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THEORY OF CHANGE CO-CREATED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth-led input to Oxfam's Youth Participation and Leadership Meta Theory of Change

Oxfam's [Youth Participation and Leadership Meta Theory of Change](#) bring together the views and expertise of youth activists from 16 countries, Oxfam programming, advocacy and campaigns staff, and theory of change experts. The design process was facilitated by Oxfam Australia through a series of co-creation workshops and consultations, and has been used as foundational reference for all Oxfam youth programming strategies.

Youth participation approaches

Oxfam held a series of workshops and consultation spaces with a range of stakeholders, including youth groups and networks, with the aim of co-creating the Theory of Change – including setting the objectives and outcomes for the project.

Workshop 1 – Oxfam Australia programming and public engagement staff: A preparatory survey was launched to gather different

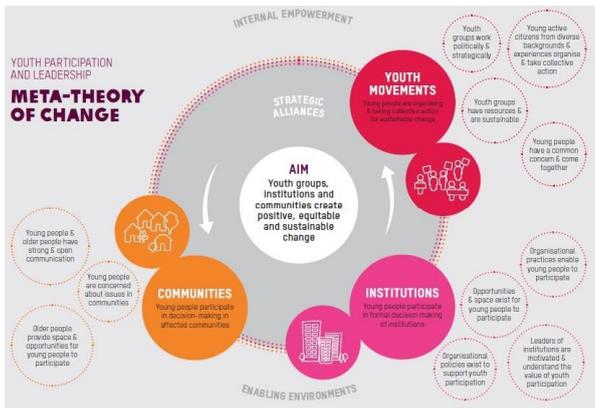
perspectives on the aim of working with young people and to generate ideas about how to design a strategy. The survey findings were collated and used in a two-hour Skype workshop, which was facilitated by the theory of change consultants, ActKnowledge.

A Theory of Change workshop was held with youth participants (under the age of 30) from Belgium, Brazil, Columbia, Egypt, Fiji, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, Spain and Sri Lanka. Discussions focused on the importance of working *with* (rather than *for*) young people, which became the aim of Oxfam Australia's youth engagement strategy.

Further analysis of the results of both the Theory of Change workshop and preparatory survey led to the initial identification of three routes (or 'paths') to support youth active citizenship to enable collective impact. The finalised paths, as they appear in the Theory of Change, are as follows:



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Youth Participation and Leadership Meta-Theory of Change taken from the Theory of Change Resource/Oxfam Australia

- Path A: Young women and young men participate in decision-making in affected communities.
- Path B: Young women and young men from different regions and fields are organising and taking collective actions.
- Path C: Young women and young men participate in formal decision-making in institutions.

Workshop 2 – Oxfam youth alumni and local activists, Mexico City: As part of an existing workshop of Oxfam youth alumni (young people who had previously participated in an Oxfam programme) taking place in Mexico City, 20 alumni (including LGBTIQ youth, indigenous youth and one young woman living with a disability) from 12 countries joined six activists based in Mexico City to contribute their perspectives and expertise to the Theory of Change design process.

Workshop 3 – Oxfam Australia public engagement staff, Sydney: A two-hour workshop was held with six Oxfam Australia public engagement staff. This workshop supported the development of the preconditions and assumptions behind the routes (or paths) to success in the Theory of Change.

Consolidation session with youth team staff and ActKnowledge consultants: The outcomes from Workshops 2 and 3 were synthesised by the Oxfam Australia Youth Team alongside the ActKnowledge consultants. This supported the more formal articulation of the three routes (or paths) as laid out in the final Theory of Change (listed above). A number of cross-cutting preconditions were also grouped into ‘capacity building’ and ‘enabling opportunities’.

Workshop 4 – Youth Food Movement (community-based youth-led network), Sydney: A session with two of the founding members of the Australian-based Youth Food Movement helped to expand the understanding of how youth movements operate and how they want and need to be supported, which was raised in Workshop 2.

Workshop 5 – Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese youth activists, north-east Cambodia: Held in the Ratanakiri province in the remote north-east of Cambodia, this workshop brought together a range of youth leaders from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Participants included rural and urban youth, young women and indigenous young people, all of whom were working to protect Cambodia’s natural resources. Alongside Oxfam staff in Cambodia, the Theory of Change workshop addressed Path A: ‘Ways in which young people can participate in decision-making in affected communities’.

Theory of Change infographic and narrative online feedback session: Oxfam Australia’s Youth Team wrote the narrative to accompany the visual representation of the final Theory of Change. Feedback on the narrative was given by all the previously consulted young people, ActKnowledge, a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning specialist, and Oxfam’s Senior Gender Advisor, and incorporated into the final narrative.

Key youth participation successes

There were several key factors which enabled young people to successfully lead and participate in the design and finalization of the Theory of Change. They included:

Capacity building: Young people were trusted and enabled to help the Oxfam Australia Youth Team design the Theory of Change, despite having no previous experience of project design or theory of change training. Some of the young people involved had never even attended a workshop before, yet helped to lead and facilitate the process.

Diversity: The wide range of stakeholders involved ensured that the views of young and older people, campaigners and community members – and their understandings of how change happens – are represented in the Theory of Change.

Time/cost-effectiveness: The Theory of Change design process did not occur in isolation to other activities. Using existing workshops (for example



the Mekong Regional Water Governance Program workshop in Ratanakiri) or meetings to add a session to develop a component of the Theory of Change allowed for a cost-effective, efficient way of reaching a diverse range of young people. To do this effectively, however, the session must be relevant to the workshop and meeting taking place, and the context and aims of the session must be clear.

Lessons for others

Adopt a variety of facilitation techniques: With the right support, anyone can participate in the programme design process. All participants in Workshops 4 and 5, and more than half the participants in Workshop 2 had never contributed to a theory of change before. Using pictures, resources such as post-it notes and stickers, as well as a trained facilitator for each small group, helped with the process. Using plain language is essential to ensure that all young people are able to understand what is required of them, and for them to then articulate and utilise a strong knowledge base as a means of contributing to the development of a wider strategy.

Enable youth-led design from the start: Young people are able and motivated to be part of project and programme design from the beginning, regardless of their previous experience. Co-creation assumes that everyone's knowledge and perspectives are of equal value and offer diverse insights into the project or programme that is being created, and that this strengthens the outcome. The approach works when power is distributed equally among participants and the facilitator. This can be achieved in several ways, for example by:

- Being explicit that everyone has knowledge and experience to offer;
- Providing enabling spaces for those who traditionally are without power;
- Continuously providing evidence that participant contributions are being listened to.

Create safe spaces and address diversity:

Designing enabling environments is key if young people are to share and participate freely, safely and meaningfully. Building trust, using appropriate language, addressing gender dynamics, and being responsive and adaptable to the different needs and priorities of the group – be that in a physical or virtual environment – are essential to ensuring open discussion.

Share the outcome with young people: Sending the final resource or product to those who have helped to co-create it ensures that they feel fully engaged and valued in the process. This closes the feedback loop and not only shows accountability, but also provides ongoing capacity building and feedback for the young people, helping to further boost their confidence.

Look for ways to increase time/cost-effectiveness:

As outlined above, the project made the most of existing opportunities and meetings to involve more participants and to maximise resources. Using digital technology even more effectively to reach a greater range of young people would have further increased the project's time- and cost-effectiveness.

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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This paper was written by Oxfam's Youth as Active Citizens Community of Practice. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Youth Policy and Programme Advisors across the confederation in its production. It is part of a series of case studies written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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