



YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP
**THEORY OF CHANGE
RESOURCE**

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OXFAM
Australia

THEORY OF CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

Young people¹ have tremendous potential to be both present and future drivers of inclusive and sustainable development. In recognising this and the power of collective action, Oxfam Australia has developed a Theory of Change (ToC) to explore what needs to happen in order for young active citizens, institutions and communities to create positive, equitable and sustainable change together. This meta-theory was developed through a series of workshops which brought together various stakeholders from around the world- young people working in civil society, youth activists, Oxfam staff, Oxfam partners, in-country programming staff and young people from communities in which Oxfam works.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The intent of this document is for it to be used as a tool by Oxfam, Oxfam partners and others working in the sector as a starting point to help guide strategies for collective impact, by specifically considering youth inclusion. The ToC provided illustrates an overarching theory of the avenues through which young women and young men are already creating change, what needs to happen to further enable this and the various roles different actors need to play to create broader societal (or transformational) change. It is important to note that this is a theory; it is envisaged that this ToC will continue to be modified and improved as we learn more about how best to support youth participation.²

A point to note when using this resource, is that each organisation/group does not need to work across all areas of the ToC, however each organisation/group should be thinking about which area they are best placed to work within and how they can strategically connect with stakeholders working in other areas to increase the likelihood of achieving broader societal change.

¹ For statistical consistency across regions, Oxfam's aligns its definition of youth with the U.N which is, 'youth and young people interchangeably to mean 15-24 years'; acknowledging that youth can represent a more fluid category than a fixed age group would suggest. It is also important to note that young people are not a homogeneous group; they experience different levels of privilege and marginalisation.

² There is an absence of consensus on a singular definition for youth participation. A review and summation of fourteen definitions of youth participation by Farthing (2012) is: 'Youth participation is a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them.' Sociologist Roger Hart created a theory around the various levels of children's and young people's participation, which is outlined in his 'Ladder of Participation': <http://bit.ly/1tWhzwo>

Cover image: Onima is 15 years old and multi-talented. She sews, she's a keen dancer and is learning karate. Having grown up in a slum in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, Onima was inspired to share her knowledge of disaster preparedness and personal hygiene with others, so she volunteers for NGO forum, Oxfam's partner, and leads hygiene promotion sessions. "I'm exploring my potential. Maybe others have strong potential too but because of lack of resources they don't reach their potential."

Photo: Tom Pietrasik/Oxfam



Photo: Tom Pietrasik/Oxfam

VISION OF CHANGE

A TRANSFORMATION OF UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS



Photo: Matthew Willman/OxfamUS

The change envisioned is a transformation of current unequal power structures, including those that inhibit the advancement of women's rights, into equitable social and political relations where 'young people's rights and needs are understood and respected, and young people lead and participate in decision-making that affects their lives and their communities.'³

The gap is huge between the societal changes that Oxfam wants to see and how power dynamics currently work in most countries. Considering the number of behaviours and policies that continually exclude young women and young men from participating⁴, this vision may be seen as naive or too optimistic. However what young people have shown throughout history, is that they are active members of society and do have the ideas and determination to create social change.

Adding to this, the current youth population is the largest the world has seen. Young people today are more connected and more educated than any previous generation; they're challenging restrictive gender norms and utilising technology to mobilise civil society in new ways.

A recent example of this is how young people have been mobilising around the world out of a shared sense of deep injustice; protesting against growing inequality, which has been intensified by the global financial crisis and high rates of youth unemployment.

The question for organisations like Oxfam is less about why we need to work with young active citizens, and more about how. Oxfam is already aware that unless youth participation is strengthened at all levels of society, broader societal change is unlikely to happen. In some cases, Oxfam is already working with young women and young men around the world (including those who are directly affected by the issues Oxfam is seeking to address⁵), to benefit from their knowledge, skills and motivation to create change.

The challenge for Oxfam (and others in the sector) now is to identify its own role in supporting youth active citizenship in different contexts. Which young people's participation is Oxfam actually trying to enable? How can Oxfam build on existing work that's happening in the space of youth participation and leadership to amplify the voices of young women and young men who are already creating change? And how can organisations like Oxfam create space within their own decision-making processes for the young women and young men they're seeking to support?

³ Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan 2014-2019

⁴ Young people face a number of barriers to achieving their full participation in society. These barriers include, but are not limited to: marginalisation of young people, political risk, economic security as well as dominant strategies of civil society which often include gaps in funding, mediating the voices of young people, lacking the agility work in partnership with loosely formed youth groups.

⁵ This includes women and young men from communities, those living with a disability, those with a HIV positive status, those from Indigenous, racial, class, caste and sexual minorities as well as young women.

THREE PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

This ToC has identified three crucial routes (paths) for supporting youth active citizenship to enable collective impact. In understanding the three paths, it's important to note the following:

- There is no sequence or priority between the paths intended; rather, they offer different avenues to achieving change by working in partnership with young women and young men, and the changes that need to happen throughout each path.
- Accountability needs to occur up and down the paths and between various actors. This does not only include power holders and institutions/groups being accountable to young women and young men, but also young women and young men (as individuals or groups) being accountable to each other⁶ and other stakeholders.
- These are not standalone paths; making connections between the paths is an essential element to achieving societal change. This is explained in more detail in the 'Strategic Connections' section later in this document.

PATH A: Young women and young men participate in decision-making in affected communities

In order for young women and young men to participate in decision-making within communities, they must first be concerned about issues impacting communities and be motivated to be part of the solution. Power holders in the community must make space for young women's and young men's participation. This will require that power holders value and are motivated to work with young women and young men. Strong and open communication between young women and young men, and power holders will enable mutual respect to be gained and power holders to see the value of youth participation, increasing the power of young women and young men and their capacity to create change in their communities.



PATH B: Young women and young men from different regions and fields are organising and taking collective action

For youth groups to affect change they must first have opportunities to connect and share their ideas about issues they care about. There needs to be a collective concern, with young women and young men from affected communities and other young active citizens working together towards a shared aim. Roles and responsibilities need to be defined and strategic plans need to be made (including operational plans), to ensure sustainability. In order for youth movements to continue to create change collectively, they need to have the resources and support to sustain their collective action, and need to be working politically and connecting strategically with power holders in communities and formal institutions.



PATH C: Young women and young men participate in formal decision-making in institutions

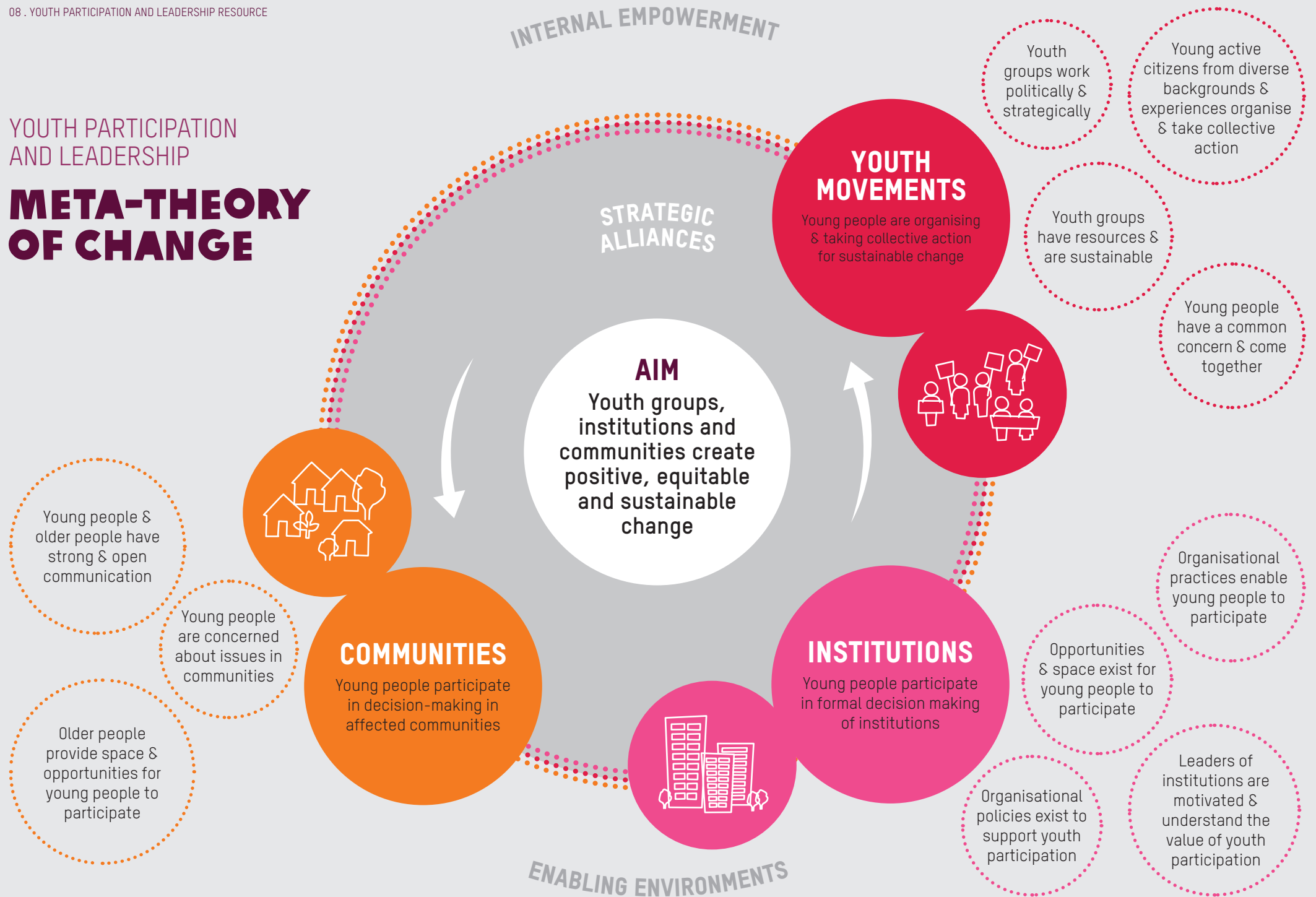
For young women and young men to influence decision-making in formal institutions (such as governments, government institutions, NGO's and private corporations), leaders of these institutions must first be motivated and see the value of working with young women and young men. Organisations need to be aware of the behaviours and practices that exclude young women and young men from participating, as well as what enables young women's and young men's participation, so organisational policies can be put in place to support this participation. While policies are one aspect, the organisational culture, everyday processes and individuals' practices must enable and support young women and young men to participate, giving equal voice to them in decision-making.



⁶ An example of this type of accountability is youth representatives being accountable to the young women and the young men that they represent.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

META-THEORY OF CHANGE



UNDERPINNING FACTORS INFLUENCING CHANGE:

INTERNAL EMPOWERMENT AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

A set of underlying factors must exist across the ToC to enable collective impact and transformational change. These factors can be grouped into 'internal empowerment' and 'enabling environments'. These elements need to be present throughout all paths and at multiple levels including the individual, family, community and institutional levels in order to shift traditionally held beliefs and behaviours (both at the individual and collective level) that inhibit meaningful youth participation.

• Internal Empowerment:

These factors relate to the individual capabilities and attributes that lead to active citizenship:

- Knowledge⁷, skills and motivation
- Awareness of oneself, one's view of the world and how this impacts on behaviours.
- Awareness of power dynamics and how this can result in behaviours that exclude marginalised young women and young men.

Internal empowerment not only relates to young women and young men, but also to power holders and other stakeholders. Internal empowerment is a crucial element to enabling interpersonal support, which must occur between peers, family, colleagues and other stakeholders to support youth active citizenship.

• Enabling Environments:

These factors relate to broader environmental influences, which extend beyond the individual, to support young women and young men in being active citizens:

- There are opportunities for young people to participate and/or be included in decision-making.
- Special measures are put in place to further support marginalised young women and young men.
- Space is created for young people to take measured risks.
- Young women and young men feel safe and secure both economically, socially and politically.

Enabling environments not only refer to the need to create the above environments, but also refer to seeking out spaces where change is already happening and amplifying these efforts.

⁷ Knowledge includes awareness of the diversity and inequalities between young women and young men- this includes the gender-differentiated experiences, needs and perspectives of young women and young men, as well as awareness of the behaviours and practices that exclude other marginalised young women and young men, such as those from such as those living with a disability, those with a HIV positive status, those from Indigenous, racial, class, caste and sexual minorities.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

KEY TO ACHIEVING CHANGE

A key feature of the ToC is that while organisations/groups do not need to work across all paths, only when strategic connections are made between paths is broader societal change going to occur. If each path is addressed exclusively without consideration of how it relates to the other paths, long-term change is much less likely to be achieved.

For example, if young women and young men in youth-led groups and networks work together without collaborating with leaders in communities and institutions, it is less likely that transformational change will occur. Thus, in order for change to occur at all levels (from the grassroots community level, to the national and global levels), leaders from youth groups, communities and institutions must be working together in strategic coalitions towards a shared vision.



Photo: OxfamAUS

ASSUMPTIONS

There are a number of assumptions which underpin this ToC and affect whether or not transformational change will ultimately occur. These assumptions include:

- Young women and young men want to participate in decision-making in their communities and their societies.
- Marginalised young women and young men are currently participating significantly less than they could be.
- Young women and young men bring different ideas, perspectives and energy to the development process that will have a positive impact on achieving broader societal change.
- Young women and young men hold the greatest potential for shifting restrictive gender roles that perpetuate inequality within our societies.
- Working to address inhibiting environmental factors will support young people to participate.
- Young women and young men have the potential to be leaders in all areas.

This document was written by Oxfam Australia Youth Advisors.

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