



Photo: CSDS Vietnam

CO-CREATION IN YOUNG@HEART

Putting Young People at the Heart of Project Design, Implementation and Evaluation

The Young@Heart project used innovative methodology to put young women and men at the heart of project design, implementation and evaluation. The one-year pilot was implemented in Uganda and Vietnam and took a youth-centered approach – enabling young people to first identify the key issues limiting their potential, then to develop action plans and collaborate with others in the community to make a positive difference.

Youth participation approaches

Oxfam and partners began by undertaking a mapping exercise to understand where young people in Vietnam and Uganda were actively engaging in development initiatives. This informed the selection of youth-led organisations and young people for involvement in the project.

Young women and men were seen not as beneficiaries of Young@Heart, but as partners and collaborators. In partnership with young people, the project was designed around three main 'Labs': an Exploration Lab, an Innovation Lab and an Influencing Lab.

Exploration Lab: This aimed to identify young

people's specific concerns, desires and interests through activities such as community art classes, student debates and online competitions. By encouraging young people to express themselves through creative, non-formal means, a deeper understanding of their lifestyles, living conditions and concerns were captured.

Innovation Lab: Using the ideas and discoveries generated during the Exploration Lab phase, young people developed innovative concepts, formats and suggestions for partnership activities to raise the voice of youth on the issues they wanted to focus on. A selection of these were then submitted to receive funding from Oxfam and its partners in Vietnam and Uganda to turn them into a reality.

Influencing Lab: Young people attended skills-based influencing, campaigning and activism workshops and were encouraged to generate campaign and awareness-raising activities on their selected issues. In Uganda, this included advocacy around corruption, unemployment and poverty; while in Vietnam, young people chose to focus on access to sexual and reproductive health rights for ethnic minority communities, human trafficking in rural areas of the country, and sustainable agriculture.



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Participants during the community dialogue in Gulu district.
Photo: UYONET

Youth-led research: Young@Heart incorporated youth-led research by asking groups of young leaders to create and share their personal ‘Stories of Change’, which could then feed into advocacy and influencing. During the Exploration Lab, groups of young people were trained on monitoring and evaluation techniques, and were equipped with smart phones, cameras, voice recorders and survey questions. The young researchers interviewed their peers about the issues they felt were the most pressing, and asked them how they felt they could address or overcome these challenges and achieve change. This qualitative research contributed to a survey which was conducted on a larger sample of the youth population. The cumulative results helped to shape the focus of the issues young people wanted to tackle in Vietnam and Uganda.

Key youth participation successes

Creative workshops: The Exploration Lab was supported by an artist/designer who encouraged the young people to think more creatively about how to capture their personal experiences. Through the co-creative process, young people created their own art, theatre, debates and photography. This approach highlighted how using creative forms of self-expression increases young people’s confidence in using their voice to create social change. However, it was important for young people to be well supported during these activities, in light of cultural and other sensitivities. In Vietnam, for example, given the fragile political situation the Exploration Lab was found to be a positive way to engage several youth groups while helping young people feel supported to express themselves freely.

Innovation: The Exploration and Innovation Labs proved popular with young people in Vietnam and Uganda, and showcased their enormous potential and creativity. Through capacity building, young people developed skills and became more aware of how they can create change and tackle social justice issues in their country. Young people also took part in training on online activism and strengthened their communication and networking skills.

Lessons for others

Allow enough time: One year was too short an implementation time for the initiative; however, the pilot was conceived as a trial of a more comprehensive programme involving more countries globally. Due to lack of funding, the global programme did not materialise, but Young@Heart did support the development of Oxfam’s Youth as Active Citizens Community of Practice (Oxfam Affiliates working together on youth programming). Longer programme durations should be encouraged to ensure that young women and men can participate in a meaningful way and that their activities have a lasting impact.

Define the thematic focus: While the project intentionally didn’t have a specific social justice focus at the start (so that young people could choose their own focus areas), the team in Uganda felt that it would have been richer if a livelihoods focus had been determined from the very beginning. Indeed, it was found that where the project was more specific on the precise issues to be tackled, the quality of the workshops and seminars were better and the ideas, initiatives and actions taken by young people were more sustainable.

Have an exit strategy: A clear exit strategy wasn’t determined at the start of the project in either Vietnam or Uganda. Learning workshops and networks were formed throughout the project in both countries; however, a more strategic approach could have been taken to ensure the project’s longevity and impact. Young people should be consulted from the start and at interim points throughout the project lifecycle, to understand where the potential lies to maintain the project’s momentum after it has finished.

Ensure multi-level stakeholder engagement: The inclusion of state agencies, government actors, youth organisations and members of the wider community throughout the project, and in the design of a sustainability and exit plan, is essential to ensuring sustainable change on social justice issues.

This case study forms part of a series of case studies exploring how to go from programmes developed *for* young people, to working *with* them and on projects led *by* them.

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For further information on the issues raised in this case study please email IDavies@oxfam.org.uk, Christian.Tremblay@oxfam.org, or Robbert.vandeWaerd@oxfamnovib.nl.



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