

# foundation BOTNAR

## Learnings from participatory programmes with young people

Fondation Botnar is dedicated to supporting initiatives that collaborate with young people to create a better future for them and with them. While we continue refining our strategies for effecting change and embark on our participatory journey, we prioritise supporting programmes and partners that work collaboratively with young people. Guided by our core values of curiosity, courage, and collaboration, we are open to learning from our partners in our efforts to engage with young people in meaningful ways.

We support programmes that use various participatory approaches, including consultation, collaboration and co-creation, and youth-led initiatives. Our partners have gained valuable insights into what works and doesn't when encouraging meaningful participation with young people. To learn more about these approaches, in 2023, we interviewed several of our supported programmes to identify commonalities in their practices.

The interviews revealed that the highlighted programmes share similar practices in engaging adolescents and youth. These programmes allow young people to make significant contributions and actively participate in initiatives. We identified ten commonalities in these practices to share with our community to encourage further collaboration and innovation.

**Collaborative intention:** From the outset, young people are intended to significantly influence many aspects of the programmes, not only in one phase or one entry point.

**Funded planning phase:** There is sufficient time and resources for planning phases to enable relationship building between young people and others, often by first aligning through context mapping activities.

**Iterative programme design:** There are multiple opportunities for iteration, protecting against a small group of young people having an outsized influence over the direction.

**Staffing:** Teams often hire specific staff(s) responsible for youth participation, sometimes young people themselves.

**Collective partnership model:** Most programmes often aim to create change through collaborations; there are often specific youth-led spaces/partners within a larger multi-stakeholder partnership model.

**Formal and informal youth roles:** Young people often have formalised (terms of reference, compensation, regular input, and co-ownership) and informal roles (one-off events or online meet-ups).

**Varied participatory practices:** All forms of meaningful participatory practices are employed - youth-led, consultation, and co-creation; rarely was only one approach utilised.

**Complimentary capacity building:** skills development, mentorship, or training is provided, often including training for non-youth on how to work with young people.

**Feedback:** Most have a way for young people to provide feedback on the quality of their experience, often via anonymous and open formats.

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion:** Aiming to reach diverse young people unless specifically designed with a specific group. Some had support to help ensure this (meals, transport, data packages, translation, and/or compensation).

In addition to identifying commonalities in practices that help deepen participation, grant partners revealed that two areas remain challenging: strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and determining how to scale while maintaining quality participation. Overall, these learnings stressed the importance of giving young people influence over initiatives and providing dedicated resources and support for their participation. By supporting collaborative, iterative, and diverse approaches to engagement, young people can be supported as equal partners to create positive change in their communities and beyond.

# #RIGHTSClick

## What's the purpose of the programme?

[RIGHTS Click](#) imagines a world where children and young people are able to claim their rights in the digital world, in a way that protects their health and wellbeing. It calls on governments and technology companies to respect children and young people's rights online and be held to account when they do not. Our vision is a world where online platforms are safe, supportive spaces for children and young people connect, mobilise and learn.

## How are young people involved?

**Framing:** In the overall framework of the Programme, children and young people are understood as leaders and agents of change, and not "beneficiaries." Young people, in all their diversity, actively participate in shaping, delivering and evaluating the Programme, from joint decision-making to leading projects on campaigning and research.

**Structures & Systems:** RIGHTS Click has set up governance structures to facilitate child youth participation in the steering of the programme: [Digital Rights Champions](#) are a strategic group of 12 children and young leaders who shape the strategy of the Programme, and are also experts in key areas from research to advocacy. They are represented from the three countries on the Programme, Argentina, Kenya and the Philippines, as well as global representation from key youth leaders campaigning for digital rights.

## What does this programme do to help ensure good quality participation?

**Staff Responsible for Participation:** the Global Children & Youth Team within Amnesty International has experienced staff responsible for ensuring quality youth participation.

**Backed-up by Strategy:** RIGHTS Click is in alignment with and even builds upon an organization-wide strategy and by tools developed by young people in the Amnesty movement focused on protecting young people's wellbeing.

**Protected Budget:** Securing the initiative's participation budget has proven critical in the set-up stage. Adjustments to the budget to ensure fuller accessibility are being assessed.

**Offerings to Young People:** During early stages, children and young people identified criteria to make their participation in governance meaningful. Some identified priorities included access, language, preparation time and materials length. Non-financial compensation was chosen to be leadership coaching, membership to larger Youth networks, and a certificate of participation. Financial compensation beyond cost reimbursement is being explored with safeguards and wellbeing in mind.

**Training for Non-Youth:** The programme recognises that the right knowledge, skills and attitudes among non-youth power holders are critical. The Global Children and Youth Team provides coaching and guidance to other colleagues working with young people and creating youth-inclusive spaces.

## What's still a challenge?

**Child Participation & Language Justice:** RIGHTS Click aims to collaborate with children (under 18) as well as young people (18-24) in multiple countries and languages. The systems are starting to be in place, but to date, only a few participants are under 18, and few languages (English and Spanish) are supported. The intention is to build this out at a pace that can ensure quality and safeguards.

**Going Beyond Advisory:** Creating space for creative or new ideas from young people (beyond just guidance or advice on adult-led ideas) requires a safe and creative group dynamic. This dynamic will be nurtured through trust and relationship building over time, so that the Children and Youth Steering Group can have more agency over decision-making.



## What's the purpose of the programme?

Today, young people account for 60% of Africa's unemployment. To help close the youth unemployment gap, Yoma (Youth Agency Marketplace), a digital marketplace co-developed with young people from across Africa, offers a variety of free online opportunities to youth to promote skills development, community engagement, and employment. The platform connects young people to opportunities provided by an ecosystem partners. Critical to including more marginalised young people, Yoma is a low-data solution that is actively exploring a zero rating (applies a price of zero for data traffic).

## How are young people involved?

**Design phase:** From the start, the intention was for young people to develop the concept, determine the direction, and have decision-making power throughout. In practice, this was enabled through a funded multi-stage design phase where young people defined problems and developed solutions through surveys and in-person workshops. As a result of this design phase, including co-creation sessions with young Africans organised by UNICEF and Fondation Botnar, Yoma was launched.

**Implementation phase:** As the initiative moved into the implementation stage, young people were hired as staff within the Yoma Global Management and Operations teams. The operations team is now exclusively young people and is now hosted by Rlabs, the youth community partner of Yoma. A Youth Council was also recruited to guide staff as Yoma develops further. Beyond the staff and council, larger groups of young people provide inputs as content creators on the platform and through UNICEF's SMS-based U-report.

**Going forward:** Yoma is exploring how to best define the decision-making authority of young staff and council, roll out in new countries in collaboration with youth-led organisations, and assess the impact in collaboration with young people. Through these developments, Yoma intends to maintain the engagement of young people through transparent collaborations that improve diversity of representation.

## What does this programme do to help ensure good quality participation?

**Defining and Applying Values:** Through a collaborative "values-based engineering" process, young people identified collaboration and fairness as particularly critical to Yoma's success. These values grounded decision-making and data protection when the platform voting process was developed.

**Formal Roles:** A youth council and youth staff were recruited to deepen participation from input gathering to decision-making. Youth staff and the Youth Council are actively assessing how to best make decisions transparently based on a large amount of information gathered from hundreds of young people online to make decisions transparently.

**Package of Support:** To support the Youth Council for their critical input, members receive certificates acknowledging their active participation, opportunities for training, mentorship, and tokens that can be exchanged for goods such as airtime and gift vouchers. As the initiative expands implementation into additional countries, the use of tokens and other global incentives will be assessed.

## What's still a challenge?

**Volume of Ideas:** Collaborating with many young people means that ideas are abundant. It is challenging to thoughtfully prioritise through a fair process, as the grounding values require. For now, online input and feedback surveys, followed by staff synthesis and discussion among the Youth Council, are how priorities are surfaced.

**"Professionalising" Youthful Thinking:** Through this process, there is also the risk of "professionalising" the more creative, out-of-the-box ideas. This is understood as a threat to youth participation. Yoma is trying to protect against this while being realistic about what is required to move from ideation to implementation to evaluation.

**Connectivity Realities:** Most exchanges are made virtually (with some exceptions), but connectivity remains a systemic challenge. For now, this is simply a reality of the environment, and the solution is to be flexible and understanding when young people can't connect. The project is also exploring offering data packages to the Youth Council.

## What's the purpose of the programme?

The Tanga City Observatory, as part of TangaYetu under the OurCity Initiative, works to improve the use of technologies for data collection for city development in Tanga. It is a platform for data-driven analysis to inform decisions and interventions in the city. Students are trained on using frontier technologies and, among others, use their new skills to monitor and improve solid waste management and city safety mapping.

## How are young people involved?

**Started with an open call:** It all began with an open call, offering free training to young people on desirable skills, including data collection. Participants were supported with food and transportation in hopes of limiting the impact of financial constraints on involvement. While further engagement beyond the training was encouraged, it was not mandatory. However, the overwhelming majority of the young people who underwent the training chose to deepen their involvement over time, seizing the opportunities as they evolved.

**Shifted to formalised roles:** From that initial group trained, 20+ participants decided to formalise as a youth-led organisation\* that now has partnerships and contracts with local and international organisations. They are focused on creating a greater understanding of young people's lives through data collection, analysis and visualisation.

*\*Called OKOA MAISHA KWA TAKWIMU (OMaT) which means Save Lives with Data.*

## What does this programme do to help ensure good quality participation?

**Priming others to collaborate with youth:** To prime non-youth stakeholders for a true partnership with young people, time was spent building relationships and understanding the value of young people's contributions in advance of introducing young people as key partners. This proved highly valuable as the data collected by young people was taken seriously by government bodies and is used to inform decision-making.

**Building highly desirable hard skills** among young people, especially in data collection, helped to ensure that young people could have a clear role, hold significant responsibility, and feel confident they were contributing in a way that was recognised as highly valuable to the overall success of the community.

## What's still a challenge?

**Diversity and inclusion:** While there is a strong gender balance among the young people involved in the data collection, other aspects of diversity, for example, how well young people with disabilities are able to lead in data collection, are largely limited. This is currently being explored.



# Safe & Sound Cities



## What's the purpose of the programme?

S<sup>2</sup>Cities aims to improve young people's safety and wellbeing in urban environments. This is done by bringing together young people with urban planners, government officials, and other key decision-makers to make deep systematic changes that enable safer cities.

## How are young people involved?

**Define the Problem & Selecting Solutions:** In six growing cities, Bandung (Indonesia), Envigado (Colombia), Naga and Baguio (Philippines) and Ambato and Cuenca (Ecuador), local organisations partnered with young people to first understand the safety and security challenges in their city from their perspective. Based on the challenges identified, young people collaborated with others (urban planners, government officials, etc.) to develop and pilot innovative solutions.

**Multiple Entry Points for Engagement:** There were multiple ways young people could influence the direction of the initiative. Some opportunities required more intensive commitment, like joining a decision-making group of young people to reflect on priorities, develop skills, and design interventions, budgets and implementation plans, among other critical activities. While other opportunities were more limited in scope but larger in scale, like attending a hackathon or completing worldwide surveys alongside hundreds of young people. Using varied approaches helped protect against any one phase or group having an outsized influence. However, identifying the right approach for the right stage remains a critical reflection point as the initiative expands.

## What does this programme do to help ensure good quality participation?

**City Agreement to Collaborate:** Securing official city government commitment to collaborate with young people via a partnership agreement is part of the Safe and Sound process. Documenting this commitment helps to set mutual understanding among all stakeholders from the start. The agreement also has the potential to support accountability at later stages.

**Relationship Building:** Beyond formal agreements, S<sup>2</sup>Cities believes in the power of investing in relationships for long-term systems change. Taking inspiration from relational theories, including Mental Mode Models and Theory U, and contextualising them to the needs and desires of local stakeholders, when applied, has helped to enable mutual understanding among diverse stakeholders, especially between local governments and young people.

**Localised implementation:** the methodologies for carrying out programme activities are decided by local implementing partners and are contextualised to respond to local needs and opportunities. Although stakeholders across all programme cities engage in the same types of activities, allowing for learning exchange and scalability, the exact methodologies are tailored to each local context to ensure relevance and impact.

**Staffing:** implementing partners include youth-led organisations. Locally, teams often hire specific staff(s) responsible for youth participation, often young people themselves.

**Capacity building:** skills development, mentorship, or training is provided as a dedicated component of programme activities and also woven throughout implementation.

## What's still a challenge?

**Youth Leadership at the Strategy Level:** There was strong engagement and leadership of young people in the programmatic design and pilot implementation phases. However, their inclusion in more strategic decision-making was limited in the initial phase. As the initiative expands to more settings, developing a mechanism for collaborative strategic decision-making with young people is a near-term priority.

**Feedback Loops:** Focusing on relationships while developing feedback loops has been an evolving process. Feedback has been collected via a survey and some focus group discussions (which were highly valued but limited). Going forward, the aim is for further feedback processes that are anonymous and open to be more formalised and integrated into the design across all cities.