



# Shifting power to young people

– How young people  
can lead and  
drive solutions in  
humanitarian action

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## **Shifting Power to Young People**

– How young people can lead and drive solutions in humanitarian action,  
ActionAid & Restless Development, 2019

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This report is written by Annie Hoban, Jenny Bowie, Lois Aspinall, Rachel Litster and Rachel Proefke with contributions from youth researchers Mohamed B Bah, Abu Bakarr Jalloh, Reena Shakya and Suzeena Shrestha as well as young people from across the world. Particular thanks goes to the many ActionAid and Restless Development teams that contributed, including Milima Dangol, Sallieu Timbo, Dinesh Gurung, David Habba, Zynab Kamara, Khin Win Khyi, Lafir Mohamed, Clement Chesire, Will Gray, Amani Mustafa, Mai Al-Qaisi, Abdul Alim, Tanjir Hossein, Claire Grant, Carol Angir, Rebecca Murphy, Grace Ileri, Francisco Yermo, Katherine Robinson, Kate Carroll, Paras Tamang, Anjana Luitel and Mary Ndiritu, Hammam Masri, Sesheeni Joud Selvaratnam, Chikondi Chabvuta and Sonya Ruparel.

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COVER PHOTO: **Dalia, a 18-year-old girl**, standing in her family' house in Gaza, where her and the rest of the family almost got killed by a fire from their candles. The electricity supply in Gaza is sporadic and often lasts between four and six hours a day. Children are badly affected by the blackouts. Many cannot study and are scared to go to the bathroom in the dark. People in Gaza have resorted to using candles, but this has resulted in many fires where residents, including children, have died.

PHOTO: CELIA PETERSON/ACTIONAID

# Table of contents

<b>5</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Purpose and partnership</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Common vulnerabilities identified by young people in protracted crisis and emergencies</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Key lessons for meaningful engagement of young people in humanitarian action</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Supporting young women’s leadership in emergencies and protracted crisis</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>Engaging young people throughout the key stages of the humanitarian cycle</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>1. Mitigate and prepare</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>2. Immediate response</b>
<b>32</b>	<b>3. Rebuild and build community resilience</b>
<b>36</b>	<b>Influence and accountability</b>
<b>39</b>	<b>Conclusion and recommendations</b>
<b>39</b>	<b>Recommendations for meaningful engagement of young people</b>
<b>40</b>	<b>Recommendations for supporting young women’s leadership</b>
<b>42</b>	<b>Recommendations for working with young people in mitigation and preparedness</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>Recommendations for working with young people in the immediate response</b>
<b>45</b>	<b>Recommendations for working with young people to rebuild their lives and build community resilience</b>
<b>46</b>	<b>Recommendations for working with young people to hold decision-makers accountable</b>
<b>48</b>	<b>Annex 1 Sources cited or consulted</b>
<b>52</b>	<b>Annex 2 End notes</b>





**“In Myanmar we were so silent.** We couldn’t talk. We couldn’t move. We had no freedom. But here I can talk to staff, to other girls. I am enjoying the freedom that I have only just found. And it’s up to me to help other girls keep that freedom, because it is so important. “ Samiun, a 20-year-old Rohingya refugee woman, was a child bride and married at just 13. She now has two children. Samiun has been attending ActionAid’s women-friendly spaces in Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh, and is a leading storyteller in the interactive theatre, warning other girls about the dangers of child marriage.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE ROSS/ACTIONAID

# Executive summary

**»Be decision-makers? Can young people do this? We didn't realise. We would like to be doing this more and make more decisions, lead more changes.«**  
Young focus group participant, Jordan

Today, half the global population is under 30 years old.<sup>1</sup> With an increase in the frequency and severity of natural hazards, disease outbreaks and man-made crises, young people should be at the centre of how the humanitarian system responds to crises. But the impact of crises on young people, and young women in particular, is often overlooked, as is their power as capable agents of change during emergencies and protracted crises.

Engaging young people in humanitarian action is however not a matter of *if* but *how*. Through interaction with close to 400 young people across 54 countries, this report concludes that young people, and particularly young women, are severely affected by emergencies and protracted crises – and are key players in ‘building back better’ for themselves and their communities.

Drawing on lessons and best practice from crises and emergencies across the world, the report emphasises that engaging young people in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery will bring better, more localised and more accountable responses. However, this report also displays how young people face particular vulnerabilities and marginalisation connected to their age and identities, which may negatively affect their entire lives if not carefully identified and addressed as part of humanitarian action.

## Our findings:

- **Young people can be doubly disadvantaged in protracted crises and emergencies and their needs must be considered through an intersectional lens.** Young people are impacted by crises and disasters in many different ways depending on their relationship with power and privilege, and intersecting identities including race, gender, sexual identity, class, religion, physical ability and refugee status. There are some factors unique to young people – at the stage when they transition from dependence to independence – that combine to exclude them from existing power structures and prevent them from accessing support. To strengthen the response, needs assessments should therefore be intersectional and engage young people.

- **Young women should be at the centre of humanitarian action and be supported in their participation and leadership in responses.** The humanitarian system is dominated by patriarchy and often fails to listen to, be accountable to, and be accessible to women of all ages, including young women. Strengthening young women's participation and leadership at all levels before, during and after emergencies, is crucial to advance localisation in an inclusive and effective manner. Maximising the role that young women play in response means not just supporting them to design action plans, but also to lead on their implementation. Doing so ensures continuity in response and challenges existing perceptions on who is best positioned to lead action in communities, reinforcing the potential of young women and men.
- **Missed education, poor mental health and sexual violence are urgent challenges facing young people, and must be prioritised and mitigated.** Young people in crises experience suffering, trauma and negative coping mechanisms that can have severe repercussions for their immediate and long-term wellbeing. Missed education, mental health problems and sexual violence (including a prevalence of early marriage) were found to be of particular concern, but often not considered priorities on humanitarian agendas. Young women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence and negative coping mechanisms including early marriage. To mitigate this crisis within a crises, young women's rights and leadership, including women-led protection mechanisms, must have top priority.
- **Young people are first responders and must be included in decision-making and leadership positions at every stage of humanitarian action.** Power dynamics too often exclude young people from decision-making spaces and reduce young people to being seen as mere labour or victims. It is essential to ensure youth representation on existing decision-making structures (for example community disaster preparedness committees), but also to support youth-led initiatives to be better recognised and integrated with existing decision-making processes and protocols.
- **Young people are uniquely placed to play a valuable and necessary role in citizen-led accountability initiatives, and must be put in the driving seat for accountability.** Due to young people's higher levels of education than the previous generation, as well as their networks within the community, eagerness to question the status quo and innovative approaches e.g. using social media and technology to campaign and raise awareness, there are significant advantages to young people taking forward accountability work to ensure open, transparent and effective governance in emergency and crisis settings.

When young people live through emergencies and protracted crises, their lives will be forever changed as opportunities are lost and life projections diverted. The transformative nature of emergencies and protracted crises must be channelled in ways that ensure this negative impact is limited as much as possible and allows young people to be involved in leading and driving initiatives that directly affect their lives.

Fortunately, young people are increasingly seen as key partners and leaders in emergencies and protracted crises, for example in the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace & Security<sup>2</sup> and the Compact on Young People in Humanitarian Action signed at the World Humanitarian Summit (2016).<sup>3</sup>

The time is now to build on this momentum and engage a wider group of practitioners and policymakers to create a more effective, responsive and accountable humanitarian system – and to support the world’s largest ever youth population to create more peaceful, resilient, just and equal societies.





**Johanne Moise, 28**, has been a leader in her community in the village of Jacquet, Haiti, for ten years. When Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti in 2016, she used her experience and worked with other women to organise their community and lead the emergency response. "We visit everyone, because the hurricane hit everyone", she says.  
PHOTO: DYLAN ROBERTS/FREESOCIETY/ACTIONAID



# Introduction

Of the 1.8 billion young people in the world,<sup>4</sup> 90% live in developing countries, and it is estimated that over 600 million are currently living in fragile and conflict-affected settings.<sup>5</sup> Being young and female is one of the most dangerous risk factors in emergencies, where young women are vulnerable to early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, rape and trafficking.<sup>6</sup> Young people are also marginalised in multiple different ways depending on their intersecting identities including race, religion, gender, sexual identity, geography, physical ability, refugee status, caste and class, all of which exclude them from existing power structures and prevent them from accessing the support and decision-making spaces they urgently need.

Young people are not just passively affected by crisis and disaster. They have the agency and capacity to lead in the response as well as in the recovery that follows. While development and humanitarian approaches still too often ignore the power of young people as capable agents of change, young people's role in leading and shaping humanitarian response and recovery is increasingly recognised as necessary, not optional – not least to strengthen the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

From the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace & Security<sup>7</sup> to the Youth Compact signed at the World Humanitarian Summit,<sup>8</sup> young people are seen as key partners and leaders in emergencies and protracted crises. To support the world's greatest ever youth population to create more peaceful, resilient, just and equal societies in the face of increasing disasters and uncertainty, we must challenge negative power dynamics and respond more appropriately to the needs of young people, engage with them more strategically in humanitarian action, and support their leadership to drive solutions and transform their societies.

## Purpose and partnership

This report identifies lessons and good practice to shift power to young people in humanitarian action. The findings come from a collaboration between ActionAid and Restless Development.

ActionAid puts women at the forefront of all its humanitarian action.<sup>9</sup> It does this by taking a feminist lens to interrogate uneven and patriarchal power structures and root causes driving vulnerabilities; promoting leadership of the most affected but underrepresented and marginalised women; building on local insight, talent and capacity; and putting participation and accountability at the heart of humanitarian practice. ActionAid has a wealth and variety of experience in engaging young women and young men in development and humanitarian work globally. There is now a desire to understand more systematically what members are doing across the board to mitigate the impacts of disasters on young people, engage with and shift power to them, and promote their leadership to drive solutions in line with ActionAid's humanitarian signature and principles.

Restless Development has pioneered and championed a new model of youth-led development that transfers power, agency and accountability into the hands of individuals and communities who can achieve a real, lasting impact.<sup>10</sup> They also enable and connect youth leadership initiatives to ensure change happens at scale. Restless Development actively seeks to collaborate with institutions, governments and practitioners across the field to embed their meaningful youth engagement approach in programmes, aiming to increase impact.<sup>11</sup>

With their wealth of experience and youth-centred lens, Restless Development was uniquely placed to partner with ActionAid to design and lead research to gain insights from practice, with a focus on young people's lived experience and ActionAid's own global programming, on how to develop and implement programming that meets young people's needs and engages them as partners and leaders, driving solutions to the challenges they face.

It is hoped that the findings and recommendations in this report will be relevant not only for ActionAid and Restless Development, but a wider group of practitioners and policymakers seeking to create a more effective, responsive and accountable humanitarian system. Young people should be able to see their own rights fulfilled in times of emergencies and protracted crises, and with this report as well as detailed programming guidelines developed by members of the Compact on Young People in Humanitarian Action, work to ensure this can be funded and flourish.<sup>12</sup>

## Common vulnerabilities identified by young people in protracted crisis and emergencies

Young people<sup>13</sup> experience crises and disasters differently depending on their intersecting identities. Their experience will depend on their relationship with power and privilege, which itself is dependent on a range of factors including their age, sexual orientation, gender identity, caste, economic status, class or refugee status. There are some factors unique to young people – at the stage when they transition from dependence to independence – which are particular risk factors in times of disaster and crisis. For example, if young people are not identified as household heads or as ‘pure dependents’ by those who are responsible for identifying needs and making decisions, they can be unable to access resources. This is a risk for all young people, yet intersectional power analysis reveals that due to entrenched biases and stereotypes about roles linked to gender and age, duty bearers are less likely to identify women, and even less so young women, as a household head, and thus these young people will experience double disadvantage.

The survey and focus group discussions highlighted some common risks for young people in humanitarian contexts and crisis: missed education, failure of duty bearers to meet immediate needs including mental health, and increased risks of sexual violence and exploitation particularly for young women, including prevalence of early marriage. The next sections explore each, keeping in mind an intersectional perspective.

### Missed education

When respondents were asked in the global survey about the risks they faced, missed education was the most widely cited, with 91% saying their emergency or crisis context had an impact on their education. Missed education was also raised as a critical issue in all three focus groups. The young Syrian refugee participants in Jordan shared their frustrations with the restrictions on re-entering education due to their registration status. Young people in the Nepal focus group shared that many of their peers had dropped out of school following the 2015 earthquake, with many young women being forced into early marriage – “Many students dropped out from school as they were forced to marry, which hampered their education,” said one of the participants.

In Sierra Leone, young people in the focus groups said that in addition to the disruption to education due to extended school shut-down during the Ebola crisis, those who lost parents to the virus had taken on caring responsibilities for younger siblings, resulting in leaving education permanently to seek out work to support their families. Showing how class can influence and perhaps mitigate a young person’s experience, one young Pakistani man responding to the survey shared, “before the earthquake I was studying in a prestigious law college, but when the disaster took

## ActionAid's humanitarian signature

ActionAid's humanitarian signature focuses on three core components.

**Women's leadership:** Women are the worst affected in emergencies, as well as the first responders. ActionAid is committed to advancing women's leadership in emergencies by ensuring women and their organisations are equipped with the capacity, information and knowledge to lead and support other women and their communities to protect and achieve their rights in humanitarian contexts, and to make decisions that will ensure their resilience in the long term.

**Shifting power:** ActionAid's presence and relationships with local organisations in communities must be enhanced through our responses. We don't undermine local capacity but build on it through the response. We enhance local leadership in programme design and response, and support access of local leaders to national funding and advocacy opportunities.

**Accountability:** Ultimately, effective humanitarian response means that all stakeholders and actors are accountable to affected communities. ActionAid works with communities and local organisations to support them to hold agencies (including national governments; donors and INGOs) to account, and to ensure that they are responding appropriately to the needs expressed by the communities themselves. Adapted from ActionAid, 2019, *Safety with dignity: a women-led community-based approach to humanitarian and protracted crises*.

place it caused many casualties and miseries in my family, I had to give up my education...I wanted to be a judge after doing law, but the disaster totally changed the scenario. I became a social worker and it has become a passion now." It is likely that some of the most marginalized young people, whether due to disability, caring responsibilities, or other factors, may have already been excluded from education prior to a disaster or crisis.<sup>19</sup>

### Immediate needs including mental health

Young people's immediate needs for shelter, food, and physical safety – and for psychosocial support – were also paramount in the minds of those consulted for this study. In the global online survey education was listed as the most critical issue, followed by homelessness and hunger/malnutrition (about half of respondents), followed closely by experiences of physical abuse including gender-based violence<sup>20</sup> (approximately 40% of respondents). Almost equal to experiences of physical violence, 38% of respondents also cited poor mental health.<sup>21</sup> An example is this sobering comment from a young man in South Sudan, who said, "I did not enjoy my childhood. We ran most of the time, I could not finish school, I lost my parents. It pains me that I feel I cannot forgive the people who killed."

Mental health issues featured even more prominently in the focus group discussions. In Jordan, young Syrian refugees shared that the emotional strain from loss of and separation from family members was at the forefront of many of their minds. Whilst



## Research

Between November 2018 and April 2019, Restless Development undertook four streams of research to identify lessons and findings for good practice.<sup>14</sup>

- 1) A global online consultation using a survey that reached across 56 countries via ActionAid and Restless Development's networks to capture views and voices from over 300 young people on their experience of living and working in emergencies and protracted crisis settings.<sup>15</sup>
- 2) Facilitated a series of focus group workshops with a total of 84 young people to reflect in-depth on their experiences in three distinct humanitarian contexts – the Ebola response in Sierra Leone, earthquake response in Nepal, and the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan.<sup>16</sup>
- 3) Conducted desk-based research of existing ActionAid and partners' resources including evaluations and case studies shared by nine ActionAid members and ActionAid's International Secretariat.<sup>17</sup>
- 4) Conducted key informant interviews with 12 ActionAid staff and three external partners to gather further knowledge from inside and outside the organisation on their experience of working with young people in humanitarian settings, as well as relevant insights from existing work to support women's leadership, rights and protection in emergencies.<sup>18</sup>

Restless Development used a youth-led and participatory research approach, with young people leading aspects of the research process. For example in Sierra Leone and Nepal, Restless Development recruited and supported four youth researchers to design, coordinate and facilitate the focus groups with their peers. The youth researchers also reviewed the recommendations and contributed to the research report.

The findings and recommendations from the research are presented in this report. The report first highlights some of the common vulnerabilities identified by young people in protracted crisis and emergencies. It then looks at key lessons for engaging young people, highlighting good practice for supporting young women as leaders. This is followed by a section on experience and good practice with specific findings for working with young people throughout the key stages of the humanitarian cycle – to mitigate and prepare, in the immediate response, and in rebuilding their lives and building resilience for themselves and their communities. Finally, it highlights good practice for advocacy and accountability, for working with young people to hold decision-makers accountable in humanitarian and protracted crises. While the findings synthesise key areas, the recommendations remain detailed to reflect the full range of ideas and suggestions captured from across the four research streams. Find them in the back of this report.

some young women and men shared they had received counselling, they said psychosocial needs are very much unmet for the majority of young people, especially young men – perhaps due to cultural norms and entrenched gender stereotypes that prevent young men from accessing services. In the focus group in Sierra Leone, young people said those who survived Ebola have found it challenging to reintegrate into society, especially those who were isolated from family during the response. Participants shared that young women are particularly affected by stigma and exclusion as many are now assumed to be infertile, and refused marriage or abandoned by husbands. The focus group in Nepal highlighted unmet mental health needs following the earthquake, reporting that panic and fear still affects their daily lives.

The research highlights that for the young people surveyed, disasters and conflict can result in changes in family structure and social connections (due to displacement, loss of parents), as well as trauma (of witnessing violence or fleeing) and stigma and exclusion that can have devastating and lasting impacts on hearts and minds. Meeting these needs, with awareness and analysis of the different barriers and experiences due to gender and other factors, must be prioritised alongside meeting urgent physical needs for shelter, food and safety.

### **Increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation particularly for young women, including prevalence of early marriage**

Reported experiences of gender-based violence (41%), including sexual exploitation or abuse (35%), early marriage (24%) and human trafficking (20%), featured prominently in the global online survey.<sup>22,23</sup> These are all disproportionately experienced by young women, for whom disasters and crises are particularly dangerous, and in fact the figures are likely to be higher.<sup>24</sup> A young man from Zimbabwe shared in the online survey, “I saw girls from Bmare getting married young and not finishing school.” In the Nepal focus group, participants shared that many young women had been forced into early marriage. Young people also shared stories of young women being trafficked, as well as young people becoming victims of organ harvesting.

The statistics and stories shared reveal how factors such as refugee status, class and gender intersect with youth to define different experiences, with the multiple risks associated with being a young woman in especially sharp relief. It goes without saying that these issues can and will have a significant impact not only on young people’s immediate vulnerability, but also on their entire life course. As we will see in the following sections of the report young people’s exclusion from decision-making spaces can further compound their vulnerability, since their needs are not recognised, prioritised or appropriately factored into response and resilience programmes – and their skills and talents are exploited or squandered rather than supported and strengthened.

## Key lessons for meaningful engagement of young people in humanitarian action

Unsurprisingly young people, who are embedded within families and communities affected by crises and whose lives are altered by them, shared in the global online survey and the focus groups how they took on active roles in response to disasters, emergencies and crises across the different countries and contexts.<sup>25</sup> This ranged

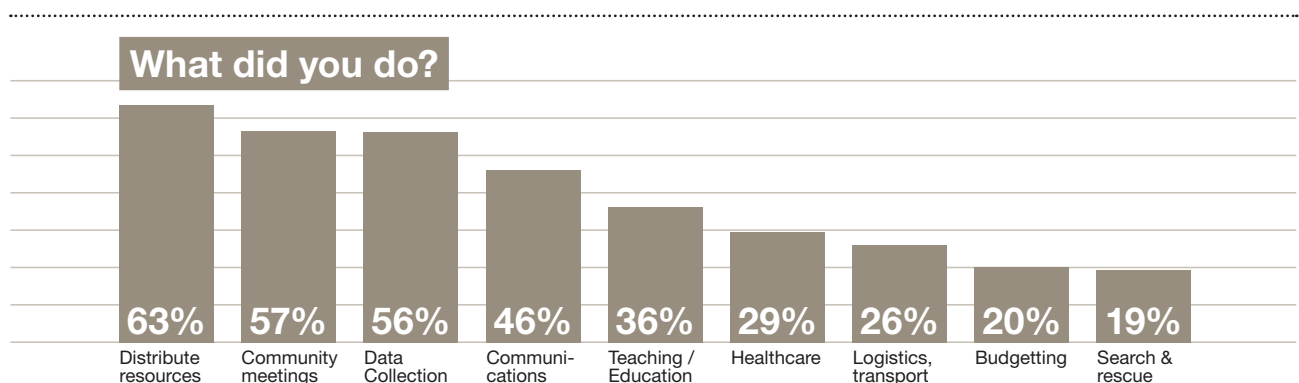
**“In most crisis and emergency settings the majority of the population is young. In these environments, young women and young men are the first responders, builders of community stability and cohesion, or adversely involved in negative coping mechanisms. It is therefore considered their fundamental right to be involved in leading and driving initiatives that directly impact their lives.”**  
**Anicetus Atakpu, ActionAid Nigeria**

from distributing food, clothing or equipment to community liaison and data collection, peer education and search and rescue.

The research identified some negative ways young people were

involved, for instance instrumentalised as labour, treated as helpless victims or exploited for political gain. For example, a young man from Zimbabwe said in the online survey, “when the violence escalated, we were forced to attend political meetings, despites us being students. Absenteeism would warrant some beatings and torture.” It also pointed to structural, systemic and socio-cultural barriers to young people’s meaningful engagement, including their exclusion from decision-making spaces, age-based discrimination and cultural attitudes (especially toward young women) that discouraged or prevented their participation and leadership.

This section draws out some of the key lessons for meaningful engagement of young people to lead and drive solutions in humanitarian action, with specific findings for supporting young women’s leadership.



**Results** of online survey asking young people what they did in responding to crisis and emergencies



**Wesal, a 13-year-old** Syrian refugee in Jordan, loves math and English. Wesal lost her mother in airstrikes and her father was arrested and not heard from since. Wesal and her sisters are now being raised by their grandmother in Mafraq, Jordan, but the grandmother was wounded and is unable to work.

PHOTO: SHARRON LOVELL/ACTIONAID

## Youth representation

One finding from the research is that it is important to identify representative roles young people can play in existing leadership and feedback structures, while also supporting the development of youth-led initiatives. For example, a case study from ActionAid Kenya demonstrates how they have incorporated Activista youth representatives into their women-led Disaster Management Committees, putting young people in decision-making roles at the community level.<sup>26</sup> ActionAid Kenya reflected that it is harder to set this up when crisis unexpectedly hits. Even with good intentions that young people should be afforded opportunities to play specific leadership roles in response, it can take some time to establish or develop these, especially when the response already has some structure and momentum. In the short-term, young people can be embedded as representatives in existing structures.

ActionAid Kenya also cautioned that expanding representation should not be seen as an endpoint. Instead, it should be an interim solution to building more transformative and comprehensive youth leadership opportunities through young people's own structures. To this end, ActionAid Kenya has also supported young people and their institutions to develop their own disaster preparedness and contingency plans in anticipation of recurring drought and floods. They have also facilitated youth-led advocacy for the adoption of these preparedness plans by county governments, resulting in their suc-



## ActionAid's youth-led networks and hubs for activism

**ActionAid's Activista network:** Activista is ActionAid International's global youth network, working with more than 250 partners and thousands of volunteers in over 30 countries. In some countries it is part of the country programme, whereas in others it's an independent umbrella. Activista focuses on youth campaigning through mobilisation and engagement at all levels. It's also engaged in programming through the Local Rights Programmes (LRPs). Activista works to empower and enable young people to actively participate in the decision-making and political processes that affect their lives. Working with Activista volunteers has offered a strong entry point for working with young leaders to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of crisis and disaster.

ActionAid International, February 2017, Youth action for global justice: youth engagement plan (2018-2021).

**ActionAid Global Platforms in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Zambia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, El Salvador, Denmark, Palestine and Jordan:** Global Platforms are ActionAid's network for youth-led activism. The 10 platforms support movements, youth networks (including Activista), organisations and individuals who promote progressive social, political and economic change around the world. Through capacity building and support to various youth-led initiatives, Global Platforms seek to promote young people as drivers of change towards a more just, sustainable and democratic world. In Jordan and Nepal, where a Global Platform existed before and during the earthquake in 2015, the Global Platforms have served to organise young people to influence and take leadership in emergency responses. The Global Platforms are a partnership between the ActionAid countries in which they are placed and ActionAid Denmark.

[www.globalplatforms.org](http://www.globalplatforms.org)

successful integration into the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) in West Pokot, Baringo, Garissa and Kilifi counties.

### Challenging barriers, including social and cultural norms, to young people's inclusion in decision-making

In the focus groups in Jordan, young people from refugee and host communities expressed frustration at their lack of decision-making power. They said, for example that, "there is no space to meet and do something in my society." They are not the decision-makers in their families, and have even less power to inform or influence decisions in the refugee context. They said that elder family members made decisions about where they should travel to seek refuge. On arriving in Jordan, young people felt that decisions on their movement and welfare then transferred to agencies such as UNHCR and the Jordanian government. Even once settled in the community, young people felt they had very little influence on decisions made for refugees.

Another barrier was negative cultural attitudes toward working with NGOs. Young people shared that family members have discouraged them from engaging with



**Kelvin Moigua (left) and Sahr Komba,**  
ActionAid youth volunteers raising awareness about  
Ebola in Kono District, Sierra Leone.  
PHOTO: DAVID SAN MILLAN DEL RIO/ACTIONAID

NGOs due to safety concerns and mistrust of external organisations. One young participant said, “if we had the power, young people would change the tradition, it’s [seen as] shameful to work in this field”. Another said, “Be decision-makers? Can young people do this? We didn’t realise. We would like to be doing this more and make more decisions, lead more changes.”

During the Ebola response in Sierra Leone, young people in the focus group shared that the majority of decisions were made by chiefs, politicians and religious leaders. Young people were usually outside the decision-making structures. However, there are examples of how young people were engaged by leaders such as the Chief of Binkolo, who each month invited section chiefs, town chiefs, youth leaders and representatives to update on activities and the implementation of by-laws. A majority of the young people in the workshops shared some positive impacts of their involvement in the response. For example, those who were involved in decision-making spaces or given positions of responsibility felt this had shifted attitudes towards young people in the community.

While these examples highlight the need to formalise young people’s access to decision-making in crisis and disaster contexts, they also point to a need to consider specific social and cultural contexts to assess any backlash and risk that challenging norms might mean for young people.

## One thousand eight hundred young leaders trained by Restless Development in Sierra Leone helped contain Ebola outbreak

Restless Development was invited to work in Sierra Leone by the Ministry of Youth soon after the country's conflict had ended. The organisation quickly scaled-up to a nationwide programme, working with young people across ethnic groups, many of whom were ex-child soldiers. As well as focusing on core areas around employment and sexual health, the flagship national youth programme was recognised as successfully breaking down social barriers formed during the conflict and in doing so, challenging the negative perception of young people.

The ultimate test for Restless Development in Sierra Leone came in 2014 with the largest Ebola outbreak in history. Some NGOs chose to close operations. Restless Development recognised that the unique reach of their volunteer network could be turned into a powerful tool for working with communities to stop transmission, fight stigma and support survivors. Having worked in Sierra Leone for over a decade, they had already trained 2,000 young Sierra Leoneans, and many of them wanted to help. The organisation designed a community-led Ebola response with partners (GOAL, BBC Media Action, FOCUS 1000 and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention) in the Social Mobilisation Action Consortium. Restless Development worked in rural communities across the country for more than a year – that's 49,000 visits to individuals by 1,800 mobilisers across over 10,000 communities.

This unique youth-led approach was recognised as a significant factor in stopping the deadly spread of the disease. Due to its success, the model formed the basis for the government's guidelines for community engagement for the last 12 months of the Ebola outbreak. The young Sierra Leoneans involved showed leadership, innovation and determination.

### Engaging young people at every stage of the response as agenda setters, decision-makers, designers and leaders

The question for young people's engagement is not 'if' but 'how'. Young people shared in the surveys and focus group discussions the myriad ways they are first responders to the crises that affect them and their communities. Examples from ActionAid's work identify models for engaging young people as leaders – including those most at risk and marginalised young people who are worst affected and need solutions that both recognise their needs and work for them.

For example, ActionAid Nigeria shared that there is a strong precedent of recognising women as leaders in protracted conflict: by establishing task teams of women, including the most vulnerable, to conduct audits of gender-based violence service delivery, identify community protection issues, and analyse vulnerabilities.<sup>27</sup> The task teams then led the development of community action plans to be delivered via committee, which at times have also been allocated seed funding. ActionAid Nigeria identified that there is not just a moral imperative to involve women in this way; it led to better outcomes, based on better quality data developed through better rapport when respondents are speaking with their peers.<sup>28</sup>

## Supporting young women's leadership in emergencies and protracted crisis

According to Patty Alleman, Senior Advisor on Gender, and Catherine Poulton, Child Protection Manager with UNICEF, “violence against women and girls does not discriminate by race, religion, culture, class or country. Worldwide, one in three women have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence,<sup>29</sup> and more than 15 million girls aged 15-19 years have experienced rape. Conflict and displacement only heighten the problem. As girls and women lose their support systems and homes, are placed in insecure environments and in new roles, their risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and abuse, increases.”<sup>30</sup>

Through the desk-based review and key informant interviews, ActionAid's women-led approach to emergencies was found to have helped break down barriers to young women's participation, addressed immediate needs through creating safe spaces for women to access and lead protection mechanisms, and helped break down gender stereotypes, as well as supporting young women to take on all roles in response efforts, and wider livelihood opportunities. ActionAid's approach indicates good practice lessons for strengthening and supporting young women's leadership and agency within communities and to inform wider policy and practice. A number of key findings stand out:

### **Protection must be considered an urgent priority and young women should be supported to inform and lead community-based protection activities**

Considering the acute risks faced by young women to their safety, freedom and dignity, the research highlighted that protection needs of young women must be front and central to strong youth-led and focused programming to mitigate this crisis within a crisis. ActionAid's feminist women-led community-based protection (WLCBP) approach, which aims to promote, enable and support the role, agency and leadership of women in humanitarian action, was identified as an important model by the practitioners interviewed.<sup>31</sup> Also recognised was the need to unpack and extend an intersectional analysis, that seeks to understand the particular vulnerabilities, insights and solutions for young women, and within this the most vulnerable young women due to poverty, disability, caste or other factors. (See more on this in the section on 'Response').

### **Working with women's groups and creating spaces for young women to engage**

Young women require more tailored and youth-friendly safe spaces to discuss and address their unique protection and psychosocial challenges and needs (as well as potential solutions) openly and without fear. For example in Bangladesh, ActionAid shared experiences of running eight Women Friendly Spaces (WFS) across four camps in Cox's Bazar supporting Rohingya refugees. The WFS staff – Centre Manager, Girls'



## Young people on preparedness committees shifting norms on age and gender in Gaza

In Gaza, young women and men are part of preparedness committees, established by ActionAid Palestine and their partners. By taking part in preparedness work, norms are shifted gradually, since young people work within the group and normalise their contribution and leadership. In interviews, the young people involved were well-organised and collaborative members of the preparedness committees. They demonstrated an improved understanding of their rights and leadership, as well as the rights of women to be free from gender-based violence. One young man from Abassan Al Kabeera – Khan Yonis in Gaza – reported that he now understands better the root causes of gender-based violence, and the impact this has on society as a whole.

Officer, Case Worker, Paramedic and Psychosocial Counsellor – are all young women. The young women facilitators have earned acceptance and appreciation from Rohingya communities, especially women in the camps, for whom WFS is considered a “place of peace”. To increase awareness about issues such as health and hygiene, basic literacy, child labour prevention, women’s empowerment and leadership, nutrition, etc. inside and outside of the centres, ActionAid Bangladesh has engaged young women volunteers who accompany community mobilisers in conducting these sessions in the camps.

### Challenging barriers and avoiding entrenching gender stereotypes

In traditional patriarchal settings, young women are often expected to take on gendered roles such as childcare and domestic labour. In some instances, women face significant barriers to leaving their households. During the focus groups with young Syrian refugees in Jordan, the young women, most of whom were also mothers, said their children’s welfare was their priority and they had little opportunity to engage with the wider community, with social norms likely also informing this dynamic. However, some of the young women who had taken part in ActionAid’s empowerment programmes shared their experience of educating peers about child marriage. Interestingly, some young Jordanian women found employment opportunities with NGOs and agencies that support the Syrian community, increasing their economic independence. These examples suggest that even in the most challenging contexts there is appetite and potential for young women to engage and transform the way they are seen and their roles in their societies.

An evaluation of ActionAid Palestine’s youth and women’s empowerment and resilience programme in the West Bank also identified that maximising the role that women and youths can play in response entails not just supporting them to design action plans, but also to lead on their implementation.<sup>32</sup> Doing so not only ensures continuity in response, it challenges existing perceptions on who is best positioned to lead action in communities, reinforcing the potential of young women and men. One participant in the focus group in Sierra Leone pointed out that young women’s roles should involve more control of resources and budgets.

## **Engaging other actors to raise awareness and commitment to young women's rights, leadership and protection**

As part of a rapid assessment on women's protection in protracted crises, ActionAid Palestine identified that awareness campaigns focused on delivering women's rights education only targeted women.<sup>33</sup> Without involving other actors, it is more challenging to deliver broad-based community change to strengthen young women's rights and leadership. It was also strongly noted that a critical component of women-led programming needed to focus on bringing young men and the broader community (including local government, community and religious leaders) on board through advocacy outreach and training.

Further, an ActionAid practitioner interview from Myanmar suggested that facilitating opportunities for community members to better understand and acknowledge the role of young women should be part of the process. ActionAid Myanmar found a successful approach was starting with small activities and building from there. That way there is a prototype to share, backed by evidence, that young women have added value to the work and proven to the community this approach is effective.

A practitioner from ActionAid in Nigeria said they found that in women-led programming, it was also important to better understand the implications for young men, as they can often feel marginalised and disenfranchised. They need to be brought on the journey as well. And so there is a need to work with young men, community leadership and churches to educate them on gender equality and not isolate them from the process. ActionAid Bangladesh also shared the challenges they faced in engaging young women from the Rohingya communities. Initially, there were cases of field facilitators receiving death threats from Rohingya men to stop interventions involving young girls and women. There were even incidents of Rohingya girls being harassed and bullied on their way to visiting Women Friendly Spaces. However, they said that significant progress has been made due to the willingness and interest of the young women to persevere, combined with motivational and outreach engagement with young men, religious leaders and Mazis/community leaders – a strategy ActionAid Bangladesh took by discussing and identifying solutions with young people.

## Engaging young people throughout the key stages of the humanitarian cycle

The research revealed a wealth of good – and often innovative – practice for engaging young people across each phase of the humanitarian cycle: (1) before (mitigate/prepare), (2) during (immediate response), and (3) after (rebuild and build community resilience). The examples shared here draw on ActionAid case studies, reviews and evaluations, the views of young people engaged in the focus group discussions,<sup>34</sup> and interviews with ActionAid and other key staff working with young people in humanitarian and development settings.

### 1. Mitigate and prepare

Increasingly donors, UN agencies, INGOs and other humanitarian partners are aware it is important to consider young people's needs in responding to disasters and crises.<sup>35</sup>

“Young people are abandoned by decision-makers in times of peace. When there is no crisis, their role doesn't exist. During emergencies they are the first responders and at the front line. There is power imbalance and juxtaposition here. How can we engage young people and women consistently and recognise their leadership role throughout? We need better engagement in programme design and capacity building, mapping plans and [mitigating] risk.”

**Amani Mustafa, Head of Programmes, ActionAid Palestine**

However, far too often, thinking about how to engage young people starts at the point when disaster strikes. This is already too late.

Examples identified from ActionAid's work highlight the importance of working systematically with young people and the structures and organisations that represent them to prepare for crisis and disasters, and to mitigate the disproportionate impacts these events have on their lives.

#### Integration of young people's preparedness plans

ActionAid Palestine shared that in both the West Bank and Gaza they have been working with young people to develop their own preparedness and response plans. A midterm evaluation of ActionAid's resilience programme in the West Bank highlighted that good practice not only enables young people to lead the development of their preparedness plans, but ensures they are actively harmonised with the plans of other actors. It found that, “touch points between young women and young men and other actors leading on response must be embedded in programming and should be focused on mapping out integration and moments of collective action”.<sup>36</sup> Interviews with ActionAid practitioners working with young people also revealed that wider community ownership and sustainability are strengthened when these plans have coherence and links to those developed by authorities at other levels.

## **Supporting and strengthening youth spaces, structures and networks**

The importance of developing meaningful partnerships with young people and supporting the structures, networks and organisations that represent them before a disaster strikes (including informal student movements, school-based and social clubs, volunteer groups and networks) was also highlighted. In Nepal, a case study from ActionAid's work demonstrated how strong existing partnerships with youth organisations made it possible to support their collective leadership, voice and action in response to the devastating earthquake in 2015. At the community level, ActionAid-supported 'child club' members had graduated to form local youth groups, which complemented ActionAid's support to the Activista youth volunteer network. ActionAid Nepal had also been engaging with youth-led organisations as a strategic partner for promoting a young people's agenda for action, including partnerships with Youth Advocacy Nepal and the National Youth Alliance for Reconstruction, a loose network of 14 youth-led social organisations.

While these youth-led organisations contributed to relief and rehabilitation in different ways for their own communities, together and with ActionAid Nepal's support, they also: coordinated 700 young volunteers to deliver responses recognising the importance of enhancing their capacity; facilitated youth-led public discussions on humanitarian effectiveness; and supported young people's initiatives on awareness raising about health, sanitation and hygiene, and psychosocial counselling support.<sup>37</sup>

## **Developing surge networks and HR policies that protect young people and promote their wellbeing**

An ActionAid report on improving surge capacity<sup>38</sup> demonstrated that response reach can quickly be scaled by leveraging skills and networks developed before the disaster. A midterm evaluation of ActionAid Myanmar's 2009 flood response found they were better able to respond to the disaster than other agencies because, while those agencies needed to develop a ground presence, ActionAid Myanmar was able to draw from their cohort of established, trained young fellows to deliver resources quickly.<sup>39</sup> While these fellows were initially based in different regions, they demonstrated an ability to move quickly and effectively operate in a new region. This experience is not unique; it was also identified as a best practice of others. For example, a report by ActionAid Palestine<sup>40</sup> cited the example of UNFPA's Y-Peer initiative, a network of hundreds of young women and men leading their own initiatives, who provided an active volunteer base when violent conflict escalated.

In disaster-prone areas, it can be beneficial not just to work with communities on disaster risk reduction, but to invest in developing a network of trained young volunteers who can quickly be deployed when disasters arise. Developing this network also provides an opportunity to build young people's skills in areas relevant to disaster response, as well as knowledge of their rights and confidence in their abilities before an



**Classroom destroyed** by the 2015 earthquake in Kavrepalanchowk, Nepal. The earthquake hit 25 April 2015 and killed nearly 9000 people.  
PHOTO: RUPESH SHRESTHA/ACTIONAID

emergency occurs. Critically, to avoid the misuse of young people as labour in crisis response, the Future of Humanitarian Surge report found that one of the key reasons to build such a network ahead of time is to put in place robust HR guidelines and management.<sup>41</sup> This must ensure young people's rights, safety, safeguarding, fair compensation and skills development are all taken into consideration, and a system is in place to manage these provisions in times of disaster and deployment.

An ActionAid report on encouraging more women in surge also highlights some of the particular considerations important to women's participation. These include personal safety and security, confidence and skills, personal hygiene needs, and wellbeing and support, including family support and support to cover (child) care.<sup>42</sup> In the Sierra Leone focus groups, young people said that NGOs should specifically build the capacity of young women on volunteerism before a crisis, and support them to learn about disaster management. As one participant said: "otherwise, how will they inform and lead in the response?"





**After the Ebola outbreak** in Sierra Leone in 2014, many teenage girls like Kanku (16 years old, number two from left to right) became pregnant. When schools officially opened in Sierra Leone following a closure for eight months, many did not go back to school. Kanku's biggest challenge, she said, is to find ways of sustaining herself and her baby and find money to go to school. - "If I am given an opportunity, I will go back to school. I passed seven subjects out of nine in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at Junior Secondary School three (JSS 3) level," said Kanku. She has to make ends meet for the baby, herself and other nine family members. In the picture from left to right: Finda (17), Kanku (16), Forah (15), Hellen (17), Isatu (17).

PHOTO: TAKAITEI BOTE/ACTIONAID

## Investing in skills and awareness raising on rights and risks for young people

ActionAid has documented examples of building young people's awareness of their risks and rights, as well as developing technical skills relevant to disaster response to help prepare for and mitigate the impact of disaster. According to the research, technical skills-building in a range of areas spanning medical and first aid, preparedness training and facilitation, protection, women's leadership, programme design, monitoring and evaluation and beyond, were all highlighted as key interventions. One interviewee explained that it can have a dual benefit – firstly aiding their humanitarian and emergency response work, making it more effective, and secondly helping gain professional experience, which in turn can support a transition into paid and resilient employment. Equally important can be working with young people to understand and articulate their rights, and to analyse their vulnerabilities and risks and community risks, in order to take an active role in monitoring.

An example where investment in preparedness and training have proved successful comes from ActionAid Kenya, where in a recent flood response they were able to work with young people they had supported to develop preparedness initiatives such as information sharing, mobilising communities at risk to move to higher ground through local radio FM stations, and monitoring river flow levels. ActionAid Kenya is

## Young fellows model of ActionAid Myanmar

ActionAid Myanmar has established a youth fellows model, where young people are trained to support communities to act on their needs and aspirations, to build on their own capacities and resources and to forge linkages and collaborate with other key stakeholders. Young fellows build their skills on facilitation and community mobilisation, community needs assessment and analysis, and advocacy towards government on community collective actions. As such, fellows become change makers in support of support transformational community initiatives.

Since Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the youth fellows have been involved in emergency responses. During Nargis, ActionAid Myanmar youth fellows led a community-based disaster response by using Participatory Vulnerability Analysis in cyclone-affected areas in Ayeyarwady region. Since then, during every emergency young people are at the forefront of disaster management and are the first responders in their respective areas.

In 2015 the country faced widespread floods, and several ActionAid Myanmar implementation areas were affected. The fellows were the first responders. They conducted rapid needs assessments, supported distributions of food and non-food items, and supported community rehabilitation efforts.

Following the Kachin conflict in 2018, fellows supported the distribution of dignity kits for women and girls. Two of the young female fellows in this response were from the affected communities.

Given the integrated programming approach of ActionAid Myanmar, staff and fellows collaborate and coordinate across the different programme engagements with a strong emphasis on working with women, girls and young people.

working with young people-led relief committees, community disaster management committees, county citizens' forums, young people-led social accountability groups and women's networks. These institutions have all received essential training on needs assessments, disaster risk management cycle programming, accountability processes, protection, climate change and influencing.<sup>43</sup> A practitioner from ActionAid Nepal also shared that in their experience, young people can be supported to use creativity for awareness raising, i.e. on what to do if there is an earthquake – using songs, cartoons, street drama and street art.

## 2. Immediate response

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster good practice can get thrown out the window, but it is also the riskiest time for young people, especially the most vulnerable, and therefore critical to commit to approaches that reduce their need for negative coping strategies. Such strategies should be building on young people's knowledge and skills, and challenging uneven power structures from the start. The research identified that too often young people's needs are invisible or deprioritised in the immediate response to crisis, that they are merely used as labour – to do the heavy lifting of relief work – or treated as helpless victims.

It also identified good practice for prioritising young people's urgent needs, working with them to identify their priorities and design and lead solutions, while strengthening their skills, talents and insights, and supporting them to take on decision-making, agenda-setting and oversight roles. It should be acknowledged that not all young people have the same time and resources available, especially in the immediate response to a crisis, and it is important to consider innovative and supportive ways to reach, support and engage the most marginalised young people that reduces their burden, and does no harm.

### Meeting urgent needs including mental health and protection must be the priority

Immediate responses need to mitigate suffering and meet urgent needs to reduce long-term trauma and prevent negative coping mechanisms such as dropping out of education and early marriage. Interviewees noted that in unstable environments, young people are often confronted with multi-layered challenges and have likely faced significant trauma – for which psychosocial support was identified as paramount and is often overlooked. They identified that young people can play an effective role in delivering psychosocial support to their peers, as well as receiving support themselves.

ActionAid Nepal provided a good practice case study of working with the National Youth Alliance for Reconstruction (NYAR) to conduct psychosocial support to school students in order to minimise the trauma caused by the 2015 earthquake. NYAR, alongside ActionAid Nepal and “Saichhik Namuna Gramin Bikash Kendra”, conducted psychosocial counselling in nine schools in earthquake-affected areas, reaching about 2,500 students.<sup>44</sup> Trained facilitators used group sessions and various therapies such as dance, song, jokes, drama, yoga and music as a means to provide the counselling.

ActionAid staff interviewed also found that tailored protection plans for young people – with a specific focus on young women – must be a critical component of humanitarian response, recognising the high rates of gender-based violence against young women in emergencies. ActionAid Kenya gave the example of targeting households with adolescent girls with food packages during the 2017 drought response, to ameliorate the

## Supporting young people in Yangon to lead disaster preparedness

Since 2018, ActionAid Myanmar expanded its youth-led approach to urban areas through the Myanmar Consortium for Community Resilience project. This project works with six civil society organisations to establish an urban youth volunteer network for Yangon city. Having developed the capacity of the core volunteers in five townships on climate change and disaster management, identification of risk(s), and how to prepare, cope and respond in case of disasters, they in turn conducted step down training in their communities with other young people. ActionAid Myanmar, together with the consortium partners, continues to provide technical and financial support on community awareness and linking with relevant government departments, including the Department of Disaster Management and Government Administration.

likelihood of them being married off where families were unable to meet their daughters' and families' immediate needs.<sup>45</sup>

This demonstrates a practical way in which recognising how poverty, gender and youth combine to pose specific risks – and how adjusting response plans from the outset helped minimise the impact experienced by these young women and their families. ActionAid Kenya also shared that it is essential to ensure clear protection plans for young women, including safe spaces for them to accept services such as food packages and medicine. Young women shouldn't have to walk alone for long distances after dark, for example.

### **Involving young people in needs assessment and targeting to reach the most vulnerable**

Findings also suggest that young people are best placed to understand their own and their peers' needs and can help in targeting at-risk and vulnerable people, including through their social networks. In a good practice case study, ActionAid Bangladesh shared that they have trained and engaged 240 young volunteers in the Rohingya refugee camps on activities related to targeting, outreach and community engagement. These volunteers were supported to conduct data collection, distribution of life essential kits and dissemination of important information in the camps, with the aim of reaching those most marginalised/at risk.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, ActionAid Nepal shared that engaging marginalised youth groups remains a challenge. For example, those living in poverty, young girls, urban/rural youth, dalit and indigenous youth, as young people can face multiple forms of discrimination and inequality compounded by lack of education and access to resources, or economic, social and political opportunity. They found that offering skills or training that was of immediate relief/benefit (i.e. provided income) for these young people was one effective strategy. In the focus groups in Sierra Leone, young people shared a successful model where girls were doing house-to-house visits in their own communities, and were better able to reach vulnerable girls and young women.

## Young people's engagement in the design of interventions is also important

In one example, ActionAid shared how *not* involving young people in design resulted in interventions being less appropriate and effective. ActionAid Nigeria's *Alternatives to Migration* project review noted a drop-off in training participation because it wasn't meeting expectations. Young people had engaged in ActionAid's REFLECT circles to identify their needs, but were not engaged in designing *how* to meet those needs, and so the training didn't provide the correct solutions.<sup>47</sup> ActionAid Nigeria recommended that involving young people in the design for the training course upfront could ameliorate this in the future. The organisation now promotes young people's leadership in designing solutions that meet their needs and expectations. "It requires asking young people 'how to solve the issue' that ensures our programmes are successful," said Anicetus Atakpu from ActionAid Nigeria.

There were also examples of **how young people contributed creatively to designing solutions to challenges in relief delivery**. When roads were inaccessible during disaster response in Chin State, Myanmar, young fellows developed a motorbike relay race to get teams rapidly to communities to conduct needs assessments and deliver assistance.<sup>48</sup> In Bangladesh, ActionAid has worked with young women volunteers including both refugees and volunteers from the host community in Feedback and Information Centres, who along with Rohingya volunteers directly interact with Rohingya communities to design solutions to their problems and obtain information about available services.<sup>49</sup>

Good practice examples also emerged of young people contributing their unique skills including using social media channels to communicate their needs and information, mobilising volunteers and offering peer education (e.g. to raise awareness of rights and risks). For example, in the focus group in Jordan, one young man shared his experience of using social media to document his journey and educate the wider public about their situation. A young woman in Jordan shared her experience of educating peers in the community about child marriage. In Nepal, many of those who participated in the focus groups said young people took on the responsibility of providing safe centres for children as well as fundraising using social media.

ActionAid and partners **also identified the limitations of youth engagement that simply used young people for labour**, and recognised that some programme delivery could be improved in this area. For example, ActionAid Malawi and Action Myanmar found that young people played an effective role in community coordination and as 'energetic responders' in flood response programming.<sup>50</sup> However, they also recognised that many young people are already overburdened in the immediate aftermath of disaster (due to the physical and emotional toll and additional responsibilities in supporting their families), and that their needs and wellbeing must come first. Equally, young people have more to contribute than their labour, and



want to make more strategic use of their time. However, they are often not given an opportunity to set the agenda of what response looks like. **Women and young people are often excluded from decision-making spaces that determine the direction and response of recovery efforts.**<sup>51</sup>

Notably, some examples of good youth initiatives also **point to parallel structures, suggesting young people were outside existing decision-making structures,** with efforts to a greater or lesser extent running alongside wider response efforts and coordination structures. For example, in Nepal during the 2015 earthquake response young people shared in the focus group discussion that they felt the decision-making power was held by local community organisations, with guidance from the Community Ward Representative and Guthi (member network that is a custodian of religious, cultural and social heritage). Whilst young people therefore did not have a role in the main decision-making spaces, they said that many young people did form their own initiatives to respond to the needs of the community.

In both protracted crises and disaster response, agencies often establish groups to deliver assistance, training and other services. However this results in building parallel structures, where in most cases there are already groups and structures in place. Programming in both Myanmar and Palestine identified that youth groups already existed where the need was, but required strengthening, coordination and support to deliver.<sup>52</sup> Instead of building new structures, it is important to map what youth groups and youth-led organisations are already operating, and determine what support and strategic visioning they need.

Of course, where preparedness and mitigation efforts have already engaged youth organisations, groups, networks and movements, and where local youth representatives were linked to national and regional coalitions, it was faster and easier to engage them more comprehensively at the response stage. For example, a practitioner from ActionAid Myanmar shared that the unique advantage is that those in youth-led organisations are often already better connected to each other both personally and professionally, and have a higher appetite for partnership. Where a leading agency can support is in leveraging these existing connections to convene strategic, coordinated response efforts.

### 3. Rebuild and build community resilience

One of the insights from ActionAid’s approach to promoting women’s rights and leadership in humanitarian action is that it provides the opportunity to tackle root causes of vulnerability and inequality, and supports communities not to just rebuild but to improve on what went before. Here, young people are particularly powerful agents of positive change who can be supported to challenge business as usual. Key practitioner interviewees highlighted that young people’s eagerness to question the status quo meant that after a crisis or spike, they are keen to learn from past experiences and use emergency and crisis situations as an opportunity to ‘build back better’. As one interviewee expressed, “Young people are not really heard by government and power in the Middle East, but they are the future. They have new attitudes towards gender, education and politics, and working with young people has great potential. We rely on them to build a different future for the Middle East. This new generation will carry out the values of equality, gender equality, freedom.”

It was widely agreed in the interviews that without engaging young people we, “completely lose the fabric of resilience building”. They said it is critical to work directly with young people in peace building, governance processes, conflict transformation and accountability mechanisms. This enables communities to build longer-term resilience and effectiveness. ActionAid’s community-focused approach was heralded as an effective way to foster youth leadership in resilience building. By meaningfully involving young people in each step of the humanitarian response cycle, starting with preparedness, they are better positioned to take on resilience planning.

Throughout the focus group discussions, two areas emerged as paramount to rebuilding the lives and resilience of young people and their communities: sustainable livelihoods, and education.

#### Sustainable skills and livelihoods

Access to a secure livelihood was repeated as a priority by young people throughout the consultations, and the practitioners interviewed agreed that livelihood programmes need to be a key component of any humanitarian programming engaging young people. In many emergencies and protracted crises, young people suddenly become the breadwinners for their family, responsible for the welfare of many older and younger family members. Findings from the practitioner interviews highlighted that employment opportunities are critical for young people to feel valued, to have opportunities to financially support their families, to mitigate irregular migration, and to provide positive alternatives to negative coping mechanisms (e.g. crime, joining armed groups, early marriage).

## Build or enhance safe spaces for young people – with specific spaces for young women

Investing in creating these spaces, whether at a community or health centre or purpose-built safe shelter, might not seem like a top priority, particularly after a disaster or crisis. However, ActionAid's experience demonstrates that creating these spaces can be a seemingly simple but in fact transformational contribution to meeting women and young people's most urgent needs for safety and services in humanitarian response, as well as enabling reflection, planning and action.

This finding draws on experience for example from ActionAid Myanmar, which identified establishing women's centres as a key component of their flood response efforts, providing a peer-to-peer space where women, including young women, could access information and psychosocial support.<sup>53</sup>

In Nepal, following the 2015 earthquake, 30 Women Friendly Spaces were constructed, providing training, psychosocial support, access to information on rights and referral services for gender-based violence. One hundred and ten adolescents' groups, including specific groups for young women, were convened and supported through these spaces to receive training on rights and access to services.

ActionAid Bangladesh has developed youth-friendly spaces in Rohingya refugee camps where young women and young men can interact with each other while also accessing services to meet urgent needs and training opportunities.<sup>54</sup> One of the groups supported through this space is the adolescent girl's protection group. Creation of this platform for the Rohingya youth proved to be very effective as group discussions enabled them to be more aware about their situation, identify their needs and advocate for their rights to respective authorities in the camps.

ActionAid Arab Region also identified that young people in Jordan and Lebanon lack both physical and emotional spaces where they can gather not just to connect and receive services, but also to express their ideas and attain more efficacy in changing the world they live in to contribute to social cohesion. A report on young people's perspectives on improving community cohesion against radicalisation found that it can be important to link these spaces to opportunities for young people to have their voices heard, particularly in situations of protracted conflict where young people face limitations on their access to public space.<sup>55</sup>

One dimension of this is the importance of not exploiting young people's volunteerism. One practitioner said there should be laws enacted to protect young volunteers and the period of volunteering for an NGO should be limited, with pathways to paid employment/compensation. ActionAid practitioners from Bangladesh and Myanmar also shared that employing young people had had the dual benefit of giving them jobs and ensuring young people's perspective informed and shaped their work.

## Undermining resilience – refugee camp settings

Focus group discussions in Jordan and practitioner interviews found that in protracted crises settings, and particularly in refugee camp settings, young people did not have enough to do. They lack access to safe spaces and meaningful opportunities, whether that be education, employment or community volunteering opportunities, and this is particularly detrimental to young women who in some cases are not allowed to leave the house due to traditional patriarchal social structures. It was noted that idleness can lead to negative consequences and dismantles the critical and transformational role young people can play in leading solutions. In these settings, young people remain in unstable and transient environments, where the likelihood of migration due to displacement, safety and security concerns or political and economic instability is high. In these environments, young people are often responsible for protecting and financially supporting family members, with limited time to commit to community leadership. Therefore, it is difficult to develop programmes with a long-term outlook, and remains a barrier to community stability and resilience building.

One of the findings from the focus group discussions and online survey was the influx of opportunities that emerged for some young people with the relief efforts, including jobs working for NGOs or skills-training offered as part of the response. However in many cases these opportunities were not viewed as sustainable. For example, the young people in the Sierra Leone focus group said there were some longer-term opportunities, such as working with NGOs, following the Ebola outbreak in 2014. However many shared that they, alongside many of their peers, have not found long-term jobs and remain unemployed. “Some jobs were created just for the response to Ebola and all of them have been retrenched and cancelled.”

A practitioner from ActionAid Nigeria shared an example where young people were supported to set up local businesses, which then provided resources when a recent flood hit, rather than relying on foreign aid packages, which often undercut the market. They said this has mitigated urban migration and instilled community empowerment in the response. It highlights how longer-term thinking and programming around livelihood development can mitigate vulnerabilities and build community resilience.

Experience from focus groups in Jordan found that for displaced young people living in host communities, it is very difficult for their qualifications to be recognised. Where limited work permits can be accessed by displaced communities e.g. in Jordan, young people are often limited to taking specific roles such as day labour. Young people in protracted crisis settings are often highly educated. It was suggested that these young people should be supported to lead advocacy to enshrine their rights to work in host countries, enabling young people to enter the labour market and best utilise their skills to support and build community cohesion.

The reality of ‘negative coping mechanisms’ in conflict settings is strongly connected to livelihood. A practitioner from Nigeria highlighted the tough choices young people face: “Violence is lucrative and young people are paid handsomely. They are willing



**Young Syrian and Palestinian** refugees in Jordan at the ActionAid Arab Region Community Centre in Mafraq.  
PHOTO: JENNY BOWIE/RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

to stake their lives because of it. We asked – if you’re telling someone to drop your guns, what are you giving them in return? What are we offering young people in return financially, so they don’t turn to these negative means? For this reason it can be critical to have more funding in the sector for livelihood programmes.”

**Continuity of/return to education was stated as a desire by young people, and by practitioners as an important building block to resilience.** The findings from focus groups and ActionAid practitioner interviews was that young people in emergency and crisis settings have lost years of education, face barriers to returning, or may have continued periods where they are ‘in and out’ of education. Young people therefore need to be supported and encouraged to continue or resume their education. “A right to education is critical – education can’t be truncated as a result of the crisis,” said one ActionAid practitioner from Nigeria. Another practitioner said that education services for young people should include relevant practical modules, which build awareness and critical understanding of their immediate crisis or emergency context setting, e.g. in protracted conflict environments. In addition, creative, practical and non-formal education methods were highlighted as effective ways to engage young people in learning.



## Influence and accountability

It was acknowledged, particularly in the key informant interviews, **that young people are uniquely placed to play a valuable and necessary role in citizen-led accountability initiatives** to ensure open, transparent and effective governance in emergency and crisis settings. Interviewees said that young people often have higher levels of education than the previous generation, as well as networks within the community, eagerness to question the status quo, and innovative approaches e.g. using social media and technology to campaign and raise awareness.

**Young people are often politically active and engaged but are often learning about politics and decision-making in a vacuum**, and therefore it was recommended that an accompanying capacity building and education package is needed so that young people understand the geopolitics and root causes of an emergency or crisis. This can also support young people to better understand how to navigate their political context, undertake power analysis and build influencing networks. Technical training in other areas such as data collection and analysis, network building, advocacy and communications were further regarded as important foundational skills for young people to be effective in holding decision-makers to account.

Further to this, ‘smart ways’ should be considered, which enable young people to speak freely without putting them at risk, aligning to the Do No Harm Standards.

**Working with youth coalitions rather than individuals means that young people feel more protected to use their voice collectively and avoid being singled out.**

Alongside this, youth-led advocacy is required to build buy-in from decision-makers on the role of youth leadership in development, including humanitarian work, which still remains a barrier to young people’s meaningful and positive engagement with decision-makers.

The research identified several key examples of ActionAid’s approaches to put young people at the forefront of oversight and accountability. For example, in Nepal, ActionAid’s support to the National Youth Alliance on Reconstruction initiated policy advocacy for community-led reconstruction, youth leadership at multiple levels, and building back better through the empowerment of young people and other stakeholders. The Alliance facilitated public discourse on humanitarian effectiveness including accountability and transparency. ActionAid Nepal shared that one of the key successes of the initiative was that this network of young people monitored the reconstruction process to ensure transparency and accountability, and submitted the fact-finding report to the government of Nepal with recommendations for action.

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## Youth-led accountability for public services for refugees in Jordan

In Jordan, ActionAid has been working with young people in the communities of Mafraq (a community that makes up 24.2% of refugees in Jordan) and Zarqa (14.4%). In both governorates, young people have identified the gaps that exist in local public services and have determined sustainable solutions to ongoing challenges brought about by upheaval within the shared context.

Through training in debating and accountability, ActionAid has supported young people from Syrian and Jordanian communities to come together to develop the leadership skills required to lead the implementation of these solutions. ActionAid has deliberately prioritised supporting young women whose voices have consistently been unheard in their communities.

This training has seen young people engage directly with service providers to demand greater accountability about where funding is allocated. It has seen the initiatives developed by the participants provide young Syrians with an opportunity to have a greater understanding of the power of their collective voice, as well as building alliances amongst their young Jordanian colleagues.

To date, debating skills training and space given to young women and men has seen them engage with community leaders, grow their leadership potential and make demands of the government directly. Young people have developed an understanding of their rights, as well as their potential to enact change within a protracted crisis and ability to participate in decision-making conversations.

They have established mechanisms that have led to significant shifts in governorate allocations to community services, including boards showing local government budget allocations, and regular government debates and meetings with government officials to which the community are invited.

Whilst these efforts have seen increased accountability to community members by governorates and service providers, young people still feel excluded. Despite their achievements, young people still feel their capacity as leaders is not recognised by decision-makers. Young people have also identified the lack of employment opportunities outside the humanitarian system as an ongoing concern.

ActionAid is continuing to engage with young people to implement youth-led and designed interventions aimed at direct change within the community, to increase acknowledgement of both their capacity and role within the response to the ongoing refugee crisis.

ActionAid Arab Region, May 2019. *Case study on engaging young people in humanitarian action*



PHOTO: ALICE OLDENBURG/ACTIONAID

## Youth-led accountability forums by ActionAid Kenya

In Kenya, ActionAid supports county citizens' forums as key accountability platforms where citizens hold governments to account on humanitarian and development issues. These forums are led by young people equipped with social accountability tools, analysis and influencing skills. ActionAid Kenya has strengthened young people-led social auditors' groups and facilitated them to lead communities to participate in planning, budgeting and other governance processes. Young people have mobilised and supported communities to hold the county and national governments and other duty bearers accountable; demand for integration of community-led participatory change plans/community action plans into annual development plans and budgets; and advocate for increased budgetary allocation and effective use of resources for agriculture, disaster response, primary healthcare, basic education and water provision. They have been involved in budget tracking, developing shadow reports and facilitating county citizens' forums with budget analysis and project implementation to enable citizens to hold duty bearers accountable. They have also produced citizens' demand charters, petitions and other advocacy documents.

ActionAid Kenya. April 2019. *Case study: ActionAid Kenya working with young people in humanitarian work*

# Conclusions and recommendations

Young people are affected by crises and disasters in many different ways, depending on their relationship with power and privilege, and their race, gender, class, religion, physical ability or refugee status. Missed education, mental health and sexual violence, including a prevalence of early marriage, were found to be of concern to many young people engaged for this research.

The findings and good practice captured in this report highlight that addressing young people's most urgent needs and supporting them to lead and drive solutions to humanitarian crises are two sides of the same coin, and that while approaches must recognise the different obstacles and be sensitive to the different situations of young people, they must also unequivocally shift power to young people in humanitarian action by breaking down barriers to their representation and leadership. All that is reflected in the following recommendations.

## Recommendations for meaningful engagement of young people

- Undertake power analysis to understand young people's underlying (root causes) and overlapping (intersectional) vulnerabilities and recognise young people's competing priorities when creating strategies to engage and support them that do no harm and alleviate double burdens.
- Ensure youth representation on existing decision-making structures, and support youth-led initiatives to be better recognised and integrated with existing decision-making processes and protocols.
- Initiate small and achievable activities at first to demonstrate short-term successes that can then be shared with the community and local leaders. It's important to include non-youth actors in these activities to get their support. These measures can challenge barriers to young people's inclusion in decision-making spaces, as political and community support for youth leadership activities is essential.
- Create, support and strengthen spaces for young people to meet, talk about their issues, plan, develop and lead solutions in their communities.

- Ensure a model that engages young people at every stage as agenda setters, decision-makers, designers and leaders.
- Ensure that humanitarian and development agency staff have the knowledge and skills to meaningfully engage young people, as many are not from a youth engagement background. Invest in staff training and mentoring and joint activities with young people to break down barriers.
- Develop internal youth engagement principles to guide how the organisation works with young people in emergencies and protracted crises, and publish this document in an accessible format for young people. These principles could include quotas for percentages of young people in programme activities and an outline on how to engage marginalised young people.

## **Recommendations for supporting young women's leadership**

- Work with established platforms (where they exist) such as women's groups and forums to ensure access, voice, leadership and safe spaces for young women in these networks. Work with young women to define what their needs in these spaces are, and work with adults to ensure their buy-in and support.
- Run tailored risk analysis for young women in programme set-up so a clear understanding of the risks young women face is assessed from the outset, and programme design responds to these risks responsibly.
- During the design of activities with young people in humanitarian and protracted crises, be aware of further entrenching gender stereotypes and norms through programming (e.g. men do search and rescue, women run emergency childcare).
- Consult with young women on their basic needs, and engage them in designing solutions. Ensure they have access to health and psychosocial support services.
- Build the capacity of staff, especially at the field level, on how to undertake gender analysis, to understand the barriers to women's participation in activities.
- Outreach to parents and the wider community and engage them in women's leadership programmes (e.g. home visits, open days) to establish buy-in and reassurance on security.





**Young villagers uplifting** a house after the earthquake in Terai, Bardiya, Nepal. Floods after the 2015 earthquake rendered thousands of families homeless and many young Nepalis worked to help their communities.  
PHOTO: RUPESH SHRESTHA/ACTIONAID

- Support young women to take leadership in educating their peers and the wider community about negative coping mechanisms, including the risks of child marriage, trafficking and sexual assault during humanitarian and protracted crises (e.g. school assemblies, forming women’s groups, using print and social media).
- Support young women to engage in protection activities, such as joining young women’s task teams or committees, to monitor and support themselves and their peers’ multi-layered protection needs. Ensure language on protection is defined by young women and framed around their wellbeing. Information on young women’s protection should be shared in accessible ways, taking higher illiteracy rates into consideration.
- Ensure staff are trained on both child and adult safeguarding procedures, as often young women can straddle both categories, and this will better enable more flexible and effective linking referrals to relevant support services.
- Implement community sensitisation and reintegration programmes for young women who have been isolated from the community due to discrimination against, for example, those with children out of wedlock, or living with disabilities.

- Provide technical training for women's networks and organisations on areas such as fundraising and financial management to support their longer-term sustainability. Support their efforts by advocating for this approach to donors and decision-makers.
- Whilst focusing on the most marginalised, make sure to tackle the needs of young men and address their psychosocial and mental health needs, which if unaddressed can result in further restrictions on female family members and increases of gender-based violence.
- Engage role models in communications to shift attitudes towards young women volunteering and engaging in relief efforts.
- Ensure young women are still able to access sexual and reproductive health services during humanitarian and protracted crises. This also includes access to information about their sexual and reproductive rights, and how to access health service support. Safe and confidential youth-friendly sexual reproductive and health rights services that are adaptive to the specific needs of young women are also recommended, as young women face stigma, or are unable to talk to those in positions of power about their needs. It is recommended to share this information through a range of safe social channels, peer groups and mentorship support programmes to ensure those most marginalised can also be reached.

## **Recommendations for working with young people in mitigation and preparedness**

- Develop partnerships with youth-led organisations in crisis prone areas, and provide them and their members with training in key skills for crisis response (e.g. first aid, protection) and transferable skills for employment (e.g. monitoring and evaluation, communications).
- Through working with youth-led organisations, educate all young people in the community on their basic human rights, including information on women's and refugee rights.
- Engage young people in the design of preparedness activities, as they can help identify existing levels of knowledge and good practices in the community, to contribute towards preparedness plans.
- Invest in a network of young volunteers that can be scaled up or down, developing an official youth volunteer registration system with information accessible to humanitarian and development agencies and community leaders.

- Establish written Volunteer Terms of Reference, aligned with national employment legislation and guidelines for stipends and compensation, to encourage consistency across humanitarian and development agencies.
- Ensure communications, feedback and safeguarding mechanisms are accessible to marginalised young people.
- Ensure young people are trained in how to analyse future risks e.g. climate change, political instability, conflict.
- Engage young people outside the NGO/volunteering bubble through partnering with student movements and social groups.
- Utilise young people's creative skills for awareness raising with communities on crisis preparedness and response (e.g. natural hazards, health).

## **Recommendations for working with young people in the immediate response**

- Prioritise young people's urgent needs (food, shelter, healthcare, safety/protection, psychosocial support, legal support) alongside engaging them, and young people from neighbouring or host communities, in leadership or community assistance activities.
- Engage young people in targeting assistance and mapping needs as they often have wide social networks and knowledge of neighbouring communities.
- Disaggregate needs analysis by age and recognise the unique needs of young people, as well as their differential needs depending on gender, sexual identity, status, faith, geography or class etc.
- Involve young people in understanding and reflecting on their own needs and experiences, identifying peers/most vulnerable youth, and informing others.
- Ensure that humanitarian and development agency staff have the knowledge and skills to meaningfully consider young people's needs and experiences, as many are not from a youth engagement background. Invest in staff training and mentoring and joint activities with young people to break down barriers.
- Work with youth-led organisations to reach marginalised groups outside of formal structures (e.g. school), such as young people in slum areas, sex workers, young people with disabilities, young women who are homebound due to

caring responsibilities, queer or non-binary people – so that they also receive essential information and support.

- Include all young people in decision-making spaces (e.g. community committees). Young people are often engaged as the labour – to do the heavy lifting – in crisis response. Young women are often only viewed as vulnerable victims. In reality, both young men and young women are negatively impacted by crises and disasters, and women are very much first responders, and take on a disproportionate burden of child/family care and other unpaid work as well.
- Give young people a role in designing solutions, in addition to identifying community needs. Identifying strategies that reduce the multiple burdens on young people are critical, and more work needs to be done to document good practice here.
- Political and community support for youth leadership activities are essential for their success. Initiate small and achievable activities at first to demonstrate short-term successes that can then be shared with the community and local leaders. It is important to include non-youth actors in these activities to get their support.
- Work with community leaders to develop representative roles for young people on decision-making committees (e.g. women’s groups, community forums, protection committees) and actively monitor young people’s participation, providing guidance on meaningful youth engagement as needed.
- In unstable environments such as protracted crisis, prioritise developing short-term transferable skills-building activities for young people, as many young people are unable to emotionally and physically invest in long-term, more behaviour-change focused activities.
- Be willing to adapt methods of communication to work with young people. For example using social media networks (e.g. WhatsApp groups) to coordinate volunteers, meeting volunteers outside office hours.
- Support youth-led organisations to form local, national and regional coalitions, focused on the crisis response, and establish strong communications channels between this coalition and national NGO response coalitions or forums (e.g. by ensuring a representative of the youth coalition participates in meetings). This strengthens young people’s voices, and reduces risks for youth leaders in speaking up.

## Recommendations for working with young people to rebuild their lives and build community resilience

- Harness the opportunity that a crisis brings to disrupt social norms and business as usual. Empower young people to challenge negative coping mechanisms and unequal power structures to bounce back better.
- Ensure greater continuity in skills-building and livelihood opportunities from emergency-response to peace/development phase programming.
- Prioritise livelihood and education interventions that economically empower and foster hope and purpose in young people, including reaching out to the most vulnerable and marginalised who may otherwise be susceptible to negative coping mechanisms.
- Engage young people in all areas of resilience building: identifying risks, vulnerabilities and capacity; increasing access to basic rights and services; increasing access to and understanding of information and knowledge on risk; strengthening collective action and social cohesion; and influencing policy and institutions (advocating for change, to tackle the root causes).
- Provide young people with training (e.g. online fundraising, financial management) and tools to form fundraising groups, and utilise networks to raise funds for youth-led reconstruction projects and to advocate to government agencies and other duty bearers for social, political and economic empowerment.
- Broaden young people's understanding of their geopolitical context including educating young people on the dangers and impact of negative coping mechanisms (e.g. crime, joining armed groups, early marriage).
- Support young people to plan and coordinate social and cultural activities (e.g. football matches, dance shows) for themselves and the wider community as light relief, and support community cohesion. Many young people value these as of equal importance as returning to education or security livelihoods.
- Where different nationalities, ethnic, religious or social groups are living side-by-side (e.g. refugees and host communities), work with young people to design initiatives where they can work alongside each other to mitigate and tackle stigma and discrimination (e.g. joint sports and social activities, exchange visits).



## Recommendations for working with young people to hold decision-makers accountable

- Support young people with holistic training on how to deliver accountability work that builds skills on a range of issues including data collection and analysis, network building and navigating the political context to advocacy and communications. This should build on existing skills e.g. using social media and technology, and existing networks e.g. social clubs, groups and movements.
- Support young people to understand geopolitics and the root causes of a crisis, how to navigate their political context, undertake power analysis and build influencing networks.
- Ensure young people have better access to data and information on their rights, and also government (national, regional and global) commitments on response efforts. Young people can be trained on data collection to better build an evidence base of progress towards commitments being achieved and where commitments are lagging.
- Support young people to take on positions of leadership, for example young parliamentarians, e.g. the “Not Too Young To Run” campaign in Nigeria.
- Develop ‘smart ways’ to enable young people to speak freely without putting them at risk, aligning to the Do No Harm Standards. Working with youth coalitions rather than individuals means that young people feel more protected. Young people can also call on regional and global youth networks to speak on their behalf and put pressure on global decision-making, e.g. via the UN Major Group on Children & Youth. Young people need to be supported to access these networks.
- Support relationship-building between young people and decision-makers. Where possible engaging in pre-existing decision-making spaces e.g. local assemblies is a good starting point and often where service delivery is discussed.
- Showcase examples of youth-led advocacy that can build buy-in of decision-makers towards the role of youth leadership in development, including humanitarian work.
- Support young people’s initiatives to use media and social media to amplify their voices for social change. Young people have a role in active listening to community members and raising their voices: “Young people like us can be the bridge between society and decision-makers. We can be the voice for the

voiceless.” Young people are taking on a range of new, innovative and accessible ways to campaign e.g. Techo’s “City for Youth” campaign.

- Create a requirement that all humanitarian projects must include youth leadership in decision-making, and accountability mechanisms built in that enable policy reform and inform structural change, alongside day-to-day service delivery.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer capacity building opportunities, which are particularly welcomed by young people as an opportunity to learn from each other’s experience. This can be at a local level (e.g. between refugee and host communities) or through facilitating national or global exchanges with other young people who have or are living in a similar situation (e.g. the Global Platform).

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# Annex 2

## Endnotes

- 1) <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-radio-day-2013/statistics-on-youth/>
- 2) <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/12/un-security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security/>
- 3) <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3829>
- 4) ActionAid's definition of 'young person' recognises the diversity of young people (race, gender, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity) aged 18-35. The term avoids binary language of women and men, which excludes people who don't identify as either. ActionAid adopts an intersectional feminist lens in its work and women are recognised as a key constituency in our strategy. By adopting this lens we take the position that our work is not gender blind, on the contrary, we aim to be inclusive in our language and work
- 5) <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/One%20pager%20on%20youth%20demographics%20GF.pdf>  
<https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/12/un-security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security/>
- NB: a new paradigm for development is emerging driven by a generation that Restless Development describes as the 'peak youth' generation - 1.8 billion young people in the world; more than there ever has been or it is expected will be again
- 6) <https://www.unfpa.org/news/10-things-you-should-know-about-women-world's-humanitarian-crises>
- 7) <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/12/un-security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security/>
- 8) <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3829>
- 9) <https://actionaid.org/opinions/2019/why-actionaid-promotes-womens-leadership-emergencies>
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- 11) <http://wearerestless.org/2016/11/23/meaningful-youth-engagement-made-simple-just-hit-the-bullseye/>
- 12) <https://www.youthcompact.org/>
- 13) While the age range engaged for the research spanned from 15-35, the definition of young people is contested and fluid, with a recognition that the experience of a 15-year-old and a 35-year-old will not be the same, and that ultimately young people must be involved in identifying themselves and their peers

**14)** The research sought to answer five key questions: 1) What needs do young women and young men have in times of protracted crises and disasters ranging in contexts, including sudden and slow onset? 2) What is the role of young women and young men in responding to protracted crises and disasters? 3) What role can young women and young men play in holding decision-makers and power-holders to account for delivery of response during protracted crises and sudden or slow onset disasters? 4) What role can young women and young men play in building community resilience and advocating for solutions that build resilience to ongoing risk or future shocks? (e.g. disasters and protracted crises)? 5) Which specific considerations for young women need to be recognised and integrated into responses and programming during protracted crises and disasters?

**15)** Responses were submitted across 54 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and South America. Three hundred and thirty young women and young men accessed the survey and 133 fully completed all questions. More men (201) responded than women (129) perhaps reflecting the global disparity in internet access (three respondents identified as non-binary). Ten responses were received from people living with a disability and nine from people who identified with the LGBTQ+ community. The researchers noted that the survey was accessible only to those with the internet, power and English literacy, and the results should take this into consideration, and be read alongside the focus groups which takes a more inclusive, qualitative lens to the same questions

**16)** The focus groups were gender balanced, and included representatives of young women and young men from marginalised groups including people with disabilities and from LGBTQ+ communities

**17)** ActionAid Palestine, ActionAid Myanmar, ActionAid Nepal, ActionAid Malawi, ActionAid Kenya, ActionAid Arab Region, ActionAid Nigeria, ActionAid Denmark, UN and Techno

**18)** These included interviews with ActionAid staff from Bangladesh, Palestine, Nigeria, Kenya, Myanmar, Lebanon, Jordan, Denmark and ActionAid Arab Region, and the International Humanitarian Team. Representatives of Techo in Chile and the UN's Envoy for Youth and Rep for Major Group for Children and Youth were also consulted

**19)** NB: Two current initiatives which prioritise education in emergencies as a lifesaver are the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (Global) and No Lost Generation (Syria and Iraq)

**20)** Homelessness (53%), and hunger or malnutrition (48%). Around four in ten respondents reported that they had faced physical abuse (42%) or gender based violence (41%)

**21)** This could also be underreported if it is not something respondents are used to talking about (though survey was anonymous), and the survey respondents are likely more privileged/have more coping mechanisms than non-respondents considering internet connectivity, time to complete survey, and association with ActionAid and Restless Development's networks

**22)** These statistics were self-reported 'those who had experience of...'. The statistics are an average of male and female respondents. Overall, young women reported less experience than young men. It may be that young men were overreporting to include experiences within their families or of peers, and that young women were underreporting their own experiences which is common.

**23)** NB: ActionAid is committed to ensuring that anyone who comes into contact with the or-

ganisation is protected from all forms of exploitation, abuse and harm. As part of ActionAid's approach to preventing and responding to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse and other safeguarding concerns (such as child abuse), ActionAid is committed to ensuring that their practices and personnel do not carry out harm and supporting people who disclose experiences of harm

**24)** We know from triangulating with other data that women and young women disproportionately experience these impacts e.g. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-actionfacts-and-figures> and the focus group discussions also corroborated this. We also know that women often underreport due to lack of action/impunity, fear of reprisal, or due to trauma or shame of admitting or reliving (even for themselves) these deeply violating and painful experiences. [https://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS\\_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf](https://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf)

**25)** According to the research report: eight in ten responses (81%) were from people who had personally experienced a disaster, emergency or crisis, while 44% were responding from an ongoing disaster, emergency or crisis. This includes living or working in areas affected by conflict or violence (DRC, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon), often resulting in mass displacement and refugee populations (Brazil, CAF, Uganda, Rohingya people in Bangladesh, South Sudan, Zimbabwe) life in the Palestinian occupied territories. Historic crises included extreme weather and associated emergencies as well as public health crises (Bangladesh, India, Malawi, Myanmar, Philippines and West Africa), earthquakes (Nepal, Nicaragua), fire, volcanic eruption, flooding and landslides (Uganda, DRC, Rwanda). In the online survey, young people said they distributed food clothing or equipment (63%), attended community meetings (57%), collected data (56%), communications (46%), teaching/education (36%), healthcare (29%), logistics/transport (26%), budgeting (20%) and search and rescue (19%)

**26)** ActionAid Kenya. April 2019. *Case Study: ActionAid Kenya working with young people in humanitarian work*

**27)** ActionAid Nigeria. 2018. Humanitarian Projects Overview including: *Alternatives to migration project; strengthening SRHR Maiduguri, Yola, Damaturu*

**28)** *Ibid*

**29)** <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

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**34)** Most of these young people were directly or indirectly linked to ActionAid or Restless Development or their local partners through projects, networks or events

**35)** For example, this is enshrined in the Youth Compact developed out of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. More than 40 humanitarian partners including governments, UN system entities, private sector organisations, INGOs and major youth organisations and networks have endorsed the compact. Also of note is that over a third of the 169 SDG targets highlight the role of

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**ActionAid is a global movement of  
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