AIYD – International Youth Development Policy Review

USAID Technical Brief

Purpose – Looking back, looking ahead

USAID released its inaugural Youth in Development Policy in November 2012 with two main objectives: (1) Strengthen youth programming, participation and partnership in support of Agency development objectives based on seven guiding principles, and (2) Mainstream and integrate youth issues and engage young people across Agency initiatives and operations. As the community of leading youth development practitioners, AIYD was a proud contributor and consulting organization to the policy. Mark Green was sworn in as USAID Administrator in August 2017 amid a sustained youth imperative in development. **AIYD undertook a consultative review on the fifth anniversary of the USAID Policy to assess the Policy's impact in the context of the international youth development policy landscape,** resulting in recommendations for USAID and stakeholders committed to empowering and improving the lives of young people and their families and communities.[1] We believe that renewed US leadership could further mobilize and leverage resources in priority areas to have the greatest impact on this largest youth population in history.

Key Research Questions:

- ➢ How, if at all, has the USAID policy impacted the design or implementation of your development projects?
- ➢ What, if any, other guiding principles are missing from USAID's policy to strengthen programming?
- ➢ The policy was meant to be relevant and apply to youth in all regions and contexts, but also to programs in all sectors; do you think it has been successful in that regard? Why or why not?
- ➢ What are the biggest successes and failures in terms of policy implementation?
- ➢ What do you believe USAID should emphasize or change in future youth practices or guidance? How do you think USAID's youth portfolio could be informed by others and their policies or strategies?

Top 10 Technical Recommendations: The policy can have the greatest impact if USAID encourages, empowers and incentivizes the following actions:

- ➢ Inculcate and operationalize policy and technical guidance into internal practices
- ➢ Deepen education, inspiration and professionalization of staff and partners on youth development and engagement
- ➢ Strengthen and formalize organizational structures and coordination
- ➢ Increase research and data collection
- ➢ Place more emphasis on sustainable systems and institutions
- ➢ Increase, incentivize and enable financing and implementation of youth-serving, cross-sectoral and place-based programs
- ➢ Prioritize at-risk, vulnerable young people
- ➢ Engage a broader range of stakeholders across the private and public sector by exploring innovative financing tools
- ➢ Lead in global efforts on key issues related to youth
- ➢ Strengthen and evaluate youth participation mechanisms and activities

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[1] AIYD Members contributing to this review include: Chemonics International, FHI360, International Youth Foundation (IYF), Education Development Center (EDC), Research Triangle International (RTI), Global Communities, IREX, Plan USA. Dr. Nicole Goldin, AIYD Senior Advisor, led the review.

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Background and Context

Half the world's population was under age 30, giving rise to a demographic imperative when USAID's first youth development policy was launched. In this peak youth era where 85% of the world's young people live in developing countries, AIYD believes in an enduring youth imperative in global development and diplomacy today: our foreign assistance investments can best advance U.S. and global economic and national security interests if this youth imperative is accounted for. Youth comprise a large share of the population worldwide, but remain marginalized where instability and terrorism take root, creating a national security imperative. As the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy states "Societies that empower [women and youth] to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful. We will support efforts to advance women's equality, protect the rights of women and girls, and promote women and youth empowerment programs."[2] If the U.S. and development partners do not sufficiently "support, protect, prepare and engage" youth as the Policy advises, our adversaries will – and we may not like the outcomes or youth choices that result from their influence over ours. Furthermore, the economic imperative of youth is underscored by the fact that investments in human and physical capital of a young population can generate a significant economic payoff adding hundreds of millions of people to the global labor and consumer base. If education, economic growth and trade investments fail to equip or enable young workers and entrepreneurs to thrive, then this dividend may not be realized.

Following USAID's lead, other donor agencies and organizations have since released new strategies or policy statements elevating and cohering their commitments and practices with youth. In 2013, AIYD issued its "Guiding Principles" offering practitioners further evidence-informed best practices in designing and implementing cross-sectoral and technical youth programs. In April 2016, UK DFID released its Youth Agenda to "Putting Young People at the Heart of Development" focusing on supporting young people to make successful transitions to adulthood, to work with young people as agents of social change and as passionate advocates seeking to shape and influence the world that they will inherit. The UNDP and Canada's DFATD have also released strategies or policies that prioritize youth in development and foreign assistance activities.

Key Insights

(1) Policies provide robust, relevant, enduring foundational guidance on youth development as new lessons emerge

AIYD members highlighted the Policy provides an enduringly useful and robust conceptual framework. It has impacted their design or implementation of a range of development projects. It has opened the eyes of many in the development community to the importance of youth in development. Others indicated that that the Policy has informed and encouraged organizational practice especially in terms of youth engagement, innovation and participation in their own project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

The Policy crystalized lessons from USAID's body of sectoral and cross-sectoral programs such as EQUIP3 and YouthNet, and articulated a participatory, asset-based approach to help mainstream youth programming more broadly. The seven Guiding Principles for youth programming set out in the Policy continue to provide a useful baseline of best practice. At the same time, as learning has grown, the

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[2] National Security Strategy of the United States of America, White House, December 2017
https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf

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Positive Youth Development approach—which incorporates many of these baseline principles—continues to evolve as core (but exclusive) theory of program design. Other frameworks, such as the principle of "do no harm," should be an additional consideration for activities involving youth. Given shrinking civil society space and increasing conflict and fragility, there is an associated risk to personal safety and security when working in this space. In addition, while the Policy principles ask programs to "Account for Diversity and Commonality of youth" and to "Pursue and Promote Gender equality," the notion of *intersectionality* among youth warrants more explicit consideration to these factors.

At the outset of its policy development process, USAID communicated its intent to deliver a policy that would respond first and foremost to ensure officers and technical staff across Missions and Bureaus, functional and geographical, are equipped with better program resources for greater impact to reach more youth. There is consensus in the AIYD community that USAID was successful in this, and the Policy is relevant and applicable to youth programs in all regions and contexts, but also to programs in all sectors, (although youth are still more "obvious" as a priority in certain sectors—education and workforce, health—more than others). While acknowledging the importance of addressing youth-specific needs to have greater development impact, *the policy guidance has fallen short in its consideration of the life course of youth and in the differing needs of youth at different ages and stages of the broad youth spectrum identified in policy* (ages 10-29 encompassing early adolescents, adolescents, emerging adulthood, young adults) to ensure that programming targets particularly critical development phases of life. Similarly any update should be further informed by recent research on brain development and newer evidence on Positive Youth Development approaches.

> **Guiding Principles in USAID's Policy on Youth in Development**
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> ➢ *Youth Participation is Vital:* engaging youth in all phases of the program cycle and decision-making
> ➢ *Involve and Support Mentors, Families and Communities:* engaging adults and intergenerational stakeholders, and ensuring all are prepared to interact with youth
> ➢ *Pursue Gender Equality*: accounting for differing expectations, constraints, vulnerabilities, and opportunities among young men and women
> ➢ *Account for Commonalities and Differences Among Youth*: identifying and acting on the diversity factors that affect youth resources and opportunities
> ➢ *Invest in Assets that Build Youth Resilience:* strengthening youths' ability to avoid risky behaviors and overcome trauma or shocks
> ➢ *Provide Second Chances*: ensuring youth who miss development milestones have access to remedial and "catch-up" opportunities
> ➢ *Embrace Innovation and Technology By and For Youth:* including ICT integration, affordable access, showcasing and incubation support

(2) Policy implementation yields success alongside unmet expectations

The USAID youth policy had a significant impact but there is much more to be done. Under the *Youth Power* mechanisms for Learning and Implementation, the work delivered has built upon and improved the evidence base for and improved the Agency and implementer's knowledge and capacities of Positive Youth Development and has benefitted thousands of young people where projects and operations are taking place. The Policy asked that an *Agency Youth Coordinator* be installed to elevate and cohere activities across the agency and with Mission Points of Contact. Though delayed, AIYD applauds the installation of the Coordinator (Michael McCabe), and believes his work to champion youth development at senior levels, support Agency staff, and consistently engage and learn from the partner and implementing community. The Coordinator created a senior youth champions group supported by technical youth champions across the agency. Moreover, the USAID policy set a tone for inclusive processes, and more youth participation in programs is evident from Missions.

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These achievements not-withstanding, implementation of the USAID policy is still a work in progress. *The lack of strategic guidance and tools for specific sectors or regions has hampered implementation of the policy to advance youth development.* While the Policy remains educational and inspirational on the basics of youth development, further identification of goals and advice on youth dynamics, best practice, and indicators within specific contexts such as rural, urban or conflict and programmatic areas would better enable funders and implementers to design and bring results at scale. At the same time, cross-sectoral projects are still the rarity versus an emerging norm, as evidenced by the fact that, for example, most of the Task Orders issued to date under Youth Power are mostly single sector.

Given there is a *dearth of expertise in the Missions, and the lack of depth in technical knowledge vis a vis youth development across the agency, further investment in training and tools would have a significant impact on development results, similar to the impact USAID made in gender.* Recent trainings are commendable, but do not go far enough in providing the level of education on youth integration in specific education, health, democracy and governance, resilience food security, economic growth or other Agency programming priorities.

Structural issues have also limited implementation. Despite the welcome establishment of the Agency youth coordinator within the DCHA Bureau, *youth remain largely lost organizationally* in a sector- and regional-oriented bureaucracy that tends to operate in silos. In addition, earmarks and budgetary silos make it difficult to utilize funding for youth-specific programming (but at the same time, present an opportunity to integrate, mainstream and fund youth programs from existing, if allocated or pre-determined, resources). Current redesign efforts provide USAID with an opportunity to reconsider the home for the Youth Coordinator to have the greatest impact.

Finally, we observe that procurement processes can limit youth participation in project design which conflicts with one of the principles of the youth policy. Moreover, the frequently short-term nature of program budgets and project lifecycle can be incongruous with youth programming or do not allow for results to accrue. Where possible, youth policies and programs should include a focus on local systems strengthening as a cornerstone consideration, recognizing that results may be incremental, take time and often require extended period of evaluation of impact. Similarly, in terms of evaluation, the policy guidance does not give enough attention or recognition to intermediate outcomes (such as staying in school and training) that are especially important for youth at younger ages and that impact later outcomes that tend to be prioritized (such as jobs).

(3) We can learn more from others

Other policies have influenced our approach to youth development but acknowledge we could further coordinate and glean best practice among the U.S. Government, as well as learn from and adopt practices of others. For example, the UK Department for International Development (DFID)'s Youth Agenda comprises a clear approach and a laudable emphasis on agency and young people's meaningful participation. The United Nation's Development Program (UNDP) is recognized as a leader for their strategy and ensuing efforts to elevate youth in peace and security, while the United Nations System Wide Action Plan represents a welcome example towards coordination and coherence.

Technical Recommendations

In the five years since the release of the USAID Policy, the international youth development community has seen solid advancement by USAID and other donors to advance the interests of young people with

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smarter investments and programs. To build on this momentum, increase reach, and see greater results in responding to the youth imperative, AIYD recommends that USAID, the State Department and other stakeholders should take steps to encourage, empower and incentivize closing the gaps between what policies say and what an organization does in three principal areas: (1) improve execution of existing policy and programs, (2) extend impact of existing programs and (3) increase resources for youth programs.

(1) Improve Execution of Existing Policy and Programs

- **Inculcate and operationalize policy guidance** into internal practices and embed youth into organizational processes and resource planning. This could include tools for Missions to develop their Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) with a youth lens, including country-level examples of how youth inclusion and planning are tracked and shared, as well as revisiting and ensuring youth data points and research are part of requisite Gender and Social Inclusion Assessments.

- **Deepen education, inspiration and professionalization** of staff and partners on youth development and engagement to help advance flexible policy and programming options that respond to contextual and targeted youth needs. In USAID and the State Department, this could include a "youth in development and diplomacy" module as part of core Foreign Service Officer training; as well as offering a series of e-learning modules and advanced webinars on sector- and regional-specific understanding youth and program design; and/or support/fund participation in external trainings. USAID and its partners need to demonstrate the highest possible knowledge and practice in youth development to achieve greater impact. Incentives could include establishing a "youth champions award" for the annual awards ceremony, internal learning exchanges and increased acknowledgement, rewards and opportunities to personnel who show innovation and leadership, particularly taking advantage of the talented Foreign Service National staff.

- **Strengthen organizational structures and coordination** within USAID, across the U.S. Government (USG) and at multilateral and country levels. Youth are often sidelined or insufficiently represented in bureaucratic architectures, and youth development suffers from weak or absent coordination in terms of policy, research, and programs which undermines leverage, impact and efficiency. The redesign efforts at USAID creates opportunity to better situate, centralize, and elevate the USAID Youth Coordinator and amplify their mandate as a result. More USAID Missions can install youth specialists or program officers responsible for cross-sectoral portfolios. At the global level, better coordination is needed across public and private donors and partner organizations to minimize redundancy and maximize synergies, share research and best practice, and leverage resources where possible.

(2) Extend Impact of Existing Programs

- **Increase research and data collection** to generate new knowledge and evidence. Despite increasing evaluation of youth programs and policies, further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to prove (or disprove) principles of what works in youth development. Areas requiring greater attention include further research on PYD approaches, integrating findings from domestic programs involving US youth; as well as deeper understanding of youth attitudes and perspectives and improved data

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collection and monitoring of youth outcomes and progress against Sustainable Development Goals or other indicators of development, wellbeing, or quality of life.

➢ **Place more emphasis on sustainable systems** and institutions to lastingly deliver at scale. This could take the form of working through government systems, partnering with the private sector and supporting dynamic partnerships to build evidence; convening donors and national stakeholders working on policy, institutional, or curricula, reform; supporting efforts to disaggregate existing data; increasing inter-generational, family or community elements of projects; or strengthening capacity of youth-led and youth-serving organizations and networks.

➢ **Strengthen and evaluate youth participation** mechanisms and activities and ensure they are even more deliberate, planned and representative, including at institutional levels and platforms. These efforts should include more empowerment of youth themselves. Given the thin rigorous evidence base regarding the benefits of youth engagement and participation to young individuals, communities and projects, quantitative and experimental evaluation should also be a priority.[3] Attention to amplifying the voices of and engaging marginalized youth is particularly important.

➢ **Prioritize at-risk, vulnerable** young people who are often the hardest to reach and most in need. While many policies and strategies do include such a commitment, it may be more complicated or difficult to act upon as targeting data may be inadequate, or it may require more creativity, patience or spending on the ground.

(3) Increase Resources for Youth Programming

➢ **Increase, Incentivize and enable innovative financing** such as the Development Credit Authority (DCA) and Global Development Alliance (GDA) for implementation of youth-serving, cross-sectoral and place-based programs by more easily mixing funding streams and drawing upon a wider range of budget allocations. This could include drawing upon Congressional earmarks or better integrating youth Presidential Initiatives and leveraging existing platforms for funding.

➢ **Engage a broader range of stakeholders across the private and public sector** in policy debate, advocacy and implementation to achieve results. An expanded set of decision-makers, experts, and stakeholders at global, national and community levels need to be involved and bought in to advance a comprehensive youth agenda. There is a need to "get outside ourselves." This especially includes partnering with the business sector to invest in current and future young employees, managers, suppliers, clients and customers.

In line with our mission to advocate, educate and activate, we at AIYD stand ready, willing and able to work closely with, help educate and support USAID officers to ensure foreign assistance resources are not only improving lives and communities abroad, but best serving American taxpayers and our economic and security interests at home. We know investing in youth promotes effectiveness at both these urgent goals.

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[3] See AIYD Guiding Principles (2013) for best practices in participation; and illustrative indicators for public engagement, association and personal development.

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