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# YP2LE Positive Youth Development Learning Agenda Literature Scan Brief: Findings from Recent PYD Research and Learning Agenda Recommendations

## March 2023

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## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

From December 2021 to May 2022, [YouthPower2: Learning and Evaluation \(YP2LE\)](#) conducted a literature scan to identify emerging evidence-based research and best practices on what works in youth development related to USAID Youth Power’s five [Positive Youth Development \(PYD\)](#)<sup>1</sup> [Learning Agenda themes](#):

1. [Understanding how PYD programs achieve positive impact in low- and medium-income countries \(LMICs\)](#)
2. [Cross-sectoral impact of PYD programs](#)
3. [Measurement of PYD constructs](#)
4. [PYD for vulnerable or marginalized populations](#)
5. [Youth engagement in PYD programs](#)

Each Learning Agenda theme seeks to further the four PYD domains ([YouthPower Learning 2016, 22](#)).

The Learning Agenda highlights priority research questions in the field of PYD in LMICs and is a living document to be regularly refined. This brief highlights key findings related to Learning Agenda themes from the recent literature scan activity, describes how the evidence has changed in the past 5 years, and provides recommended considerations for updating the Learning Agenda.

The literature scan activity was not a systematic literature review; it was a rapid scan of key developments related to PYD Learning Agenda themes in the last 5 years. The review entailed identifying and summarizing research-oriented sources either developed under the YP2LE project or externally that have been published in English between 2017 and 2022. To be eligible for inclusion in the scan activity, sources needed to relate to at least one of the five PYD Learning Agenda themes. The YP2LE team identified sources via online searches and outreach to youth development researchers and stakeholders in the Global North and South.<sup>2</sup> Key terms the team used in online searches entailed those included in PYD Learning Agenda themes (e.g., cross-sectoral). For any sources—particularly YP2LE workstream deliverables, where multiple products were created under a workstream—the team included only shorter summary documents in the scan (e.g., briefs) and referenced full-length documents solely for additional contextual details. To be included in the scan, sources had to focus on learning related to research studies, interventions, and evaluation studies based in LMICs that targeted youth or sub-populations of youth. Types of documents that were eligible for inclusion in the scan included peer-reviewed articles; government, donor, and technical reports; case studies, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> PYD is a strengths-based approach and framework that recognizes that to achieve the vision of healthy, productive, and engaged youth, PYD programs, practices, and policies must work with youth to improve their assets, agency, contribution, and the enabling environment.

<sup>2</sup> Outreach activities included requests for resources in YP2LE newsletters, emails to YP2LE Consortium partners, follow-up requests during the related workstream webinar in March 2022, posts on YP2LE social media accounts, and targeted outreach to regional evaluation associations (e.g., AfrEA), related organizations (e.g., Global Evaluation Initiative), and relevant higher educational institutions (e.g., Global South Academic Network).

After sources were confirmed for inclusion using a set of developed criteria,<sup>3</sup> YP2LE synthesized key information from each source, including relevant PYD themes; geographic regions of focus; sectors and youth age segmentations of focus; key findings, study outcomes, and gaps; and recommendations for future research and programming.

**Assets:** Youth have the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.  
**Agency:** Youth perceive and are able to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their decisions about their lives, set goals, and act upon those decisions to achieve desired outcomes.  
**Contribution:** Youth are engaged as a source of change for their own and their communities' positive development.  
**Enabling environment:** Youth are surrounded by an environment that supports development of their assets and agency; provides access to services and opportunities; and enables their safety and security. Overall, an enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive.

In all, the team reviewed 18 YP2LE and 61 externally published sources. Literature the team reviewed was most often [specific to Africa](#) or [global](#) in nature (i.e., did not focus on a specific region or country). A higher number of sources the team identified and reviewed were related to the Learning Agenda themes of [vulnerable and marginalized youth](#) (36 sources), PYD impact in LMICs (32 sources), and measurement of PYD constructs (32 sources). Fewer sources focused on youth engagement (26 sources) and cross-sectoral impacts of PYD programs (17 sources).

## WHAT LEARNING HAS EMERGED IN THE LAST 5 YEARS?

A [Systematic Review of PYD Programs in LMICs](#), conducted in 2017, identified key findings on the state of evidence regarding PYD programs. While the current activity is intended to be a literature scan for purposes of updating PYD Learning Agenda evidence, some of the findings echo themes from the 2017 review. Specifically:

- Research and programming approaches often align with a PYD approach, but few explicitly reference PYD. In this literature scan, sources YP2LE reviewed detailed activities that built youth's assets and agency and engaged youth in activity delivery. Additionally, many identified youth programs employed a socio-ecological model (SEM) approach,<sup>4</sup> which addresses the enabling environment domain of PYD.
- Research studies demonstrated varying degrees of rigor: While some applied mixed methods (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) with multiple primary data collection points, many others used smaller sample sizes, had only one data collection timepoint, or did not employ validated metrics or scales.

The 2017 review recommended a greater focus on gender integration in PYD programming, including activities targeted to men and boys. A related finding from the current scan is that most reviewed programs discussed gender-specific considerations, but applied a binary approach to measurement of

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<sup>3</sup> To be eligible for inclusion in the scan, sources had to focus on research studies or interventions on topics related to at least one Learning Agenda theme and on youth in LMICs, as well as be published in English within the last 5 years.

<sup>4</sup> An SEM approach "looks at the interrelationships between individual, relationship, community, and societal-level factors, allowing for a deep examination of the multiple effects and interrelatedness of social elements in an environment" (YouthPower Learning, 2018; p. 6).

gender identity (e.g., man and woman). This finding is important for considering the inclusion of youth who identify as gender or sexual minorities—vulnerable sub-populations of youth who should be engaged in PYD research and interventions.

#### **Recommendations at a Glance:**

- Conduct more research on the effectiveness of systems-based and cross-sectoral PYD programming.
- Develop youth-specific and outcome-oriented measurement indicators and guidance.
- Support developing, testing, and adaptation of measurement tools for localization and contextualization.
- Expand the evidence for the impact of PYD programming for youth in vulnerable situations beyond the health sector, while also acknowledging youth’s diverse intersectional identities.
- Further assess the challenges to youth’s participation in programming in LMICs by looking at barriers at the interpersonal, community, and systems levels.
- Develop tools that offer guidance on effective measurement of youth’s engagement and inclusion of youth in research teams.

Similar to the 2017 review, the health sector was prominently featured in the literature for this scan, especially [sexual and reproductive health](#) (SRH). The current scan also identified a focus on [mental health](#), a topic that has become increasingly important in the discourse related to PYD.

A new finding specific to the current scan is that youth engagement—while its own theme —often overlapped with other topics related to PYD measurement and PYD for vulnerable and marginalized youth (e.g., [youth participatory research](#)). More specifically, sources on measurement of PYD-related topics included strategies for engaging youth in measurement activities. PYD sources and those related to vulnerable and marginalized youth covered inclusion strategies and how to meaningfully engage youth in vulnerable situations. This suggests an increased recognition of the cross-cutting importance of youth engagement (“by” youth) in activities “for” youth. Additionally, although the search did not specifically seek out sources related to youth [programming in the context of COVID-19](#), this topic emerged in three identified sources.

## **FINDINGS BY PYD LEARNING AGENDA THEME**

### **UNDERSTANDING HOW PYD PROGRAMS ACHIEVE IMPACT IN LMICS**

In general, sources the YP2LE team identified from the current scan related to this theme provided evidence on impacts of PYD in health, agriculture, education, or across multiple sectors. Promising practices included applying systems-level approaches<sup>5</sup> (e.g., integrating interventions into education systems) and using a socio-ecological framework to target outcomes across sectors. As in the 2017 review, programs do not necessarily identify themselves as PYD; however, they offer activities that align with a PYD framework and measure PYD outcomes.

Sources the team reviewed identified schools as opportune settings for health and well-being programming and initiatives—this echoes a finding from the 2017 systematic review, where more than

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<sup>5</sup> [A systems-level](#) approach involves “interconnected sets of actors—governments, civil society, private sector, universities, individual citizens, and others that jointly work towards producing a particular development outcome.”

half of the studies reviewed involved interventions for youth in schools. Schools provide a safe space, particularly for girls and young women, facilitating the outcomes of school-based programming. There is an emerging evidence base for [improved learning outcomes](#), [increased social and emotional well-being](#), and [reduced health risk behaviors](#) in response to holistic school health PYD approaches. Examples of comprehensive, systemic approaches that implemented health interventions through schools included [Health Promoting Schools](#) and [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#); however, the team noted limited uptake and sustainability of these efforts.

The YP2LE team observed that integration of [agricultural education](#) in schools was particularly relevant in African economies, given the importance of the agricultural sector in the continent, the large proportion of youth, and the need for livelihoods that do not strain natural resources. School-based agricultural initiatives that integrated aspects of PYD involved youth as early adopters of agricultural innovations—empowering them to implement innovative practices in their communities, while contributing to strengthening of this component of the enabling environment.

In the health sector, the resilience-oriented intervention [Our Family Our Future](#) (piloted in South Africa) engaged families in the prevention of adolescent HIV and depression. Program results included high levels of family satisfaction with programming, retainment of all participating families in post-intervention assessments, decreased depressive symptoms, and increased HIV testing 3 months after the intervention. However, researchers recommended studying this program with a larger sample size, over an extended period to better determine program impact.

Evidence gaps the team identified for this theme include the need for more evaluated examples of PYD programming that were effectively integrated into systems to improve youth outcomes (e.g., schools, health clinics, juvenile justice, etc.). Results and lessons learned from these studies can inform replication, adaptation, and scale-up of successful PYD programming across systems or in different geographies.

## CROSS-SECTORAL IMPACT OF PYD PROGRAMS

As noted under the previous theme, PYD programming often targets outcomes across sectors. Under YP2LE, findings from six cross-sectoral [youth assessments](#) carried out in multiple countries in [Africa](#) and the [Eastern and Southern Caribbean](#) identified similarities in what young people reported they needed to thrive in their communities: access to quality and relevant education for the job market; SRH/family planning (FP) knowledge; and access to youth-friendly health services. This sets the stage for cross-sectoral programming opportunities. Youth also reported facing barriers to authentic participation in community decision-making and civic engagement; violent crime and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) sometimes further compounded these barriers.

Since the 2017 review, there have been more efforts to examine the benefits of cross-sectoral programs for youth. Promising cross-sectoral programs included [building assets and agency](#) (e.g. [life skills](#)) and addressing key components of the enabling environment by [engaging families](#), community members, and key stakeholders (e.g., government officials) to [shift norms](#), while increasing knowledge and skill-building. A retrospective study of [USAID-funded youth programming in Jordan](#) from the last decade found that youth participation affected PYD outcomes, which in turn, influenced outcomes in other sectors (e.g., soft skill development helped youth identify careers to pursue and build professional networks). Similarly, the [Waves for Change Program](#), which focused on gender and sports development,

found that gender sensitization training contributed to more equitable gender norm modeling for coaches, and female youth noted being able to engage more openly and share feelings with male coaches. The multi-level [Plan-It Girls Program](#) in India also focused on gender and female empowerment, using a gender-transformative curriculum that targeted life skills and workforce development during the transition from the education setting to the workforce. The evaluation found increases in participants' self-confidence and improvements in development of needed skills for workforce participation. However, in the context of this review, there was a lack of studies or evaluations that provided clear findings on the benefits and effectiveness of cross-sectoral PYD programs in achieving positive youth outcomes. Another [impact evaluation on youth employment-related outcomes](#) found improvements in workforce engagement, workforce readiness skillsets—especially related to youth's self-confidence, disengagement from violent extremism, and improvements in life and leadership skills.

**An impact evaluation of Save the Children's [Skills to Succeed](#), an integrated workforce development and FP/RH program in Bangladesh had mixed findings: Some positive health-related outcomes at midline were not necessarily sustained at endline. However, treatment group youth had a higher likelihood of ever having tested for HIV at endline. Other findings indicate that youth gained health-related knowledge and confidence in advocating for their health and better recognized the importance of FP/RH for workforce engagement.**

Gaps the team found during the scan of the literature focused on this theme included a lack of studies or evaluations that provide clear findings on the benefits and effectiveness of cross-sectoral PYD programs in achieving positive youth outcomes. While programs use mixed methods to collect data on PYD outcomes, they rarely collect longitudinal data. The 2017 systematic review also noted limited availability of rigorous evaluations of cross-sectoral PYD programming—an evidence gap that persists.

## MEASUREMENT OF PYD CONSTRUCTS

The evidence base related to PYD measurement has expanded in recent years, particularly in specific sectors (e.g., soft skills, [SRH/FP](#), and [mental health](#)). Related to social emotional learning (SEL) and soft skills, a [resource repository](#) has been developed that includes guidance, study findings, and links to ongoing measurement initiatives. One example is a compilation of commonly used [SEL and soft skills frameworks](#) to facilitate comparison of their key features when making decisions about programming and measurement.

A key consideration when measuring PYD-related skills and outcomes among youth in LMICs is the importance of adapting tools for the specific context. Among the sources the team reviewed for the literature scan activity, approaches to PYD measurement differed (e.g., Global North vs. Global South), and localized and contextualized measurement approaches were lacking. A similar finding was noted in USAID's [State of the Evidence](#) brief on soft skills measurement. Most identified research and measurement tools are primarily related to researchers, institutions, and approaches [from the Global North and designed with a focus on adolescents from the Western world, including high-income countries](#). Newly developed measurement instruments the team identified in the literature focused on

measuring [soft skills](#)<sup>6</sup> development, including World Learning’s [WorkLinks Skills and Values Assessment](#), the International Youth Foundation’s new [Passport to Success Traveler Course](#), [YouthPower Action’s Soft Skills Assessment Tool](#), as well as a collaboration between the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank resulting in a new [instrument](#) to measure life skills based on the Middle East and North Africa [Life Skills and Citizenship Education](#) framework and [Measurement Instrument](#).

Another area of important and recent growth in PYD measurement is mental health. Key stakeholders in mental health measurement, including the World Health Organization and UNICEF have developed [the Measurement of Mental Health among Adolescents at the Population Level \(MMAP\) initiative](#) and [the Global Action for Measurement of Adolescent Health \(GAMA\) Advisory Group](#) to address gaps in youth’s mental health measurement. Additionally, the [Social Provisions Scale](#) (recently validated for youth populations) focuses on identifying the presence and stability of youth social connections. Also related to the Learning Agenda theme of youth engagement, another study determined that [psychological engagement](#) in programming activities was a predictor of PYD outcomes. However, there are persistent evidence measurement gaps regarding youth mental health measurement in [conflict and humanitarian settings](#) and [how the interplay between time, the contextual environment of program activities, and program participants](#) enhances PYD outcomes.

Among identified PYD measurement sources, promising tools (i.e., sources that have been applied and have demonstrated positive effects in programming) incorporated inclusive and participatory approaches.<sup>7</sup> In a measurement context, participatory approaches entail “partnership with members of marginalized communities [directly via the research process] to reduce or eliminate injustices and/or inequities that have been identified by community members themselves” ([Jull, Giles, and Graham 2017, 2](#)). For example, the [Passages](#) project’s [Social Norms Exploration Tool](#) outlines processes for participatory exploration, measurement, analysis, design of social norm interventions, and related monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices across different contexts and population groups.

While these tools have filled an important gap in the PYD measurement space, practitioners and researchers have identified a continued need for more youth-specific measurement indicators. Existing indicators<sup>8</sup> in reviewed sources tended to focus on participants’ outputs rather than outcomes (e.g., training received vs. application of training to acquire a position in workforce). One identified resource that included relevant outcome indicators is [UNICEF’s Gender Toolkit on Integrating Gender in Programming for Every Child in South Asia](#).<sup>9,10</sup> The Toolkit provides guidance on gender mainstreaming and applying gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) approaches across all stages of the program cycle, from assessment to M&E activities.

Existing gaps for this theme include the need for further development of youth-specific indicators focused on outcomes and impact, continued development and refinement of validated measurement tools through interdisciplinary research collaboration, and more evidence of piloting and application of

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<sup>6</sup> [Soft skills](#) include a “broad set of skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.”

<sup>7</sup> [Social Norms Exploration Tool, Research-to-Change Toolkit](#).

<sup>8</sup> USAID’s [Standard Youth Indicators Reference Sheet](#), Priority List of Indicators for Girls’ Menstrual Health and Hygiene: Technical Guidance for [Monitoring](#).

<sup>9</sup> [UNICEF’s Gender Toolkit on Integrating Gender in Programming for Every Child in South Asia](#).

<sup>10</sup> An additional resource with outcome indicators includes [USAID’s Education Reporting Toolkit](#).

developed tools in different contexts to inform contextualized and localized measurement of youth outcomes in LMICs.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy's [Youth Thrive Survey](#) incorporates PYD in the measurement process by assessing five strengths-focused outcomes that protect youth and promote PYD, including resilience, social connections, understanding of adolescent development, access to support in crisis situations, and cognitive and social emotional competence. The instrument has high internal consistency and reliability and while developed in the United States, it is being piloted internationally and has been used among youth ages 12–26.

## PYD FOR VULNERABLE OR MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS

There seems to be a growing recognition that PYD programs should address the inclusion of vulnerable or marginalized groups. Many frameworks the team reviewed for the literature scan focused on vulnerabilities related to individual characteristics, experiences, and contextual factors, including those related to the [COVID-19](#) pandemic and youth residing in [conflict and post-conflict zones](#). Sources consistently noted that addressing vulnerabilities requires incorporating inclusive practices, such as protected time for relationship-building between youth and key stakeholders, incorporation of youth peer networks, and contextualizing activities to youth's needs and capacities at [key entry points of a program's lifecycle](#). Researchers suggest that it is crucial to involve members of priority populations directly in design, implementation, and analysis activities. One tool that provides detailed guidance on participatory approaches to implementation research activities and stakeholder involvement is the [Research to-Change-Toolkit](#). The toolkit outlines key strategies for inclusive identification and engagement of stakeholders, as well as approaches for defining their motivations and priorities, communicating study findings with them, and seeking their input to adapt program activities, as needed.

While PYD for vulnerable or marginalized populations is a growing emphasis, identified studies continue to focus largely on female youth populations and interventions to address outcomes related to health, in particular SRH/FP and safety. Across reviewed studies, [adolescent girls and young women](#) (AGYW) were typically the population examined. Some studies focused on health outcomes among AGYW highlighted how sector-specific activities can improve cross-sectoral outcomes. [For example](#), provision of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) supplies, SRH, and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention education supported AGYW to stay in school and empowered them by addressing social norms and fostering an enabling environment.

Promoting specific PYD features of an enabling environment was a common and effective approach in reviewed studies, and was specifically employed through strengthening opportunities for youth to build healthy relationships and bond and engage in safe spaces with other youth and adult advocates.

A [study USAID funded and YP2LE completed that involved a systematic literature review and qualitative data collection](#) on PYD programming evidence for youth in vulnerable and marginalized situations in LMICs described the complexity of addressing [youth's intersectional vulnerabilities](#). This study echoed similar approaches in other peer-reviewed publications focused on [youth living with disabilities](#) and [youth experiencing homelessness](#). Findings informed the development of the *Intrinsic, Contextual, and Structural Framework*, which defines the different components of youth's vulnerability and ways to recognize and measure them within the context of youth programming.



The [REACH](#) program promoted AGYW agency and empowerment, and qualitative data collected from female intervention participants indicated the program had created safe spaces in sports activities and fostered healthy relationships and bonding with coaches. This was particularly achieved via participatory approaches in PYD-aligned activities (e.g., design of safe spaces) to improve PYD outcomes (e.g., perceptions of safety). The program also had a cross-sectoral focus by addressing education via literacy-based activities and physical activities to improve health outcomes. Further research is needed to determine the long-term effect of programming activities on AGYW outcomes.

The importance of the presence of a positive adult influence for young people was reported in other studies as well, specifically engaging other key stakeholders at the interpersonal (e.g., family, peers, etc.) and systems (e.g., healthcare, education, etc.) level. Some studies that involved [family members](#) in programming activities reported more success in improving youth outcomes than activities that only involved youth, because of their influence on youth's perceptions and behavior. Improving the parent-child relationship [has been shown](#) to delay initiation of sexual activity, decrease health risk-taking behaviors, increase contraceptive use, and decrease pregnancy rates. However, not all family members were typically included in existing family-based approaches. Namely, male family members, who may also serve as key stakeholders for influencing social norms in the home and community, were often left out of these activities. Additional promising practices included [collaboration between youth-related systems, such as education and health systems](#), to address housing insecurity and provide access to health sources and services [for youth experiencing homelessness during COVID-19](#), including nutrition and COVID-19 testing.

Gaps the team observed in the research on this Learning Agenda theme included a lack of data on the barriers and facilitators to improving outcomes for youth in vulnerable situations beyond the individual level (e.g., youth), specifically related to interpersonal, community, and systems levels.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PYD PROGRAMS

While this topic is its own PYD Learning Agenda theme, literature scan results show that youth engagement was also cross-cutting with other learning agenda themes, including measurement of PYD constructs and PYD for vulnerable or marginalized populations. This intersection included youth taking a leadership role in defining relevant program terms and concepts and guiding activities for understanding vulnerabilities among specific sub-populations of youth (e.g., youth's understanding and experiences of violence). Studies employed youth-led approaches (e.g., youth serving as lead activity facilitators for program processes and determination of outcomes) in research and policymaking, as well as sector-specific strategies (e.g., particularly in democracy, human rights, and governance).<sup>11</sup> Similar to the above-addressed themes, studies tended to focus on [engaging AGYW](#), including in activities related to social and gender norms and gender equity. On the topic of inclusion, sources reported several effective channels for meaningful youth engagement that were connected to the creation of safe spaces, including youth centers and youth clubs; others focus on linkages to [peer networks](#), mentorship and

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<sup>11</sup> For more information, see [Walking the Walk: Prioritizing Youth Political and Civic Engagement in Renewing Democracy](#); [Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE: Summary of Key Interventions and Examples](#); [Toolkit for Youth Inclusion in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance](#); [Policy Brief: Beyond Dividing Lines Youth-led Civic Engagement for Peace](#); [Engaged and Heard!: Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement](#); and [Inclusive Development – Inspiring Youth to Civic Action](#).

coaching activities, and youth-specific decision-making bodies (e.g., councils). For example, findings indicated that the incorporation of structured youth–adult dialogues in [Tanzania](#) had created meaningful opportunities for intentional collaboration and joint identification of solutions to address prioritized issues and for youth to apply leadership skills.

Several youth engagement-related sources highlighted youth-led research and approaches to measurement of youth engagement. [One study](#) employed research led by young women in Jordan and stated it was critical to build in enough time to enhance program mentors’ and young women researchers’ confidence and skills, provide them with stipends, and build rapport with the community to gain their acceptance and trust in adolescent girls leading research activities. Through participant surveys, [the study identified](#) improvements in girls’ understanding of research, their perceived abilities to carry out research activities, and related skills such as critical thinking and objectivity in research design and implementation activities. Another project in [Jordan](#) that trained youth in conducting community asset mapping resulted in youth-developed community-based programming, and improved facilitation skills among engaged youth. [Project implementers](#) reported that building in meaningful youth engagement in their programming activities had directly improved participating youth’s assets and agency, as well as increased potential for sustaining program outcomes, because youth felt more invested and had ownership in improving and maintaining positive outcomes. Implementers also noted the importance of funding support for scaling promising practices.

[Another study](#) focused on measuring adolescents’ participation in relationships and public life in Côte d’Ivoire and Indonesia. The study assessed participation via their *Adolescent Participation Questionnaire*, which measured seven constructs: (1) self-esteem, (2) self-efficacy, (3) social connectedness, (4) mattering, (5) decision-making, (6) civic attitudes, and (7) civic engagement. Additionally, under the YP2LE project and in collaboration with Youth Excel, YP2LE led a training with USAID staff on making power inclusive in USAID programming with youth. This training focused on (1) helping participants recognize and better understand youth–adult power differentials to highlight the importance of youth’s engagement in USAID programming, (2) providing guidance to USAID staff on tools to promote youth inclusion at different stages of the USAID program cycle, and (3) strengthening USAID’s capacity to engage youth meaningfully via intergenerational dialogue.

For this theme, the team perceived several critical gaps in the literature. Despite an increased number of sources focusing on meaningful youth inclusion, there is a lack of research-oriented sources, including those on effective measurement of youth engagement. The limited existing research-oriented sources that focused on measuring youth engagement were [developed under the YouthPower Learning](#) (YPL) mechanism and highlight measuring youth outcomes and organizational outcomes to target the enabling environment. While some identified sources highlighted [youth participatory approaches](#), there is also a need for studies and tools that provide guidance on how to engage sub-populations of youth in vulnerable situations in research activities and as members of the research team.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this literature scan highlight key learning from the past 5 years of PYD research, as well as opportunities to promote YouthPower’s PYD Learning Agenda by focusing on critical gaps to expand the evidence base.

| THEME   | <a href="#">SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS (2017)</a>   | LITERATURE SCAN FINDINGS (2022)   | CONSIDERATIONS FOR UPDATING THE PYD LEARNING AGENDA  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Understanding how PYD programs achieve positive impact in LMICs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some programs with PYD components have demonstrated positive outcomes, but less evidence is available about PYD-specific outcomes (e.g., self-regulation of emotions and self-confidence).</li> <li>• Studies evaluating the long-term effects of PYD programs are lacking, and program evaluation data had varying levels of quality.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs do not necessarily identify themselves as PYD, but they offer activities that align with PYD and measure PYD outcomes (especially in the health, agriculture, and education sectors).</li> <li>• Promising practices include applying systems-level approaches and using a socio-ecological framework to target outcomes across sectors.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect more evidence on the effectiveness of integrating PYD programming into systems (schools, health clinics, etc.) and youth-systems strengthening approaches.</li> </ul> |
| Cross-sectoral impact of PYD programs                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The identified evidence base focused on the health sector; limited was evidence available on the effectiveness of cross-sectoral approaches.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In recent years, there have been more efforts to examine the benefits of cross-sectoral programs (e.g., <u>health</u>, <u>workforce</u>, <u>life skills</u>, <u>gender</u>, <u>mental health</u>), <u>including with vulnerable youth</u>; however, level of rigor among studies varies and there are little to no longitudinal data.</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to invest in research that gathers evidence on the effectiveness of cross-sectoral PYD programs in achieving positive youth outcomes.</li> </ul>                     |
| Measurement of PYD constructs                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few validated measures of PYD constructs exist. Available measures tend to focus on the</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of measurement guidance with indicators that have been tested and applied to</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop youth-specific measurement indicators and guidance for adapting to</li> </ul>   |

| THEME | <a href="#">SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS (2017)</a>         | LITERATURE SCAN FINDINGS (2022)   | CONSIDERATIONS FOR UPDATING THE PYD LEARNING AGENDA   |
|-------|--|---|---|
|       | individual, with limited attention to context and community factors. | <p>measure youth development outcomes (e.g., number of youth program participants with increased self-confidence). Most available sources focus on measurement of program outputs (e.g., number of youth trained on business management skills).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs recognize the need to use validated tools for measurement and several efforts have been made to develop and test tools.</li> <li>• While some studies use validated tools, others either do not or do not mention whether the measurement tool used was validated.</li> <li>• Reviewed sources noted the importance of localized measurement of youth outcomes in LMICs as a best practice to be prioritized and addressed more systematically across programs' PYD measurement activities, in part</li> </ul> | <p>different programs and sectors to measure youth outcomes instead of program outputs.<sup>12</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to invest in the development, testing, and adaptation of measurement tools. Expand measurement considerations to inform and support further development of the knowledge base on localized measurement development and increase localization of measurement activities.</li> </ul> |

<sup>12</sup> Under YP2LE, the USAID YouthPower Learning [Positive Youth Development Measurement Toolkit](#) will be updated in 2023 to include tested youth-specific indicators on program outputs and outcomes to address this gap in measurement resources and content.

| THEME  | <a href="#">SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS (2017)</a>  | LITERATURE SCAN FINDINGS (2022)   | CONSIDERATIONS FOR UPDATING THE PYD LEARNING AGENDA  |
|--|---|---|--|
| PYD for vulnerable or marginalized populations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence on the impact of PYD programming for youth in vulnerable situations, including those who self-identify from the LGBTQI+ community, indigenous youth, and youth with disabilities is lacking.</li> </ul> | <p>through researcher–practitioner collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While there seems to be a growing awareness that PYD programs should recognize and address the diverse experiences of marginalized groups, few studies exist for populations other than girls and young women.</li> <li>Few studies examine barriers and facilitators to improving outcomes for youth in vulnerable situations beyond the individual level (e.g., youth), specifically related to interpersonal, community, and systems levels.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to emphasize the need for more evidence on how PYD affects vulnerable and marginalized populations, especially LGBTQI+, indigenous, and youth with disabilities.</li> <li>Expand research studies on youth in vulnerable situations to recognize their diverse intersectional identities, strengths, and needs, including populations beyond AGYW, in particular non-binary youth, and studies outside the health sector.</li> <li>Broaden the focus of research studies with youth in LMICs by identifying barriers and facilitators to inclusion beyond the individual level (e.g., youth), specifically related to interpersonal, community, and systems levels.</li> </ul> |
| Youth engagement in PYD programs               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many programs did not have opportunities for youth leadership in program implementation. Those that included meaningful</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More sources are available that report inclusion of meaningful youth engagement activities; however, limited research-oriented sources exist, including</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to invest in developing more guidance and resources on effectively measuring youth engagement and carrying out</li> </ul>  |

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|-------|--|--|---|
|       | engagement of youth were limited in number.                  | <p>those on effective measurement of youth engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few studies provide guidance on how to engage sub-populations of youth in vulnerable situations in research activities.</li> </ul> | research, especially for and with youth in vulnerable situations. |

*For additional information related to this research, please see [YP2LE's PYD Learning Agenda](#) and [thematic evidence pages](#).*