

## EVALUATION OF THE DfID/CSO YOUTH GUIDANCE PROJECT

“**This** [the Guide] does not look like a typical ‘DfID How To’... *It’s fresh!* This is an important resource and [I] hope that when we launch this Guide we can show the value of youth participation...We have to take a step by step approach to **change** the way an organization works.”

“**The** tip of the iceberg is the Guide itself but all what is going on underneath—the networking, collaboration, interface with donors and advocacy on behalf of youth participation—is absolutely crucial and has been **beneficial.**”

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## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the findings of a process evaluation of the Youth Guidance Project (YGP) which was conducted in December 2009 at the Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW) headquarters in London, United Kingdom. The YGP aims to develop, pilot and disseminate guidance and resources to Donor Agency country offices (i.e. World Bank, UNICEF, UNFPA, etc.) on how to meaningfully engage young people in their work alongside the implementation of core plans and strategies.

Production of the Guide was directed by a Project Manager and a Civil Society Steering Committee<sup>1</sup> which consisted of members from the UK Department for International Development (DFID)-CSO Working Group on Youth (with oversight from the DFID Equity and Rights Team). This was a collaborative project between donor and civil society organisations, in the UK, Uganda and Nepal<sup>2</sup> which will span over 18 months. It was coordinated from SPW's headquarters in London and young people were part of the Project Team and the Project Committee.

The Guide provides practical support to Donor Agency Country Office Advisers on three thematic areas:

- Governance, Voice and Accountability
- Post-Conflict Transitions and Livelihoods
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

The objective of the Guide is to provide information on how to actually work with youth at a practical level; through the provision of promising practice case studies and their associated tools/resources. The project is complemented by two pilot projects in Uganda and Nepal that were selected as contemporary case studies through a series of workshops (Sharing and Learning Networks, SLNs).

A key and unique aim of the project is the participatory nature—attempting to engage directly with young people throughout the process. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the importance of building partnerships between adults and youth as a foundation for all youth mainstreaming work in a culturally sensitive manner. This was to be achieved by involving young people as part of the Project Team in the UK, Nepal and Uganda, and also by setting up a series of Sharing and Learning Network workshops in Nepal and Uganda that would bring together donor agencies, government actors, civil society organizations (CSOs), and young people. The project aimed to place a strong emphasis on participation.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The aims of the evaluation are to explore:

- The effectiveness of approach to the Youth Guidance Project;

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<sup>1</sup> This includes: Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW), the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC), the British Youth Council (BYC), Plan International, UNICEF, International Alert, Save the Children and Peace Child International (PCI).

<sup>2</sup> Nepal and Uganda were selected as countries contemporary case studies could be gathered through a series of workshops.

- Understanding of the project and its aims and activities amongst Project Teams, Steering Committee, and Donors, and views on their usefulness;
- Benefits and impact of the Sharing and Learning Networks (SLN) in Uganda and Nepal;
- Youth inclusion and participation; and
- Lessons learned and recommendations.

The report examines the process undertaken and identifies lessons learned. These lessons are provided to inform CSOs and donor agencies on how to effectively produce a time-bound Guide on youth participation, the added value of this unique process, and recommendations on implementing the Guide beyond the end of the Guide-making process. .

The evaluation employed a qualitative approach and an effort was made to ensure that interviewees included young people as well as included a broad range of YGP stakeholders that had been involved in different roles and aspects of the project. Fourteen interviews were completed with various individuals; this included members of: the SPW team, the Steering Committee, DfID and other Donor Agency Country Offices. The interviews took place either by phone or face-to-face meetings. Additionally, a short online questionnaire was sent to 12 SLN participants, of which 6 were completed.

The evaluation will not include the full details on the project's activities as most of this has been documented in Part 3 of the Youth Guidance Project itself. The report is divided into 4 parts: Part 1. Overview of YGP; Part 2. Evaluation Findings; Part 3. Lessons Learned; Part 4. Recommendations.

## 1 OVERVIEW OF THE YGP

### 1.1 Approach

The YGP was developed in discussion between civil society members of the DfID/CSO Working Group in 2008 on Youth and the DfID AIDS and Reproductive Health and Equity and Rights Policy Teams. The discussions revolved around the critical gap that existed in DfID's social policies around youth participation issues. The Working Groups understood the vital need for a broad Guide on youth participation for bilateral and multilateral agencies for whom a closer working approach with youth would be beneficial in relation to their country plans and strategies. Therefore, the Guide provides practical support and guidance to Donor Agency country offices on how to meaningfully engage young people in their work around the three chosen priority areas: Governance, Voice and Accountability; Post-Conflict Transitions and Youth Civic Participation; and Sexual and Reproductive Health, HIV and AIDS.

The approach of the Guide is collaborative and participatory—with SPW coordinating the activities and working alongside DfID Equity and Rights Staff and a Steering Committee. The Committee, formed in December 2008, composed of some members of the subgroups of the DfID-CSO Working Group on Youth and new faces<sup>3</sup>. The Committee's goal was to provide expertise on youth participation as well as guidance and feedback on the content of the Guide and the Guide-making process.

Engaging and working directly with young people during the YGP process is also a core part of the YGP's strategy and to this end, three part-time Youth Participation Officers (YPOs) were hired in the UK to conduct desk-based research on good practices (case studies) from external organizations that would feed into Part 2 of the Guide. The YPOs also participated in the Steering Committee and conducted two focus groups in the UK with young people.

A unique aspect of producing the Guide was the advocacy component of the Guide—i.e. advocating mainstreaming youth participation. After an initial setup workshop that took place in Uganda, the Project Team decided that it was best to pilot “Sharing and Learning” Networks (SLNs) that would provide a platform on youth participation for various stakeholders and would therefore assist in advocating for and exposing others to youth participation. These SLNs—spanning from July to November 2009—brought together CSOs and donor agencies, in a workshop format, which provided in-depth discussions that aimed to extrapolate key learning's on the following key topics: youth marginalisation; youth and unemployment; youth & peer education; & youth led research and M&E. The areas identified were of interest to the pilot countries and areas as well as key/missing areas required for the Guide that would ultimately feed back into the Guide either as ‘live’ ongoing resources or tested practical case studies. The additional benefit is that the SLNs created a common platform for sharing and learning with donor agencies and CSOs interested in youth issues. To coordinate the SLNs, a YPO was hired in each pilot country, again ensuring the participation of young people

The process of producing the Guide, and in doing so, advocating for Youth Participation took 18 months as outlined below:

Phase One: Conceptual Scoping and outreach to partners (3 months: November 2008- January 2009)

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<sup>3</sup> Members included individuals from SPW, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC), the British Youth Council (BYC), Plan International, UNICEF, International Alert, Save the Children and Peace Child International (PCI).

Phase Two: Development of the Draft Guide (3 months: February 2010 – April 2010)

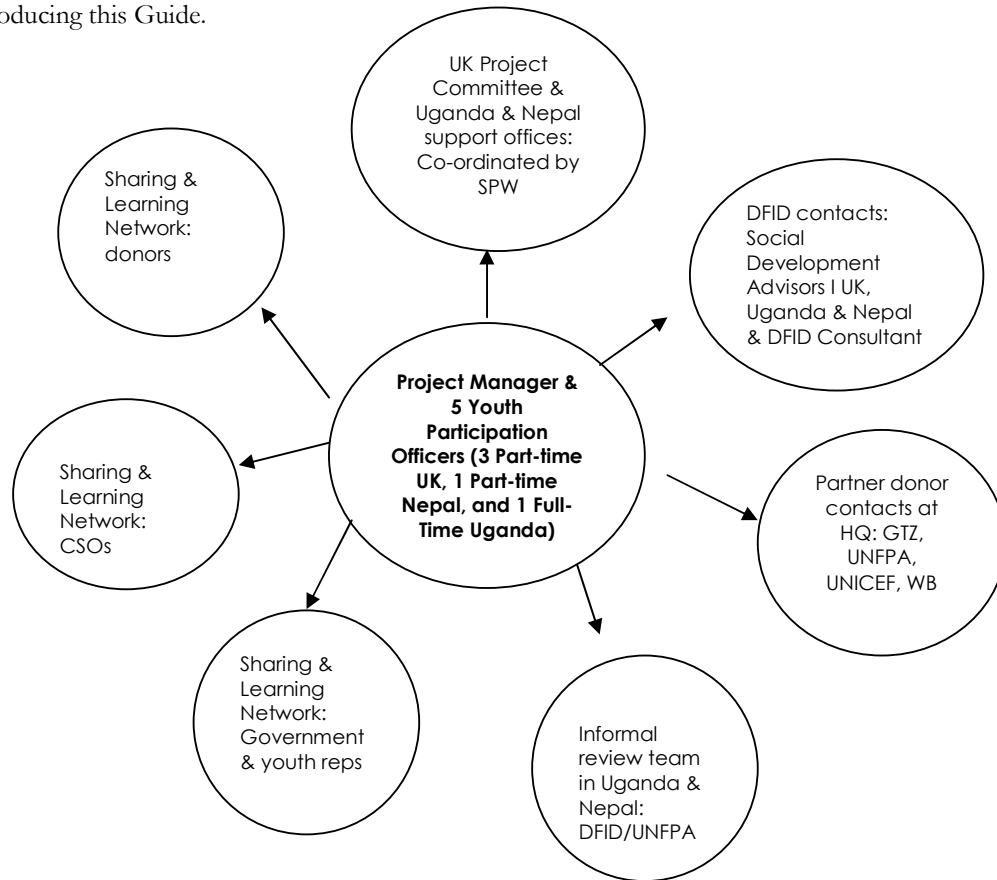
Phase Three: Implementation of pilot SLNs, further development of Guide, and review of Draft with key partners (7 Months: May 2009 – November 2009)

Phase Four: Evaluation of the Process of Producing the Guide (2 weeks: December 2009)

Phase Five: Revision of Guide, design and online version (3 months: December 2009 - February 2010)

Phase Six: Launch & dissemination (2 months: March 2010 - April 2010)

The following diagram clearly illustrates the variety of working partners that the part time youth participation officers and full time Project Manager were engaged with throughout the 18 month duration in producing this Guide.



## 2. KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

### Introduction

This section of the report presents the main findings from the project. To ascertain whether the process of producing the time-bound Guide was truly participatory, effective and allowed for young people's voices, the evaluation focuses on three different key areas. These are: the approach and institutional setup of the YGP; the value added and impact of the SLNs; and finally youth inclusion.

More specifically, the evaluation aims to answer the following questions:

1. How effective was the institutional set up i.e. team hosted within SPW, steering committee, YPOs in allowing the voices of young people to be heard?
2. What could have been done differently to make (1) even better?
3. What are the lessons learned about trying to get time-bound product (the guide) produced through this fairly complex arrangement?
4. Did the work in the two pilot countries (the SLNs) add value to the process? In what ways?
5. How useful were the SLN meetings in a) identifying important lessons learned, b) engaging a wide range of donors on an issue, c) bringing youth voice and agency into the dialogue
6. Are donors (other than DFID) engaged with the guide? What was their role?
7. How did engaging young people throughout the process improve/benefit the end product i.e. what was their value added?

The evaluation findings include quotations from interviewees commenting on various aspects of the project.

## **2.1 INSTITUTIONAL SETUP AND APPROACH OF YGP**

This section will look specifically at the effectiveness of the collaborative working arrangements of the Youth Guidance Project. It will also examine whether this institutional setup allowed for young people's voice to be heard.

### **Structure**

The YGP aimed to be a collaborative project between DfID and various youth-focused agencies in order to ensure better youth participation in development. In general, involving so many different stakeholders has been advantageous and there have been many benefits coming out of this truly participatory process. Given the resources that were available to the network and the implementing team, the Guide has 'practiced it what it preached' by involving youth in the process while concurrently building effective partnerships among several different stakeholders.

The working arrangements between members of the Steering Committee, DfID and SPW facilitated networking-building, and the ability to work effectively together—particularly given that this specific network had no previous experience in such partnerships. The diversity of the network encouraged fresh debates on different approaches to youth participation, which enhanced the Guide's materials. The participatory aspect of the Steering Committee also added value to the feedback the YGP team received in their review processes.

Many interviewees commented on the benefits of learning from one another and sharing their own expertise on youth participation in development.

“The Steering Committee was a beneficial opportunity to network in what is an emerging field and crystallized thinking on this new guide. The process is interesting and it highlights the fact that you can work in the same field and have different definitions and debates.”

“The Steering Committee's role was collaborative and was a more comfortable way for donors to relate to. You were able to get under the skin more...”

“The tip of the iceberg is the Guide itself but all what is going on underneath—the networking, collaboration, interface with donors and advocacy on behalf of youth participation—is absolutely crucial and has been beneficial.”

The most unique aspect of the working arrangement and perhaps what sets the YGP apart from other Guides is the level of involvement of young people—namely the Youth Participation Officers (YPOs) based in Nepal, Uganda and the UK. Several interviewees emphasized the fresh perspective the YPOs brought into the process and the lessons they have learned on the benefits of working with young people in this guide-making process. Others have even said that it’s evident to them that the Guide is ‘speaking from the young people’s hearts.’ Speaking with the YPOs, it was evident that the YGP process also facilitated building their skills and capacity—from interacting with donor agencies in-country to gaining perspectives on youth issues from international development organizations.

“The whole process was a kind of training/capacity building, and the continuous feedback we received on our work helped.”

“Being a part of this process from the very beginning [i.e. Youth Working Group] has been very unique. I can appreciate the process and have seen a broader Working Group turn into something more specific and tangible [Guide].”

“To involve young people and document it gives this project extreme credibility.”

“I get bored of adults talking about youth participation...Youth can tell you so much more on why it is important to include them in 3 lines. It’s a fresh approach.”

“I have been impressed by the dynamism of the young people involved in the project; it is often hard to translate theory into practice. This project provides a good example of including young people in processes which can persuade other colleagues to do so.”

### ***Lessons Learned***

The aforementioned quotes have illustrated the benefits of employing a multifaceted network to produce the YGP. However, it should be recognized that this diverse team faced two fundamental constraints, mainly in the early stages of the project, which did not effectively allow for youth participation or enhance the YGP process. More specifically, these were initial uncertainty around the strategy and logistical design of the Guide by the project committee in the early stages of the project, and secondly a budget that was unable to fully meet the demands of the project coupled with tight deadlines faced by a small, dispersed team. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the YGP team did ultimately design creative strategies that ensured a well-working structure and a cohesive unit. These strategies enabled the team to produce a practical and resource-rich Guide that has exceeded stakeholders’ expectations.

Based on feedback and interviews with various stakeholders, there are lessons learnt in producing the Guide that involve so many stakeholders. The lessons are the following:

- **Ensure objectives are clear from the outset of the project.** This involves convening the wider Youth Working Group, Steering Committee, and DfID to collaboratively consult on the project’s goals, aims, and vision. It is critical to have a unanimous understanding of the end-project and the

process. Take into account the need to bridge the current gap in terms of building up awareness of youth issues but also skills, capacity and organisational ‘buy in’

- **Clearly define roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in the process.** Draft terms of references even for voluntary positions and map out each stakeholder’s responsibilities to ascertain whether they have the sufficient capacity to carry out their responsibilities—from the beginning of the project.
- **Consult Donor—from headquarters to country offices—on their specific needs, ‘political considerations,’ and vision of the project.** Engage with Donor throughout the process to see if their needs have changed and to increase their involvement, buy-in, and ownership over project.
- **Set realistic timeline, deadlines, and funding for the project.** Ensure stakeholders have the sufficient time and budget to follow through on tasks.

During the early design and planning phase, the YGP team did not seem to have a unified voice on some elements of the project. Various members of the Team had different views on the target audience and approaches to reaching out to these audiences—i.e. whether the Guide should primarily target DfID or extend to other donor advisors as well. At the same time during this phase, the project’s timeline and the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders were not explicitly defined. This is not to say that the YGP had no structure. The roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder along with the project timeline were eventually concretely developed and defined—however the YGP process could have been enhanced had these measures been taken in a consultative manner during the early design and planning phase.

Interviewees commented that it is ‘notoriously difficult to mix theory-case study-and practice,’ and stressed that the Guide should be as accessible and practical as possible for donor agencies. As the Guide was embarking on new territory in terms of its participatory approach and focus on donors, conceptualizing and envisioning the end product seemed to be a challenge for the YGP team in the beginning phase. Convening, networking, and negotiating with the wider Youth Working Group and the Steering Committee could have greatly alleviated some of these challenges, and produced a unified understanding of what the Guide would look like and how. This additionally would have also greatly helped the YGP team get institutional buy-in from members of the Steering Committee.

Funding and time has been another challenge to the YGP project. Given the large-scale agenda spanning from the UK to Nepal, parts of the project was under-resourced in terms of its timeline and human resources (in particular this was true of the youth participation pilots – it became obvious that it was not possible to deliver on these in the budget, timeline and given national contexts). Due to funding constraints, the YGP team found themselves relying on advice and support from those lending their times to the Project (i.e. Steering Committee members). Additionally, the YGP team was not able to pursue some components of the project—such as hiring overseas young interns in the UK, or providing extra in-country support to the YPOs. Further, it was not very clear in the design phase how exactly the project would be implemented in the short duration of time allocated to the project.

“The time period was simply not enough. It is a very short time to try to pilot SLNs in 8 months. The donor world moves very slowly.”

As the quote illustrates, the majority of interviewees noted that there was not enough time to achieve all the objectives laid out by the YGP, and it was an ‘ambitious’ timeline for the donor world.

### ***Roles and Responsibilities***

The roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders seemed to evolve as the project grew into something bigger and needs changed. While this is to be expected in a project as unique and vast as the YGP, this could have been avoided had the roles of each stakeholder been clearly defined and thought out at the onset of the project.

One such example is in the set up process of the Steering Committee. The majority of members of the Committee stem from the larger DfID-CSO Youth Working Group and thus shared a common interest to mainstream youth participation in development. However, there was no ‘formal’ initial set-up of the Committee along with their expected roles and responsibilities. This uncertainty can hinder progress and sustainability of a collaborative project such as the YGP—especially when one organization is taking the lead on implementation, while others are providing input and expertise on a voluntary and goodwill basis. Nevertheless, this arrangement worked because again all stakeholders were committed to advocating youth participation to donor agencies.

Eventually, as the project came into being, the Steering Committee did informally discuss their roles and were also given specific tasks in the Guide-making process. Some members still however commented on the uncertainty of their own responsibilities. However, it is important to note that the Committee stressed that the Project Team did a tremendous job in ensuring deadlines were met and that objectives were achieved to the extent they could have, given the human resources and time constraints.

In addition, large institutional players were absent from the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee would have greatly benefited from these institutions’ expertise and experiences in the field. It is unclear whether these organizations (such as Oxfam and donor agencies) were identified as potential Steering Committee members. This point goes back to the informal set-up of the Committee discussed earlier. A mapping exercise identifying key stakeholders would have enhanced the Committee and a formal Terms of References (or monetary incentives) may have prevented some organizations from sporadically participating in the Committee.

The roles and responsibilities of the Project Manager and Youth Participation Officers (YPOs) were not fully conceptualized at the start of the project; however their expected output and responsibilities quickly developed and expanded as the project progressed. The Project Manager and YPOs came to understand how they fit into in the bigger picture in guide-making process, but the YPOs’ contribution to the process did not seem very clear-cut in the beginning to other stakeholders in the project, and perhaps even to the YPOs themselves. Some stakeholders commented that they were not sure if the YPOs’ voices were heard enough throughout the process and whether their full contribution was appreciated by others. This is exhibited by the following quote from an interviewee:

“I was not very sure of the roles of the YPOs and I think the meetings we had were quite harsh in terms of the feedback. There was an assumption that the YPOs were set up for hearing feedback but did we hear their voices? As a youth worker, I should have been sensitive and aware of how to couch feedback because we are all equal in the process.”

The aforementioned quote reflects more on whether the YPOs—particularly the UK YPOs—had as prominent of a role as initially expected. While the YPOs did greatly contribute to the process by adding a unique, fresh perspective, it is clear that they were not given as central of a role in the project as they could have been given.

## Approach

Given the vast network of actors involved in the YGP making process, the participatory approach has been effective at engaging wider networks than initially expected. Speaking with interviewees, it is evident that the participatory approach has begun a collaborative process of mainstreaming youth issues in development be it in the UK among Steering Committee members, SLN participants in Uganda and Nepal. In fact, this is particularly apparent among SLN participants—mainly donor agencies such as the World Bank and UNFPA—who have not only identified lessons learned on youth issues, but have also started thinking about how to implement these lessons into their programs (specific details in section 2.2). Moreover, the YGP making process has embedded youth participation and related issues in the minds of DfID staff—the intended audience.

“Building the capacity of young people has been quite important. They have good ideas and they are willing to listen and be mentored.”

“This [the Guide] does not look like a typical ‘DfID How To’... It’s fresh! This is an important resource and [I] hope that when we launch this Guide we can show the value of youth participation. Producing a toolkit won’t automatically change people’s minds.... But we have to take a step by step approach to change the way an organization works.”

“The Project Manager and team had been stalwarts, especially given the complexity. Their updates have been very succinct, helpful and very important.”

“I want to know how to engage with youth, but I want it in a quick and painless way. Show me evidence of how a certain program has improved because of youth participation. I need compelling arguments where I can raise this issue. I hope this guide will help me to do that.”

“The SLN has been able to identify key topics that are pertinent to the youth and has tried to find solutions to the challenges.” *(quote from donor agency)*

The participatory approach could have been improved with a tighter structure—which has been discussed in detail in the previous section. A defined structure of work (SWOT analysis or applying a ‘theory of change’ model) would have identified some aspects of the project that were not feasible and instead would have assisted in clearly conceptualizing the goals and aims of the project.

The participatory process additionally enabled institution’s to voice their preferences on what themes and sectors were most appropriate for the Guide to focus on. This worked well for a Guide that was meant to be broadly focusing on youth participation but specific enough for donors to use. The sectors are timely and fit in well with donor agency agendas. However, as participatory as this process attempted to be, it is not always possible to incorporate all voices. Some interviewees asked whether the sectors chosen were mutually exclusive and if there enough case studies to fit into sectors? Others wanted to see the Employment sector highlighted as this is a priority issue for some donor agency country offices—and the Project Team has attempted to incorporate this theme in the Guide.

While there were some hurdles in the early conception phase of the Youth Guidance Project, most of them were overcome. Measures were put into place such that the institutional set-up worked; communication channels were created to ensure that deadlines and objectives were met; and lastly, the various stakeholders worked collaboratively to provide support to the YGP and even benefited from the

learning process. It comes as no surprise that a project involving so many stakeholders in three continents faced logistical and structural barriers, but as mentioned previously, early designing, clear and detailed conceptualizing, and foreseeing setbacks would have smoothed the process.

## **2.2 VALUE ADDED AND IMPACT OF THE SHARING AND LEARNING NETWORKS (SLNs)**

The Sharing and Learning Network sessions had a dual purpose—one to produce a forum which would showcase ‘live’ ongoing resources on youth participation issues that were missing in the Guide. Secondly, to create a common platform for sharing and learning on aspects of youth participation which would ultimately assist participants—particularly donor agencies—to incorporate youth participation in their thinking and approach and also to reduce duplicity in existing projects and initiatives in youth participation.

Were these goals achieved, and did the SLNs add value to the process of producing the Guide? What has been the impact, if any, of the SLNs, and have there been any unintended consequences? The following section will provide findings to the aforementioned questions.

### **Goals Achieved?**

The SLNs were well received by the majority of participants in both Uganda and Nepal. Many participants noted that the sessions provided a common platform that brought together civil society organizations, donor agencies, and in some cases government actors to share learning and expertise around youth issues. In this sense, the SLNs gave participants the opportunity to learn from one another on what programs and projects they are pursuing in youth participation and development—rather than work in isolation. This helped to avoid duplication and ‘re-inventing the wheel.’

Based on the feedback and interviews of various participants, they found the following aspects of the SLNs particularly beneficial:

- the networking and sharing of ideas, good practice and what works well or otherwise; and
- the potential to make useful contacts and develop relationships with people working in the same area (both CSOs and donors) and facing similar issues, which reduced feelings of isolation.

Some of the general comments made by participants included:

“The SLNs were great. It especially helped us take stock of who was doing what. I was telling SPW that they should continue next year, but more as a working group than a learning network.” *(quote from donor agency)*

“This is a very good initiative... It has brought the specific of youth to the forefront. I hope the findings from all these deliberations will help improve programming for this very special group of individuals. Keep it up.” *(quote from CSO)*

Additionally, each SLN session was able to generate a ‘live’ practical case study through presentations from either donor agencies or CSOs. In fact, 100% of SLN participants who responded to the

questionnaire (6 out of 12) said that the SLN was able to identify lessons learned on youth participation. Two respondents even pointed out that these lessons have become an integral part of their discussion in their organizations' team meetings—a point which will be discussed in more detail in the 'impact' section. The success of disseminating and capturing knowledge on youth participation can be attributed to the participatory nature of the SLN and the fact that every session was hosted by a donor. The SLNs therefore emphasized on interaction and group working and therefore assisted in encouraging people to participate and contribute.

However, only 50% of questionnaire respondents felt that there was enough representation of youth and 25% thought that the SLNs were not able to engage with a variety of donors. As one of the aims of the YGP process is to be inclusive of youth and to engage donors in youth participation, the SLNs were not able to effectively achieve these measures—even though the SLN organizers attempted to reach out to both actors. This under-representation presented a challenge to many participants because they felt there was a lack of full participation from some organizations which contributed to a feeling of irregularity. The new faces or absence of participants made it difficult to learn from their experiences and gain in-depth knowledge of programs as well as to understand what would be—if at all—the uptake of the lessons identified at the SLNs.

“The SLNs organizers could invite those organisations working with young people to bring a representative to the meetings.”

“To engage more effectively with donors the SLN organizers could include a session in each of the SLN meetings on the donor perspective on the topic at hand and actually invite donor/s to present their experiences.”

“It would have been good to engage with organizations and donor agencies that are not involved in youth issues because that is the point of this project—to expose others to the issues. The SLN was confined to the people already working on youth.”

“The SLNs could be improved by engaging more civil society and donors representatives, and more importantly government actors, which had almost insignificant representation in the SLNs.”

In assessing whether the SLNs did effectively engage with donors and young people, it is important to highlight that the YPOs and Project Manager utilized all the networks available to them, but faced major time and human resource constraints in designing and implementing the SLNs in Uganda and Nepal. Under these circumstances it was perhaps more difficult to get a broad range of young people and donors participate at the SLNs. Some helpful guidelines are presented at the end of this section for organizations thinking about hosting similar SLNs.

### **Value-Added?**

It is evident that the SLNs did indeed create a network for CSOs, donors, and other actors involved in youth participation. The SLNs have also built the capacity of young people mainly through the use of YPOs. This in itself has added value to the YGP process and was a novel concept. But have the SLNs provided the appropriate content and resources for the Youth Guide itself?

The intended audience of the Guide is donor agencies. Did the SLNs capture content specific enough for donor agencies to use at the same practical and broad enough for donors to learn or extract from? A concern stemming out of the SLNs from donors was that the voice of the SLN was ‘too CSO oriented, while donors were meant to be the main target audience.’ This is especially interesting because donor agencies [DfID] were asked for their input on who to invite, and the best way to invite donor agencies. Additionally, donors themselves did not have a visible presence at the session—though they were invited and genuinely interested in the issue. An in-country donor officer commented that due to time constraints they were unable to engage at the SLN sessions, but would have preferred that the YGP team engaged directly in the donor’s programs in a technical/advisory capacity. This would have meant perhaps piloting some of the case studies identified and working with donors immediately in mainstreaming youth participation issues in their development projects.

Additionally, in the initial design stage of piloting the SLNs, the organizers were not exactly sure what this would entail. Due to the gap of high quality desk-research, the SLN sessions were meant to bridge this gap. And while the SLNs developed into something greater than expected and have provided resources to the Guide, the initial conception of the SLN was not very ‘plan oriented.’ This again is to be expected because of the resource restraints faced by a small, dispersed team, and the fact that the two pilot countries had different agendas, priorities and initiatives that they were already working on.

The SLNs have provided rich resources to the Guide itself, but it was a laborious engagement to ‘continuously keep an eye on possible case studies... through the SLNs.’ In documenting participation, the more useful case study is one that is tracked over time and whether progress has been made, which is not possible if it’s ‘live’ and extracted from lessons learned at one SLN session. If the aim was to solely provide ‘live’ content and case studies, there perhaps could have been a more efficient way of capturing this information on-the-ground.

## **Impact**

All SLN participants commented on the benefits of their involvement with the SLNs. It was seen as a support mechanism bringing individuals and groups together who were working in the same area so that they could network, exchange ideas, knowledge, experiences and good practice. Individuals were encouraged when they saw others pursuing programs in youth participation. It was commented that without the SLN, CSOs and donor agencies would otherwise not have had the opportunity to share experience. However, the benefits have extended beyond the session and this is where a visible impact can be seen. In both Uganda and Nepal, an added ‘bonus’ of the SLNs has been cases of donor agencies taking the lessons learned back to their organizations to incorporate lessons learned into their own programs.

The World Bank in Uganda has been trying to transform their Public Information Centre into a centre of dialogue and debate and was thrilled to have the opportunity to participate in the SLNs, as they saw them very timely and was aligned to their program needs—particularly the SLN session on Youth and Employment. The SLN was a way for World Bank staff to gain feedback on their plans in youth and employment and as a result shared the findings of the SLN with the country team. The Country Manager then adopted the report and presented key findings which incorporated much of what came of the SLN at a meeting hosted by the Government of Uganda. The World Bank Uganda is interested in continuing the SLN sessions because they are focused on people’s needs on the ground and are especially interested in incorporating young people’s views into their updated Country Assistance Strategy. They are

convinced that building evidence on youth participation will only persuade other donors and Government actors further on the critical need for addressing the issues.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Nepal is practicing what they preach and paving the way for youth participation. UNFPA Nepal has devoted resources specifically towards a youth programme and have a Youth Programme Officer who participated in most of the SLN sessions. UNFPA has incorporated the lessons learned and best practices derived from the SLN during their annual work plan development process (current work as this report was being written). The UNFPA, too, is very interested in seeing the SLN continue on—perhaps as a working group rather than a learning network.

In fact, 100% of the SLN survey respondents—four out of six of them donor agencies—said that they would like to see the SLN turn into a working group, and have seen the benefits of involving youth in the process. All of the respondents also said they would consider using youth volunteers to participate in SLN meetings or future workshops and would be even willing to chair a Youth Working Group on a rotating basis. 75% of the respondents commented that their organizations were in the process of planning for implementation of the case studies identified in the SLN.

It is clear that the SLNs have made an impact on donor agencies and have encouraged them to incorporate young people into their country strategies and programmes. Additionally, they have given the opportunity for CSOs to present their work to donor agencies and provide evidence on why including youth is necessary. While this is encouraging, donor interviewees have cautioned that with burgeoning priorities and agendas, it becomes harder to devote resources and time to more working groups. While the benefits have been numerous in country, donor agencies are keen to gain practical, timely advice when designing programs that provides compelling evidence on the case for youth participation—turning the SLNs into an advisory body is a concept other donors could be prepared to implement.

Some comments that interviewees made on the impact and future of SLN are:

“Donors should be encouraged to appoint a youth focal point among their staff so that the information is channelled through that person and s/he attends SLN meetings regularly since it could be part of the ToR... If the SLN was turned into a Working Group, then there would have to be more dedication from a donor agency.”

“The SLN meetings brought about agendas and need of youth participation in development among the different organizations .Hence, I understand that organization could take home food for thought on how to better work or improve participation of youth in their respective programs.”

“This is a good forum for learning and we should start thinking of its regular participation from all levels; sustainability.”

### ***Lessons Learned***

Based on the feedback from SLN participants, the following are guidelines on reproducing the SLNs and steps to ensure its sustainability.

1. Create a ‘SLN Working Group’ rather than just a sharing and learning network.

2. In addition to the working group focus should be on direct input, capacity building and technical input in the programmes and priorities of donor agencies
3. Working Group can be made more sustainable and effective through the following:
  - Consult relevant organisations on the format and topics to get their buy in and to explain the value of attending a meeting at the outset.
  - Have a call to action at the end of each SLN so that participants can take back something to their organizations and act on the findings of the SLN.
  - Invite organisations working with young people to bring a representative to the meetings.
  - Include a session in each of the SLN meetings on the donor perspective on the topic at hand and invite donors to present their experiences (besides the ones hosting the sessions).
  - Have DfID (*or funding donor agency*) send out joint invitation to SLN to encourage other donor participation.
  - Contacting donors personally to follow up on invites and arrange for one-on-one meetings.
  - Ask donors to host the session – ownership and increased involvement. (*as done*)
  - Plan more discussion time around issues to engage more with participants and break up time such that donors could attend partial sessions.
  - Invite organizations that are indirectly involved with youth issues.
  - Build an online database of good practices and lessons learned to avoid duplication.
  - Make use of a rotating chair on a quarterly basis in order to effectively sustain the SLN into a Youth Working Group.
  - Success breeds success! When donor agencies see the importance of such networks, there will be will and a way to continue.

### 2.3 YOUTH INCLUSION

Has the process effectively included the voice of young people and how did engaging young people throughout the process benefit the end product? Have stakeholders learned the benefits of including young people in development?

The findings thus far have demonstrated that under the circumstances of the time-bound activities, the YGP did effectively include the voice of young people. The YPOs in the UK, Uganda, and Nepal were instrumental in ensuring the voices of young people and were central to the SLNs, focus groups, and documentation of case studies. The YPOs have admittedly needed formal training and support; but however, their inclusion has made this a truly participative process and proves the value added of including young people in the guide-making process.

In addition, a very good effort was made to get young people—other than YPOs—involved in the process. Young people—mainly educated, urban youth—were represented at the SLNs, but as the findings have show in Part 2.2 there could have been more representation from younger people and organizations involved in youth issues. This gap can be attributed to the short amount of time the SLNs were coordinated in, the human resource constraint faced by the Project Team in building relationships with networks, and the time constraints faced by DfID in their involvement in SLNs.

Though the Guide itself may not be accessible to young people, they are not the intended audience for the report. One YPO commented:

“The information in the guide is rich and useful. Part 1 provides a conceptual framework and evidence for young activists to incorporate. However, the current format because of its

length and language may not be accessible to young people. It may have to be cut up as more of a toolkit for young people to utilize.”

Based on the findings of the questionnaire and interviews, the majority of stakeholders have learned the benefits of including young people in development. In fact, this is demonstrated by the fact that more than one donor agency has adopted the lessons identified at the SLNs, and are in the process of including youth in their programs. Stakeholders who were a little sceptical about utilizing young people’s skills during the YGP process have commented on realizing that young people’s views brings a fresh perspective and that at the end, they are all equals in the process.

Donor interviewees were hopeful that the Guide would be used in their country offices but acknowledged that it depended on how convincing the Guide would be to include youth in their program. There are already inspiring signs, but it remains to be seen, once the Guide is launched, whether donor agencies and other stakeholders will ‘practice what they preach.’

Below are some comments on the process of involving young people in the YGP process:

“With participation approaches, it is always a learning process. All the project staff are speaking from the heart. I have truly enjoyed being part of the process.”

“The young people involved in this process have met my expectations and have been extremely realistic. They have understood my perspective more than others and have all the right questions. There were no mixed messages.”

“I thought the uniqueness and importance of the project was the young people involved.”

### **3. LESSONS LEARNED**

The Youth Guidance Project made a conscious effort to engage with young people throughout the process, has succeeded in making this a collaborative project, and lastly has provided the opportunity for various stakeholders to form a network based on interest in youth participation. The YGP successes will sustain themselves beyond the project itself.

The Guidance itself is practical and accessible—going beyond rhetoric by providing concrete examples on why including youth adds value to projects and how to achieve this. The Guidance also provides additional easy resources that donors can pick up and follow if they choose to do so. Donors have stressed that the Guide must be practical and one that they can flip through and pick selected themes out. It is not expected that the Guide will be a toolkit and that donors will go through the Guide from A-Z, but will be a document they can use—as the name suggests—as guidance to planning and designing projects. Additionally, the value of the Guide has been the process itself.

There have also been lessons learned in the production of the Guide that involves so many different stakeholders. These lessons include findings not only from what happened during the project but also what did not happen.

#### **3.1 Lessons Learned: Institutional Set-Up**

- **Make certain to have buy-in from the outset from each stakeholder and Donor** when involving a vast network of stakeholders. Identify organizations, especially those represented in the South that can lend their insight and relevant practical experiences to the project’s need.

- Ensure there is **sufficient time and support** for the team to pursue the project effectively. The balance between pragmatism, achievability and long-term impact of the YGP will be difficult.
- **Ensure objectives are clear from the outset of the project.** This involves convening the wider Youth Working Group, Steering Committee, and DfID to collaboratively consult on the project's goals, aims, and vision. It is critical to have a unanimous understanding of the end-project and the process. Take into account the need to bridge the current gap in terms of building up awareness of youth issues but also skills, capacity and organisational 'buy in.'
- **Clearly define roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in the process.** Draft terms of references even for voluntary positions and map out each stakeholder's responsibilities to ascertain whether they have the sufficient capacity to carry out their responsibilities—from the beginning of the project.

### 3.2 Lessons Learned: SLN

- **Develop a clear concept of the aims and expected outcomes of SLN.** Will the SLN be a forum to capture 'live' resources on youth participation that will feed into the Guide or will it be a forum to create a network of diverse stakeholders that can exchange best practices?
- **Make certain there is enough time to prepare for the SLNs** in order to build relationships with youth networks and other organizations not directly involved in youth. It is equally important to facilitate regular participation by CSOs, donor and government agencies to ensure continuity. This also enables participants to gain in-depth knowledge on youth participation lessons learned/best practices from other participants.
- **Listen to the needs of donor agency country offices.** This must be balanced with CSO expectations. How do you create a platform for donors and CSOs to come together on youth participation issues and keep the momentum going?
- **Consider shifting the focus of the SLN to directly providing technical advice** and input to donor agencies. This can include building donor agencies' capacity for youth participation officers.

### 3.3 Lessons Learned: Youth Inclusion

- **Provide compelling evidence on the importance of including young people in development.** Donor agencies are more likely to act when they see success.
- **Engage with youth from the beginning to the end of the guide-making process.** Involving young people not only brings credibility to the project but also persuades donor agencies to replicate the model.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the lessons learned during the YGP process, this section outlines key recommendations for organizations to consider for either replicating this process or on implementing the Guide.

- **Consult Donor—from headquarters to country offices—on their specific needs, 'political considerations,' and vision of the project.** Engage with Donor throughout the process to see if their needs have changed and to increase their involvement, buy-in, and ownership over project.
- **Make certain that the implementing organization starts early preparations for implementation and has the sufficient time and support to do the work effectively.** Be realistic in terms of timescale and the context in which both the donor and the organization are operating in. Ensure that the Project Manager has enough resources to delegate responsibility to.
- **Ensure youth have an understanding and awareness of the project.** Young people must act as assets, leaders and beneficiaries in the guide-making process. However, it is crucial that donor

agencies and implementing organizations **provide support and formal training to Youth Participation Officers.** Youth Participation Officers cannot be expected to understand nuances when interacting with donor agencies and should be supported by senior management in country.

- **Consider shifting the SLNs into formal “Youth Working Groups.”** Clearly define the role of each member and focus on providing technical input for donors. This Working Group will not only ensure sustainability but will also build a platform that will capture best practices on youth development. The Working Group can be chaired on a quarterly rotating basis by donor agencies.
- **Ensure that the Guide is accessible, practical, concise, and tailored for busy donor agency country offices.** The Guide must be flexible in terms of process while specifying outcomes, and that it is available in time to inform the work of donor agency country offices particularly in their design phase. The Guide must provide compelling arguments on how a program is improved by youth participation and what has made a difference. Donors are looking for advice clear and concise.
- **Complement the Youth Participation Guide with an online database of best practices on youth participation in development.** These best practices can be collected through the Guide and the Youth Working Group sessions. This database can be an accessible ‘toolkit’ that will reduce duplicity in youth participation issues and encourage effective replication of programs and projects.
- **The launch of the Guide must be used as a platform to persuade donors of the importance of mainstreaming youth participation in development.** The launch will be a particularly important advocacy tool and can showcase not only the fresh and unique perspectives young people brought into the process, but also the lessons identified at the SLNs in Uganda and Nepal. Further, the launch should illustrate how other donor agencies are incorporating lessons learned at SLNs—a direct impact of the YGP making process.
- **Design plans for sustainability and dissemination of the Guide.** Increase advocacy efforts with donor agencies and offer training sessions to donors along with the Guide. Ensuring implementation of the guide is a critical next step.