda on MYE that ensures youth are positioned not just as beneficiaries, but as leaders and integral partners to achieving the vision of FP2020.

Three themes emerged from our assessment:

- There is a need to sharpen focus, direction and coordination within the Secretariat's work that assures MYE.
- There is an opportunity to support MYE that is self-directed, youth-led, and innovative.
- It is time for a bold agenda on youth and MYE.

We categorize our recommendations for action under these three themes:



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Sharpen focus, direction and coordination that assures MYE across the Secretariat:

- Ensure organizational definitions of youth and MYE are clear, and allocate MYE responsibilities to additional staff across the Secretariat activities.
- Review operational policies and protocols and develop a set of MYE operating standards to ensure an enabling environment for MYE that promotes the safety and well-being of youth.
- Establish an organizational framework for monitoring, evaluation, learning, knowledge management and sharing on MYE.
- Set measurable MYE objectives and indicators that are regularly reported on by Secretariat and Focal Points and as part of the annual report.
- Promote the Global Consensus Statement on MYE as a tool for securing buy-in and building accountability across the partnership.

Support self-directed, youth-led innovation and mobilization:

- Use language and ideas that engage youth outside the global policy space and the family planning sector and validates young people's agency and contributions.
- Increase coordination of and information sharing with external partners on the value of and approaches to MYE.
- Provide/leverage resources that directly support YLOs to influence and hold governments accountable.
- Provide flexible funding and support for YLOs to create and test innovative approaches to youth mobilization and advocacy.
- Strengthen YLO leadership and organizational sustainability: for example, explore the co-creation of a Young Professionals Leadership Program.

It is time to set a bold agenda on youth and MYE:

- FP2020's post 2020 strategy and Secretariat responsibilities must reflect FP2020's ambitions for MYE, to include direct support to YLOs as autonomous and influential stakeholders in the family planning movement, and articulating how Youth Focal Points will contribute to global and national progress in family planning. The work of Youth Focal Points is important, but not sufficient, and the Secretariat should also aim for long term change for youth as influencers outside individual representation.
- The work of the Secretariat must transition from MYE to MAYE so as to be inclusive of adolescents, especially very young adolescents aged 10-14. The experiences of VYAs are foundational to positive and negative behaviors and outcomes among older adolescents and youth. N.B. this is an area that the ASRH community as a whole needs to identify best practice.
- Advocate for the creation, institutionalization and sustainability of country structures and platforms for MYE in family planning and ensure space for youth to meaningfully contribute to the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs.
- Provide direct financial, mentoring, and capacity building support to Youth Focal Points and youth leaders, celebrate their accomplishments and facilitate bridge-building between YLOs, CSOs and government
- Facilitate networking among Youth Focal Points and to the wider youth movement on SRHR and SDGs.

Parting thoughts

FP2020 is at a transitory phase as it looks to what it has achieved on the road to 2020, and what the future of the partnership may hold. This is a critical juncture to codify adolescents and youth as a priority focus of the partnership; and to ensure a structure that is adequately staffed and funded to ensure MAYE is mainstreamed into the partnership. The groundwork has been laid for the full and inclusive engagement of adolescents and youth in the partnership and now presents the perfect opportunity to advance it.

Are you a youth leader or youth-led organization interested in engaging with FP2020?

We'd love to hear from you and learn more about your experience! Please get in touch with esullivan@familyplanning2020.org



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