DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

SHIFTING THE POWER:

Mikanto, young researcher from Madagascar

What will it take to do development differently?

A research series led by young people in Iraq, Lebanon, Madagascar and Uganda

Introduction

Without the power of young people, we don't stand a chance of delivering a just and sustainable future for all. We need an effective youth civil society to mobilise and connect young people and communities, and yet traditional approaches to development continue to ignore the power of young people as capable agents of change. The knowledge, leadership and capacity of young people, youth networks and civil society must be recognised and strengthened if we are to see transformative change.

In 2019, research conducted by the Development Alternative consortium found that youth civil society is under threat - it is only managing to survive rather than thrive. 'Towards a Thriving, Credible and Sustainable Youth Civil Society' showed that youth civil society organisations (CSOs) are fragile in their resourcing, not seen as core assets to development partners and are therefore often unable to operate effectively. Today, the barriers to civil society effectiveness have significantly increased because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Youth CSOs have a vital role to play in responding to and recovering from the impacts of COVID-19, yet they are facing heightened challenges to operate and deliver their work, and for many organisations their very survival is ever more at risk.

Following our preliminary research in 2019, we set out to identify, with civil society partners, what can be done to enable a thriving global civil society sector, and how organisations can lead this change across four main areas:

Funding & Resourcing

Leadership

Organisational Capacity

Connection & Collaboration

Solutions for effective collaboration between youth CSOs and development partners do exist. But the potential of youth civil society will remain untapped unless power holders in the development sector **question and expand entrenched understandings of "expertise", how to build and maintain "trust" and what constitutes "leadership".** The findings captured in this short research series offer a way forward for governments, donors and other development actors to come together with youth civil society organisations and do development differently.

Why youth-led research?

This research was designed and led by young researchers from Iraq, Lebanon, Madagascar and Uganda, allowing young people themselves to ask the right questions based on their priorities, collect stronger data through a deeper rapport, and generate better insights on the issues affecting youth-civil society today.

> **❝ WHO KNOWS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE, IF NOT YOUNG PEOPLE. ❞**
> MIALY, YOUTH RESEARCHER FROM MADAGASCAR.

What's next?

The Development Alternative will collaborate towards a more **sustainable, relevant and responsible youth CSO sector**, one that is better able to have an equal voice within the wider development sector. We will do this by **delivering evidence and research** to help us and our partners understand how to support a thriving youth civil society and challenge traditional models of development. Watch out for the launch of our first ever State of Youth Civil Society Report in July 2020. This report will explore the resilient realities of youth civil society at a global level and specifically how youth civil society is affected by Covid19, and highlight the support youth CSOs need from development actors to ensure a rapid, resilient and just recovery from the pandemic.

If you would like to find out more about this research and the work of the Development Alternative, please contact: Belen@restlessdevelopment.org

SHIFTING THE POWER:

Emmanuel, young researcher from Uganda

What will it take to fund and resource youth CSO differently?

We investigated the root causes behind youth CSOs just surviving, not thriving, and we learned that **with enough and consistent flexible funding CSOs can deliver the programming they want to.** In this brief we explore how to break down the main barriers to an empowered and well-resourced youth CSO.

Breakdown of funding sources for youth organisations:

- **25%** Sub-granted by other organisations (e.g. INGOs)
- **20.8%** Private funders (e.g. trusts and foundations)
- **20.8%** Self-funded
- **18.1%** Bilateral/multilateral donors (e.g. DFID, USAID, GIZ, UN, EU...)
- Private donations (e.g. from individuals or members)
- Corporate partners
- Use of a social enterprise model
- National or local government
- Other

This graph shows there is no one predominant way for organisations to get their funding. Among the least common funding sources, however, is "use of a social enterprise model", "national or local government" and "corporate partners". How can we better leverage these opportunities to support a better-resourced youth CSO?

We found that...

Short-term, non-continuous funding is the norm, and few organisations have experience in funding for longer periods than 6 months to 1 year. Worsened by gaps between funding cycles, short-term funding impacts the sustainability of youth CSOs, their ability to retain staff and talent, and manage core costs.

Despite allowing for a more effective use of resources (and less time dedicated to fundraising), **longer funding still inhibits the freedom to determine where to spend funding based on need,** and is only part of the answer.

Building relationships goes beyond compliance and one-way accountability, and despite these being the foundations to strong donor rapport, they need to be nurtured by detailed communication and two-way transparency between donor and youth organisation.

Organisations have a lot of appetite to **explore new ways of securing funding,** but face resourcing and capacity gaps. They are not clear on what alternative strategies are and even less certain of how to implement them.

How can we do it differently?

Organisations want <u>more</u> (and not less) interaction with donors so they can better understand the realities of youth civil society, as well as more freedom to make decisions and be the brains, not just the faces, of development initiatives.

To address structural resourcing challenges among youth CSOs, such as poor staff retention driven by disparity in pay rates with INGOs and the impossibility of offering better contracts, donors and INGOs must **change funding structures to better value (and compensate) the expertise of national organisations.**

Donors must review restrictions on existing funds and **support flexible funding streams that enable organisational growth in strategic areas,** as well as skill building and staff retention opportunities.

Now more than ever before, **a more diverse group of funders must prioritise investment in innovative, scalable and creative alternative funding models** (such as social entrepreneurship) to support youth CSOs sustainability and break the cycle of persistent donor dependency.

" **FLEXIBLE FUNDING ALLOWS THE STAFF TO COME UP WITH DRAFT AND UNTESTED IDEAS, SOME OF WHICH GAVE BIRTH TO SOME OF OUR MOST PROMISING PROJECTS SUCH AS OUR HUMAN RIGHTS AND ELECTIONS TRACKER.** "
FROM A YOUTH-LED ORGANISATION IN UGANDA.

![Development Alternative logo]

SHIFTING THE POWER:

Joseph from Uganda, Ziyad from Iraq and Mohammad from Lebanon

What will it take to lead youth CSO differently?

We investigated the root causes behind youth CSOs just surviving, not thriving, and we learned that while leadership journeys are complex and varied within CSOs, this **diversity can be harnessed towards more inclusive and dynamic types of leadership within the sector.** This brief explores how to support leadership structures that multiply leaders within youth CSOs.
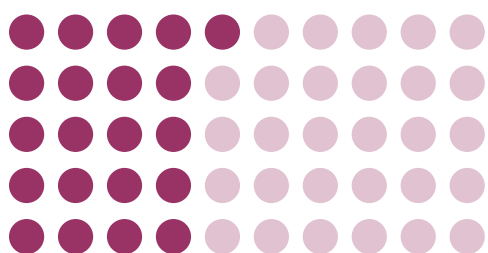
41.7%
of youth CSOs don't provide leadership development opportunities on a regular basis
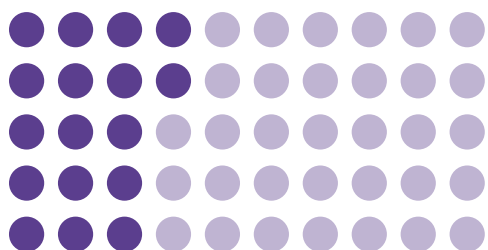
34.7%
of youth CSOs have not figured out their succession planning

The graphs above show how, despite not representing the majority of youth CSOs, a large number of organisations can be supported to develop their succession planning, and to build the leadership of junior team members.

We found that…

Well rounded leadership is seen as key, as the best leaders are not necessarily experts but have a mix of soft (ie. communications, interpersonal) and technical (ie. financial, project management) skills - though the former matters more than the latter.

To become a leader you must first know the 'right people'. While some leaders make their way up, most either found organisations or have the right relationships - both with organisations and other leaders in the sector - to help them grow. For those without relationships this may present a specific barrier to grow into leadership roles in the sector.

There is a **distinction between 'leadership' as an activity and 'leader' as an identity .** We found that while most leaders see "leadership" as something anyone could do, other members of their teams saw 'leadership' as something restricted to a small group of people - to those who hold leadership as an identity.

Whose 'expertise' count is a matter of where they come from. We found a shared sense that those with experience and credentials developed through external (and international) opportunities, are perceived as having greater "expertise" than those who built their experience through internal opportunities for growth. This finding again speaks to power imbalances within the sector and how heavily entrenched are notions of "international as 'expert'" and "national as 'implementer'".

How can we do it differently?

If development actors want others in the sector to share the view that 'everyone can be a leader' at their own right in youth organisations, we must **address prevalent, one-dimensional notions of "who gets to be a leader?" and "what does it mean to be a leader?"**; or face perpetuating a culture of elitism and inaccessibility in current models of youth leadership.

Civil society needs to continue to speak truth to power in our sector, and power holders within it need to address how **working through external spaces and top-down capacity development negatively impacts leadership** - restricting opportunities for relationship building and growth.

While capacity strengthening in leadership should combine soft and technical skills, the focus should be on **building leadership journeys within organisations**, ensuring trickle down effects, succession planning and inclusion.

> " **PEOPLE AT THE TOP SAY EVERYONE IS A LEADER BUT THAT PERSPECTIVE IS NOT SHARED BY THOSE THAT ARE AT OTHER LEVELS.** "
> JOSEPH, YOUNG RESEARCHER FROM UGANDA.

UKaid
from the British people

SHIFTING THE POWER:

How to strengthen organisational capacity differently?

We investigated the root causes behind youth CSOs just surviving, not thriving, and we learned that **with tailored and needs-based support that recognises the diversity of organisational ambition,** youth CSOs will be able to truly play a leadership role in the sector and do the work they want to. This brief unpacks how to leverage internal, diverse learning spaces and maximise capacity strengthening opportunities.

How to support youth CSOs bridge capacity gaps in their organisation:
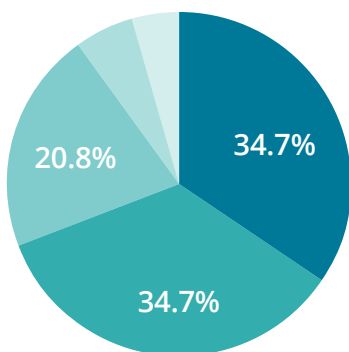
- 34.7% — Access to capacity building from external providers
- 34.7% — Funding for capacity building
- 20.8% — A platform to share learning with other organisations/networks/movements
- Knowing where I can access capacity building
- Dedicated time for capacity building

This graph shows that capacity issues are not a matter of lack of time or a lack of awareness of where to access capacity building. It's mostly an issue of funding (for the things they need/want to do) and seeking access to external expertise (the latter often perceived as something that lives outside individual organisations).

We found that…

"Capacity building" is widely understood as coming from external (international) spaces, largely framed by donor compliance requests and Western INGO standards of what a 'good' organisation looks like, without considering the diversity of learning spaces and moments to be leveraged within organisations. And while external perspectives are perceived as more valuable, youth CSOs want capacity support to be **designed around a detailed assessment of their needs.**

There are numerous, complex and simultaneous capacity needs for organisations, but no clear sense of prioritisation. It would be potentially irrelevant to identify what capacity needs organisations should target first, as these depend on each organisation's work area.

While youth CSOs might not know which content areas to prioritise, they are **clear on a hierarchy of capacity needs**: organisational needs > role-specific individual needs > individual learning.

How can we do it differently?

Capacity strengthening support and funding for youth civil society **must be reprioritised and move away from "one size fits all", donor-mandated capacity strengthening.** Instead, it should be a tailored and needs-based mix of 'core skills' for programme delivery (ie. fundraising, financial management, project management, and MEL) and specialised skills (ie.advocacy, communications, research), and support CSOs identify other capacity gaps to deliver better work.

There is an appetite for capacity support to be **transformative (and not compliance-focused and enable CSOs to have an equal voice** within the wider development sector.

Understandings of "capacity strengthening" in the CSO sector need to be widened to include internal loops of learning within organisations, and **stop perpetuating notions of capacity support as external opportunities.**

" **EXPOSURE TO OTHER LEARNING AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMS WITH ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS WILL HELP US GROW AND BE MORE EFFECTIVE.** "
FROM A GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION IN ZIMBABWE.

SHIFTING THE POWER:
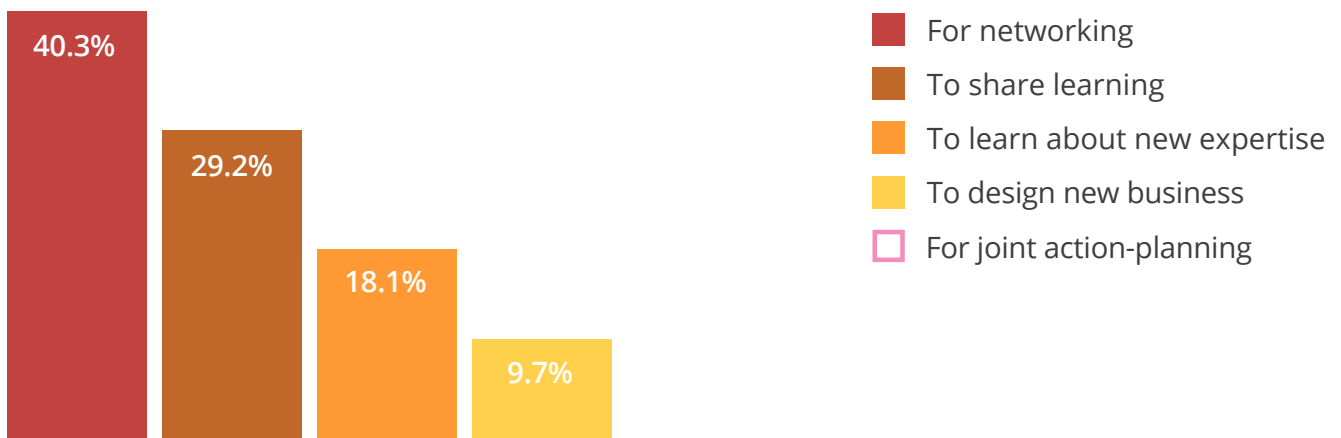
Mikanto and Mialy, young researchers from Madagascar

How to build connection and collaboration differently?

We investigated the root causes behind youth CSOs just surviving, not thriving, and we learned that **youth CSOs are keen to explore alternative ways to collaborate more effectively together.** This brief unpacks where and how youth CSOs are connecting with each other, what are the spaces and platforms they are using, what works well and what doesn't.

What are collaboration spaces used for?

40.3%

29.2%

18.1%

9.7%

- For networking
- To share learning
- To learn about new expertise
- To design new business
- For joint action-planning

The graph above shows how different spaces to foster connection and collaboration are currently used by youth civil society.

We found that...

Building trust and transparency are important for creating strong and lasting relationships. These attributes need to be established at the beginning of a new partnership and be formalised, for example through an MOU, clearly defining roles and expectations.

Most youth CSOs want collaborations that last for 3 - 5 years and outlive programme's funding cycle. However, funding limitations and short funding cycles are a real constraint to ensuring strong collaborations, as without resources and time it is challenging to build relationships.

Funding opportunities determine who to collaborate with and on what terms. Youth CSOs often want to make decisions about how to connect and collaborate differently, but the rules for collaboration (ie. with whom, how and on what) are often set by donors and INGO, based on donor strategic priorities, partnerships and funding opportunities they offer.

Establishing more diverse and productive spaces for connecting are important. While there are a number of virtual spaces for youth CSOs to interact, physical spaces to connect are fewer, less frequent (quarterly or biannual) and often far from where most of the work is delivered. Yet there is an appetite to question the potential and usability of existing spaces, before creating new ones to increase connection.

How can we do it differently?

Donors and INGOs must co-develop partnership standards at the outset of programme design, based on mutual trust, shared expectations, and agreed roles. The process must be co-owned to ensure a greater sense of horizontality, relevance and decision-making power by all partners. This will help to foster and maintain longer term partnerships beyond funding cycles.

Decisions on partnerships should also be mutually beneficial and agreed jointly with donors, as well as productive and meaningful to organisations. Activities, like partnership or influence mapping, can help donors and youth CSOs identify which collaborations are the most relevant and strategic from both perspectives.

Building connection and collaboration is not just about creating more spaces; it is about **revisiting how spaces are structured and how they can be expanded to achieve more, be more accessible and more relevant.** How can we move beyond simply "sharing" and into "delivering and thinking" together? A deeper conversation should be held in the sector about who needs to own and drive responsibility in such spaces.

"WE COLLABORATED WITH TWO OTHER ORGANISATIONS FOR A TRAINING OF TRAINERS WITH LOCAL LEADERS AND OTHER COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS. THE PROGRAM WENT SO WELL BECAUSE WE USED OUR DIFFERENT EXPERTISE IN A PRODUCTIVE WAY." FROM A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATION IN ZIMBABWE.