

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS



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Social inclusion doesn't just mean you are welcome in a space. Social inclusion means this space was made for you.

The concept of social inclusion is firmly rooted in the human right to equal treatment and freedom from discrimination. As such, the United Nations has defined social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights.”¹

Inclusion is not a means to an end. It is an objective of development as a whole, and positive youth development (PYD) in particular. YouthPower Learning has defined PYD as an approach which engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments, so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD transitions away from traditional approaches of responding to young people as a risk or problem and toward proactively building skills, fostering healthy relationships, and supporting youth to be active partners

¹ UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 2007. Final Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Creating and Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration. Paris: Division for Social Policy and Development.

in development efforts. PYD approaches can only be successful, if they work actively alongside all young people toward a more inclusive and equal society.

Social inclusion, in the form of leaving no one behind, has been enshrined at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals, based in the concepts of equality (“the imperative of moving towards substantive equality of opportunity and outcomes for all groups”), non-discrimination, and the broader concept of equity, or “fairness in the distribution of costs, benefits and opportunities.”² As our understanding of human development and the forces that contribute to marginalization and exclusion has become more nuanced, so too has our understanding of both the intent and process of social inclusion.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to the multiple dimensions and fluid nature of social exclusion. Addressing exclusion, therefore requires a conceptual understanding of the processes through which a person is marginalized, stigmatized, and discriminated against. A

² UN Chief Executive Board. 2016. Quoted in Klasen and Fleuerbaey . 2018. Leaving No One Behind: Some Conceptual and Empirical Issues. CDP Background Paper No. 44. ST/ESA/2018/CDP/44. New York: UN DESA.



person can be excluded when not allowed to participate, or even when included in a way that degrades or disadvantages the individual - for example, when used as a token, treated differently than other participants, or treated as though their participation is a favor being done for them rather than a right. That same person can move back and forth between different forms of exclusion, which means that programs and policies meant to foster more inclusive environments need to be adaptable and sensitive to the different contexts in which young people live.

In particular, incorporating social inclusion as part of PYD programming means you must understand how a person's intersecting identities can affect access to and participation in the world. Amplified disadvantages stemming from gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic class, physical abilities, sexual orientation, and location are especially powerful in creating barriers to social inclusion, economic participation, and political voice.³

Creating truly inclusive PYD programs requires going beyond practicing a welcoming attitude in implementing outreach or community engagement. Many implementers work hard to ensure that their programs are accessible to youth, meeting at times that work for them, finding centrally located or easy-to-reach spaces. They consider how program participants may feel about auditory or visual privacy and confidentiality concerns. Others invest further, by providing language translation, including sign language; by finding physically accessible spaces for young people with disabilities; and by training their staff to be friendly and open to including diverse groups of young people. All of these efforts make a program welcoming and accessible to diverse youth. They are a necessary step on the road to inclusion.

But true social inclusion necessitates deeper analysis of the existing social, economic, physical, and normative barriers and needs all young people face in the communities and contexts where the program is hoping to make a change. To achieve real social inclusion requires understanding the often invisible social identities that shape young people's agency, especially at the point of decision-making, and communicating to all young people that this space, this program, and this opportunity is for them.

Social inclusion therefore requires more than just making sure that marginalized groups are in the room. It requires full engagement of young people from all walks of life in designing program approaches and

taking on leadership roles in all aspects of program implementation.

We posit that social inclusion within PYD means the following principles should be applied across all stages of the project or program lifecycle, including design, implementation, evaluation, and scale-up. Youth deserve:

1. **Visibility:** Youth deserve recognition.
2. **Consideration:** Decision-makers must take young people's concerns and needs into account.
3. **Access:** Youth should be integrated into projects, not segregated into specific outreach initiatives.
4. **Rights:** Young people must be able to act on and claim their rights (including the right to be different, "identity"); right to access quality and accessible social services (housing, education, transport, healthcare, etc.); right to work; right to participate in the cultural life;
5. **Respect:** Youth deserve to be appreciated, cherished, and valued for current and developing abilities and contributions;
6. **Resources:** Youth should have access to funding and support to fully participate in society.

This brief covers the importance of social inclusion for positive youth development and key considerations for understanding, tracking, measuring, and evaluating the impact of social inclusion initiatives. Further resources, tools, and advice on how to implement social inclusion programs can be found at:

- [TAAP Toolkit](#)
- [World Bank: Designing Inclusive Policies and Programs](#)
- [World Bank: Social Inclusion Assessment Tool](#)
- [UNDESA: Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration](#)

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL INCLUSION BEST PRACTICES

In PYD programming, social inclusion is a relatively young and rapidly growing area of work. While there are multiple resources available for those interested in implementing social inclusion as part of their programming, the research base for the effects of social inclusion is fairly small, and those programs that have been evaluated and assessed have focused largely on political participation and young people's inclusion in decision-making processes. Expanding our view to look

³ Klasen and Fleuerbaey. 2018.

⁴ UNESCO. 2013. *Social Inclusion, Democracy and Youth in the Arab Region*. Beirut: UNESCO.

at youth engagement, leadership, and participation, as well as what literature exists on development programs designed to reach marginalized and vulnerable youth, provides a more clear, if general, picture of best and promising practices for implementers. This brief outlines key considerations for implementing social inclusion, but maintains a focus on tracking, measuring, and evaluating social inclusion efforts with an eye towards encouraging readers to expand the evidence base.

For PYD implementers, one best practice is to reflect on and analyze potential internalized biases and assumptions towards young people's experiences and identities as it is an essential part of understanding any operating environment. Implementers are not immune to the social norms, pressures, and biases that shape the communities where we work. The social, political, economic, physical, and normative barriers to inclusion in any society remain in constant flux. While they define communities, relationships, and levels of participation, either internal or external factors, like domestic policy shifts or international pressure, may affect them. This knowledge should help PYD implementers build their capacity to more effectively listen to marginalized communities and challenge, and ultimately overcome, discriminatory social norms. Social inclusion should be integrated throughout the whole program cycle (<https://usaidlearninglab.org/program-cycle-overview-page>), including through the deliberate addition of internal resources, capacity analysis, and evaluation of both the internal and external impacts of inclusion efforts.

Designing a System for Social Inclusion

During the consultation process with beneficiary communities, majority communities may identify marginalized and excluded communities, however, implementers must go beyond superficial understandings of communities and their histories of access, agency, power, and participation. Intentional consultations with marginalized and excluded youth stakeholders will help create inclusive PYD indicators.

Internal Resources Analysis

To enable marginalized communities' experiences to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive programs that enable transformative positive change, organizations should analyze the resources available to them both internally and externally. Sample questions include:

- Do we have project staff who can speak to, listen to, and integrate the voices of marginalized and excluded youth?

- Do those staffers understand how their presence, biases, and beliefs can facilitate or block program progress?
- What tools, methodologies, or other external factors are needed to ensure reasonable accommodations?
- What budgetary, staffing, or other resource shortages would hinder success?
- And if they would, how can we adapt our programming, staffing, and financial resources to more thoroughly respond to the local context, promote transformative positive change, and facilitate continuous capacity building?

Once internal capacity has been addressed, an external analysis of the project environment can begin.

External Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis

A Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis examines a project's operating environment as it relates to issues of social inclusion, marginalization, and exclusion. Once the analysis is complete, staffers can identify solutions to implement through programmatic activities to achieve transformative positive change.

Social Inclusion Analysis

A Social Inclusion Analysis contains the following key elements:

- Overall analysis of various identities
- An analysis of the social norms, root causes, and power dynamics that shape interactions among people with various identities and that influence access (or lack thereof) to vital services and resources
- An understanding of how intersectionality of various identities is affected by social inclusion, marginalization, or exclusion
- Identification of major issues that need attention, and the conditions upon which the project can build
- An analysis of key stakeholders (individuals, groups, institutions, etc.) with the desire, right, power, mandate or interest to transform areas of social exclusion, and the ability to expand inclusion⁶

⁶ World Learning. 2018. *Transforming Agency, Access & Power: A Toolkit for Inclusive Development*. Washington, D.C.

A participatory development, or “community-driven development” (CDD), approach provides the opportunity to further extend inclusion efforts to all aspects of a project and “allow [affected and marginalized] groups control over planning decisions and investment resources.”⁷ These notions speak to the core values of PYD as they ensure that youth are empowered to reach their full potential as active partners in development efforts.

As the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) explains, “Through active participation in society, youth play a key role in their own development by acquiring life-long skills, developing knowledge about human rights and citizenship, and promoting civic action to make positive contributions to their communities.”⁸

To invest in participatory implementation you must develop young leaders and leadership from within affected and marginalized communities. All too frequently, development programs and funding concentrate on larger national and international agencies, while community-based organizations led by young people, women, and marginalized communities are missed or overlooked.⁹

Investments in community-led development are vital to the sustainability of social change for youth and marginalized groups.¹⁰ Therefore, a collaborative leadership approach can help projects place youth in the driver’s seat of positive development and social change. In shifting the power dynamics to youth-driven PYD, larger implementing agencies will still have vital roles to play in guiding programs, monitoring for zones of exclusion that may arise during implementation, and ensuring projects meet organizational and development goals.

Measuring and Evaluating Social Inclusion—“Do No Harm”

However, we must also recognize that analysis, even for the purposes of understanding and intentional planning, can present a risk for marginalized and excluded youth. In many contexts, specifically identifying oneself as a

member of a minority or disadvantaged group can lead to negative repercussions. For example, being asked to identify as a member of the LGBTQ community on a program form may seem standard in more progressive environments, but can expose the participant to a wide variety of risks in a more restrictive context, or in countries where same-sex sexuality is criminalized.

In this era of data collection and indicator tracking to enhance project outcomes, thorough discussions—internally and with beneficiaries—on who is collecting data, what type of data is collected, why it is being collected, and how the information will be used are essential. While data tracking is important in international development, actively identifying marginalized or potentially marginalized participants can expose them to preventable risk or harm. Alternatives include:

- Rather than seeking to specifically identify marginalized or excluded youth who are not otherwise visible, implementers act on the assumption that a share of the youth in each project

What Do You Need to Know and Why?

It can be hard to find a balance between preventing social harm and ensuring diversity of participation in your programs. As a program implementer, it is important when setting indicators and developing monitoring tools to constantly question why you are including certain questions or details, such as those related to a participant’s sexual orientation, migration status, or experience of violence.

While you may sometimes need to know the characteristics of adolescents participating in your programs, most of the time these questions, which are designed to show an inclusive intent, have the opposite effect of discouraging marginalized or excluded youth from joining your program. Even standard questions, such as gender, can be phrased in ways that signal danger to young people who have experienced stigma or discrimination on the basis of their identity.

To measure whether your program is achieving its intended effect, it is far better to use monitoring and tracking tools to measure young people’s attitudes and biases toward marginalized groups and identities, than to track the specific identities of the young people participating.

7 The World Bank. 2013. *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*. Washington, D.C.: New Frontiers of Social Policy.

8 ECLAC (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2015. *Towards the Social Inclusion of Youth: Tools for Policy Analysis and Design*. New York.

9 Miller, Kellea, and Rochelle Jones. 2019. *Toward a Feminist Funding Infrastructure*. Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID).

10 Goldmann, Leah, Rebecka Lundgren, Alice Welbourn, Diane Gillespie, Ellen Bajenja, Lufuno Muvhango, and Lori Michau. 2019. “On the CUSP: the Politics and Prospects of Scaling Social Norms Change Programming.” *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 27 (2): 1599654. DOI: 10.1080/26410397.2019.1599654

will represent these communities. This strategy relies on implementers to have “done the work” of inclusion from the outset, eliminating barriers to entry and potential risks and conducting appropriate outreach for marginalized and excluded youth.

- The anonymization of data, requested or not, is also an accepted alternative choice, offering protections by concealing the specific individual or the source. However, this process requires careful preparation to ensure that all those with access to the complete raw data know and respect the protocols for protecting identities, and risks creating a barrier to entry to participants who fear exposure or loss of privacy.

To “do no harm,” implementers will need to empower participants to make decisions about their participation, identity, and choice to identify. By doing so, your project can mitigate the risks associated with the perceived identities and affinities of excluded groups.

In order to see the effects of social inclusion initiatives on both the process and outcomes of PYD, programs need to create and maintain intentional and adaptive monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts designed to capture their unique benefits. As explained above, creating truly inclusive programs involves more than merely welcoming youth to the space. More is needed at all stages of the project cycle, with both an internal

and external view, to help identify key stakeholders and the economic and social factors of inclusion and exclusion as well as state-sponsored policy areas and restrictions.

Use Inclusive Project Indicators

While USAID and other donors provide standard Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) indicators for programming in a variety of technical areas, including gender (including non-binary identities) and country of origin, the burden is on Programs and Monitoring and Evaluation teams to incorporate a risks/benefits-based approach to monitor and track indicators over the life of a project. Ask questions like:

- Do we need to monitor this? If so, why?
- How will the data be used?
- And am I putting staff or communities at risk?

Further, by using best practices such as analyzing country context, previous in-country projects, and recommendations from the donor and beneficiaries, you can establish focused, feasible, and useful indicators that are credible and sensitive to unequal power relations and local context. In basing indicators on this information, program teams can identify and understand the most significant change possible for projects and communities.

Illustrative Indicators for Measuring Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is vital for PYD implementers not only because it supports human rights, but also because of inclusion’s potential to amplify positive program outcomes. Programmers who hope to measure the impact of social inclusion initiatives in their PYD projects must also consider the many ways these initiatives can influence outcomes. Some sample indicators or measurement statements for monitoring both the process and the outcomes of social inclusion practices are included. Additionally, examples of US Government Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators are included under relevant measurement statements or indicators. This list is not intended to be exhaustive or compulsory. Programs should develop their own indicators based on their learning and performance objectives.

Process indicators or measurement statements for inclusion

- Representative percentage of young people participating in planning process
- Number of community organizations and networks of marginalized groups reached
- Participatory consensus reached about groups to prioritize for outreach
- Gender parity among participants
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators: Number of persons trained with USG assistance to advance outcomes consistent with gender equality or female empowerment through their roles in public or private sector institutions or organizations
- Design/review of program materials for inclusive language
- Number of facilitators/program staff trained in inclusion

- Availability of language/sign language translation
- Physical accessibility of program space¹¹

Indicators or measurement statements to monitor impact on PYD programs and clients

- Increased participants' confidence, agency, or self-esteem
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator: Percent of individuals with improved soft skills following participation in USG-assisted workforce development programs
- Change in attitudes toward marginalized or excluded groups or identities
- Number of new partnerships created with community organizations and networks of marginalized or excluded groups
- Increased awareness of issues facing marginalized or excluded youth
- Increased empathy for marginalized or excluded groups among program participants
- Increased advocacy for inclusion and equal treatment of marginalized groups among participants

Indicators or measurement statements to monitor impact on PYD outcomes

- Increased soft skills among program participants
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator: Number of youth trained in social or leadership skills through USG assisted programs
- Improved educational/employment/health outcomes among participants
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator: Percent of individuals with better employment following participation in USG-assisted workforce development programs
- Increased engagement of participants with broader social and community initiatives
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator: Number of laws, policies or procedures adopted and implemented with USG assistance designed to promote and improve youth participation at the regional, national or local level.
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator: Percentage of youth who participate in civil society activities following soft skills/life skills training or initiatives from USG assisted programs

Indicators or measurement statements for monitoring broader impact on community

- Increased leadership opportunities for youth from marginalized or socially excluded groups
- Number of new initiatives and opportunities created for marginalized and excluded youth self-fulfillment
- Increased youth participation in community organizations and networks of marginalized or excluded youth
- Changes in social norms
 - Standard Foreign Assistance Indicator: Percentage of participants reporting increased agreement with the concept that males and females should have equal access to social, economic, and political resources and opportunities

¹¹ For further resources on creating accessible training spaces, see <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Disability%20Inclusive%20Meetings%20PDF.pdf>

Inclusive and Adaptive Projects

As the processes of inclusion and exclusion remain in flux throughout implementation, it is important to use USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) practices to monitor and adapt projects by integrating lessons learned and shifts in the operating environment. Bear these questions in mind:

- Do established indicators effectively capture the nuances of inclusion and exclusion in this context?
- Are we collaborating with the right participants to ensure inclusive outcomes through the delivery and learning processes?
- Have any new zones of exclusion arisen during implementation? And if so, what work needs to be done to reestablish inclusive and transformative programming?

With a holistic understanding of project and beneficiary needs, projects can establish reflective and iterative learning processes meant to empower programming, staff, and beneficiaries.

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL INCLUSION ON PYD PROGRAMS

Social inclusion, when implemented through participatory design and community-driven development, has the potential to contribute to positive outcomes not only for participants in PYD programs but also for their communities.¹² When fully implemented, socially inclusive PYD programs should:

- Lead to increased participation by marginalized and excluded youth in PYD programs, and to increased participation by young people in community groups serving marginalized and excluded communities;
- Improve young people's leadership and soft skills such as empathy, compassion, and critical thinking, as well as individual agency, self-efficacy, and confidence;
- Increase young people's willingness, ability, and opportunity to practice standing up for their marginalized or excluded peers, or to create opportunities for interaction between diverse groups of young people;
- Positively change social norms that contribute to stigma and discrimination on the basis of gender,

age, sexual orientation, housing or migration status, ability, or other factors;

- Produce cross-sectoral impacts such as reductions school-drop out and unemployment rates, and in negative health outcomes for marginalized or socially excluded youth, while improving opportunities for youth self-fulfillment; and
- Increase the reach of PYD programs through ensuring the participation of all young people.

MOVING FORWARD: AN ASPIRATIONAL VISION FOR INCLUSIVE PYD

Social inclusion is multidimensional in process and in potential impact. The value of implementing social inclusion as part of programming for youth and adolescents cannot be underestimated. Adolescents and young people are in their own way primed for social justice, focused on a sense of fairness and equality at the same time that they are growing their social networks, developing deeper connections to their communities, and developing their own individual moral and ethical codes.¹³

Investments in social inclusion at this stage of life can counteract social and cultural biases and norms that reproduce stigma and discrimination against marginalized groups later in life. If your programs deliberately and thoughtfully engage young people in all their diversity to create a more inclusive society, you can plant the seeds for long-lasting community and social development by creating the next generation of changemakers.

By implementing social inclusion from a rights-based, empowerment perspective, you should be able to create not only diverse spaces for participation and engagement, but also a fundamental shift in how we think about leadership and power within PYD programs.

Incorporating meaningful engagement and social inclusion into PYD programming not only ensures the visibility of all young people's lives and concerns in the political process, but also gives young people the opportunity to interact across a range of different social groups. Rights-based, inclusive PYD improves participation, social cohesion, and community engagement.¹⁴

As programs engage more diverse adolescents and youth by developing their skills and unlocking their capacity to lead, we hope to see a new, more inclusive development paradigm evolve. Young people from all communities and of all identities will not just have a seat at the table. They will be front and center in creating environments where participants have the power and access to lead.

¹² UN DESA. 2010. *Analyzing and Measuring Social Inclusion in a Global Context*. New York.

¹³ Sawyer, Susan M., Rima A. Afifi, Linda H. Bearinger, Sarah-Jayne Blackmore, Bruce Dick, Alex C. Ezeh, and George C. Patton. 2012. "Adolescence: A Foundation for Future Health." *The Lancet* 379 (9826): 1630–1640.

¹⁴ UNESCO. 2013. *Social Inclusion, Democracy and Youth in the Arab Region*. Beirut: UNESCO.



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USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base related to PYD. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

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