



ELEVATING YOUTH VOICES



Generating evidence on the state of youth engagement in the Global Fund's advocacy ecosystem

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Abbreviations

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria	Global Fund
Young People Who Use Drugs	YPWUD
Young Key Population	YKP
The Greater Involvement of People living with HIV	GIPA
Country Coordinating Mechanism	CCM

Background

Youth RISE has been awarded a Global Fund grant to implement activities on youth advocacy in support of the Global Fund’s Advocacy Roadmap (2023 – 2025). This project is primarily focused on the African region (Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe), with further focus on Asia (Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan).

The Global Fund Advocacy Ecosystem refers to the network of community-led and civil society organizations that work collaboratively to advance the Global Fund’s mission of ending HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria as epidemics. This ecosystem is integral to the implementation of the Global Fund’s strategy, with a focus on engaging diverse groups, including those most affected by the three diseases, such as key populations, young people, and women.

The advocacy ecosystem operates within a complex global landscape, navigating challenges such as increasing inequality, closing civic space, and global health threats. It aims to strengthen partnerships, mobilize resources, increase political support, and leverage diplomatic influence to protect human rights, gender equality, and health equity.

The ecosystem is sustained through strategic actions outlined in the Global Fund’s Advocacy Roadmap, which guides efforts to maintain and expand the influence of these critical advocacy networks. Within the Global Fund Advocacy Roadmap, specific outcomes related to youth engagement include: strengthened partnerships for advocacy, bridges built between organizations, sustainable organizations, and advocacy for supportive policies.

The first objective of this project is to generate evidence on the state of play of youth engagement within the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem.

To achieve this aim, mixed-method research on youth engagement in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem was applied.

Quantitative data was collected using a validated survey tool while qualitative data was collected via the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The Nominal Group Technique is a simple but intuitive process in gathering information from a group. It has been widely reported to be effective in generating ideas from small groups by fostering equal participation from all participants¹. NGT is one of the most popular consensus methods in health research used to accumulate and rank responses to a question or group of questions by people affected by a particular problem or interested in a research area. It is a powerful tool for developing solutions that are prioritized but also directly actionable by capturing inputs sensitive to the context and needs of the participants.

The research seeks to identify opportunities for scalable youth-led initiatives within the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem. Utilizing this knowledge, the project will support Young Key Populations (YKPs) in developing and implementing advocacy initiatives through small grants. These efforts aim to ensure youth engagement in the Global Fund and other national processes that concern the safeguarding and advancement of their health and human rights. This report is further divided into the methodology, quantitative and qualitative summary, GIPA framework, conclusion and annexes².

Methodology

A mixed methods research was conducted using a quantitative survey and an online qualitative NGT session. For the latter, 3 YKPs were recruited per country (24 in total). All participants were below the age of 30 years, engaged in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem, and nominated by the partner organizations. For the former, an anonymous online questionnaire was administered via Qualtrics, targeting individuals under 30 and residing in the focus countries. It is also important to note that the recruitment of participants did not aim to accurately represent broader YKPs. Both qualitative and quantitative data gathering employed a mix of purposive sampling techniques - a non-probability method intentionally selecting participants based on their characteristics, knowledge, experiences, age and place of residence; and convenience sampling technique (recruiting individuals that were within easy-to-access to or already in contact with the partner organisations we worked with). This report was also drafted by a young person.

Quantitative Method

The online survey instrument comprised 95 questions, with adaptive pathways based on participants' responses, particularly regarding their awareness and engagement with the Global Fund. The survey design incorporated various question types, including multiple-choice, single-choice, Likert scale, ranking, and open-ended formats, to capture nuanced responses. Control questions were implemented to verify respondents' age, GDPR consent, and country of residence to ensure data quality and relevance. The survey was translated into the languages used in the target countries, namely English, Bengali, Russian, Swahili (South Africa), Ndebele (Zimbabwe), and Shona (Zimbabwe).

Over one month, the survey yielded a total of 445 responses, of which 311 were deemed valid for analysis. Excluding factors were related to age (respondents 30 or older), incomplete surveys and respondents residing in a country different from the target countries for this study. However, it is noteworthy that Tanzania encountered challenges in response collection due to delayed transfer of funds, resulting in no data from this country at the time of reporting. This methodological approach aimed to gather diverse perspectives on youth engagement within the Global Fund ecosystem, particularly emphasising the experiences and challenges faced by YKPs.

Methodology

Qualitative Method

The NGT method typically involves the following phases: silent generation of ideas, round-robin recording of ideas; ranking of ideas, and summary. Participants consisted of selected YKPs by each country partner. For each question, 24 participants individually came up with responses, and all responses were compiled. The NGT session was conducted online and responses were gathered on a Google document. Some responses were merged if they had the same interpretation. Using a scale of 1 to 5, participants rank their top five ideas on the compiled list and the highest-scoring responses are summarized as the most significant responses to the question.

The Global Fund project manager & Capacity Building officer at Youth Rise, also serving as Technical Lead (Isaac Olushola) facilitated the session with the help of the Deputy and Youth Engagement Programme Lead (Carolina Ahumada). The session was divided into two phases, with each phase on one question. Both phases were carried on the same day spaced by a break between. The two questions were aligned with the project's objectives and guided each section. They are:

1. What barriers limit your engagement in the Global Fund Advocacy Ecosystem?
2. What factors promote your engagement in the Global Fund Advocacy Ecosystem?

A week before the meeting, all participants had been briefed on the session's objectives. They were each provided with an idea generation document to help pre-record some of their answers before the session. At the beginning of the session, the questions were re-introduced and participants were asked to write down their responses separately. All responses from countries were compiled by the technical lead on a single document and shared with all, and then the ranking scale was explained. The participants ranked their responses in order of priority to their country context. Also, translators helped to translate questions and responses for non-English-speaking participants. GIPA (The Greater Involvement of People living with HIV) is a principle that enables people living with HIV to be included in decision-making on issues that affect them. We have adopted this principle as a framework to also guide the involvement and effective engagement of YKPs and YPWUDs in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem. The GIPA framework was used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative responses.

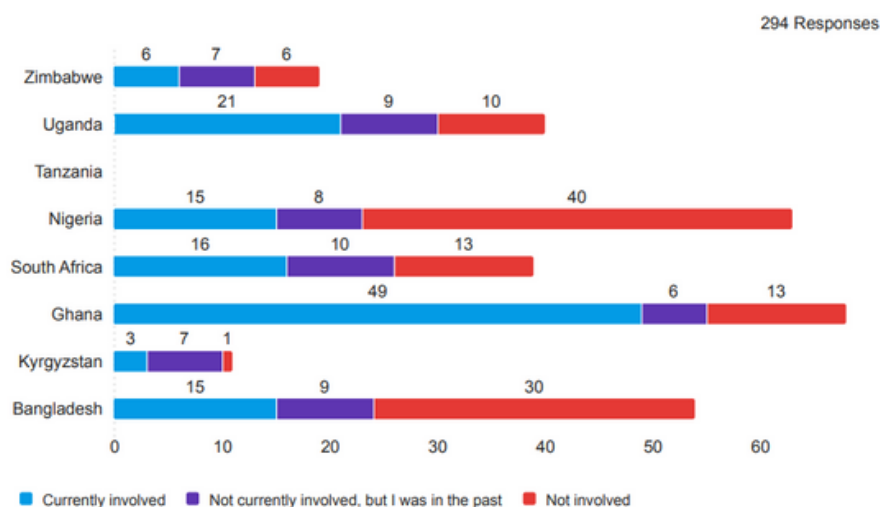
Quantitative Summary

This section summarises the following components from the quantitative study: YKPs involvement in community organizations or advocacy groups; their knowledge regarding the Global Fund’s processes; level of engagement with their country coordinating mechanism (CCM); barriers to participation in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem and ways to increase participation.

The sample included responses from 311 young people across selected countries in this study, with the majority falling in the 18-29 age range. Participants who filled this survey include: Young People Who Use Drugs (YPWUD)- 164/311, Young People living with HIV (142/311), Young People Who identify as LGBTQ+ (43/311), Young transgender people (26/311), Young men who have sex with men (45/311), Young sex workers (72/311), Young women and girls in high-prevalence settings (21/311), Young people with disabilities (14/311), Young people in prisons and other closed settings (7/311), Young people from ethnic and racial minorities (8/311), Young people experiencing homelessness (23/311), Young people affected by humanitarian emergencies (4/311), Young migrants and refugees (4/311), Young indigenous populations (11/311) and others who did not belong to any YKP group (17/311). Generally, 49% identified as men, 46% identified as women, and the remaining identified as non-binary or preferred to self-describe. Nigeria and Ghana had the highest representation. Bangladesh and Ghana exhibit a higher proportion of male respondents, while Nigeria and Uganda show a higher proportion of female respondents. A small percentage of respondents in Bangladesh, Ghana and Zimbabwe identified as non-binary or chose to self-describe their gender. This data provides context for interpreting the findings in this summary.

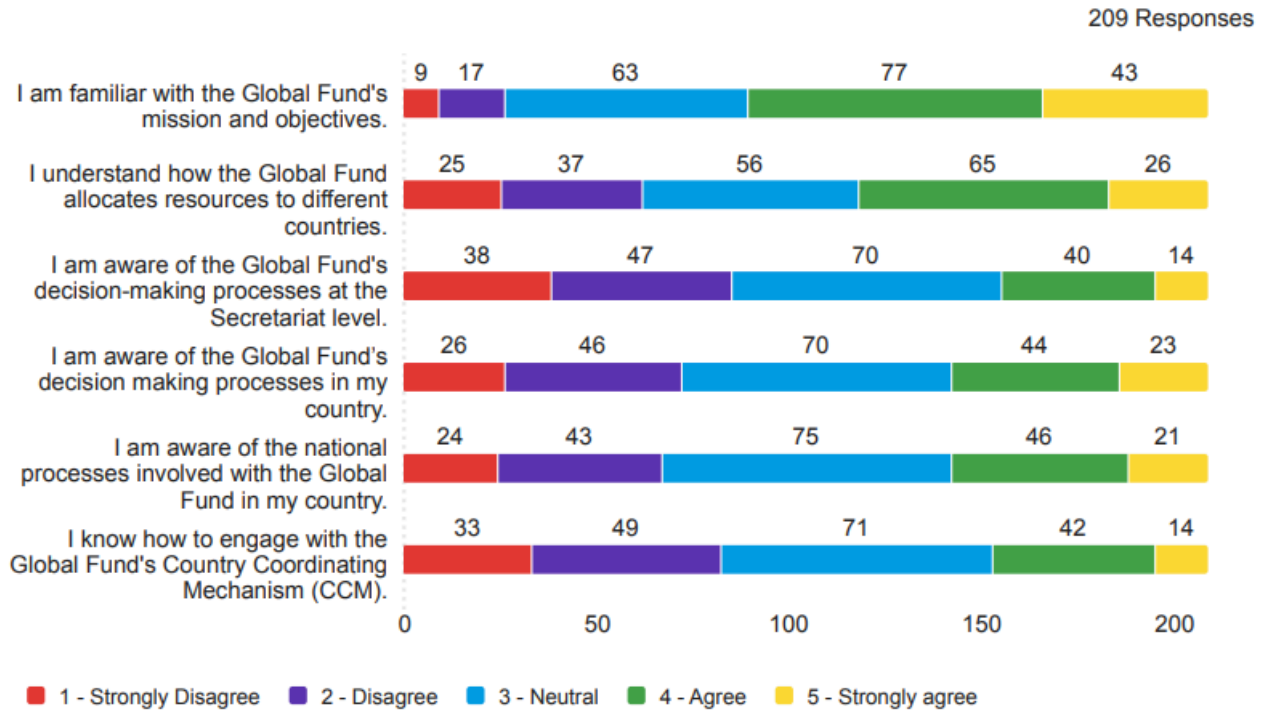
This section highlights the overall advocacy engagement of YKPs and awareness of the Global Fund and its activities.

Graph 1. YKPs active involvement in community organizations or advocacy groups

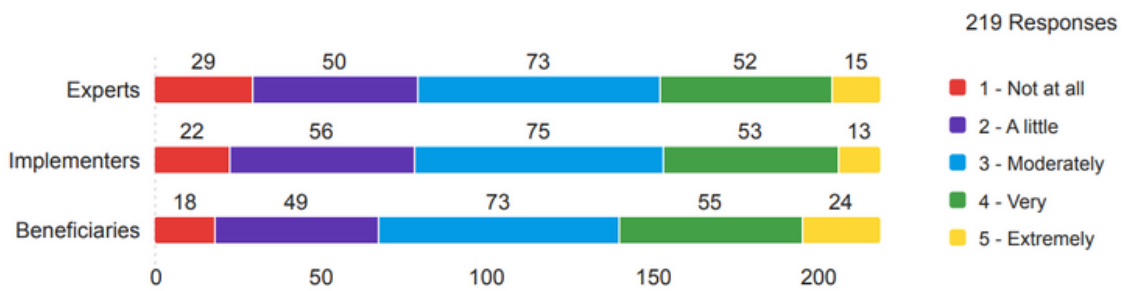


The most common community organizations and advocacy groups mentioned were focused on HIV/AIDS, Human rights, Youth empowerment, Health and wellbeing, and Harm reduction.

Graph 3. YKPs knowledge regarding the Global Fund processes

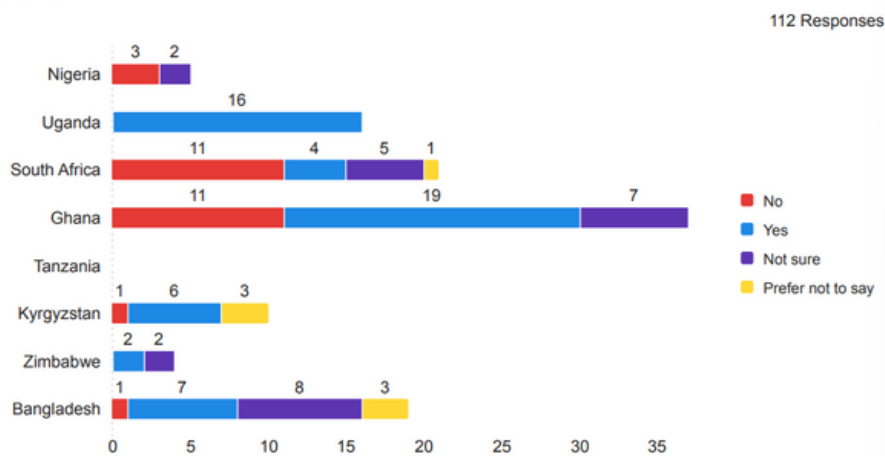


Graph 4. YKPs responses to the question "To what extent are YKPs involved and engaged as players in these three domains within the Global Fund Advocacy Ecosystem?"



Approximately 46% of YKP reported being unaware of youth representatives in their CCM, while only about 28% indicated they were aware, and around 26% reported knowing somewhat. Nevertheless, there are important discrepancies among countries. Nigeria and Zimbabwe appear as countries where YKP are the least aware of their young CCM representatives, with nearly 69% and 71,5%, respectively, reporting being unaware. It is also necessary to note that this may not necessarily reflect the larger situation as some organizations engaged YKPs already involved in their organisations who had prior knowledge of the Global Fund, while others did not.

Graph 5. YKPs responses to the question “If yes, have you ever engaged with youth representatives in your CCM?”



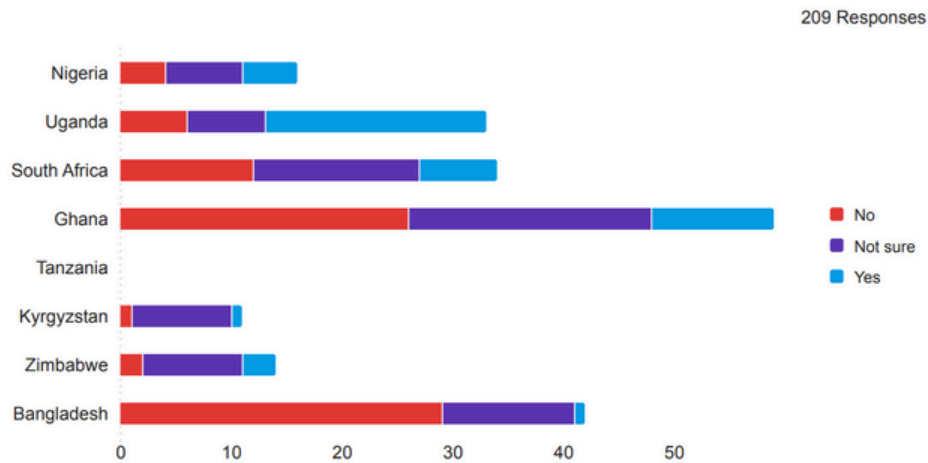
Graph 5 shows that from the YKPs who responded to have some level of awareness of their local representatives, about 48% had engaged with them, while 46% had not engaged or were unsure if they had engaged with youth representatives in their CCM. Uganda was the only country where all the YKPs who were aware of their local representatives had also already engaged with them.

Graph 6. YKP responses to the question “Have you ever interacted with or participated in activities organized by the Global Fund Youth Council?”



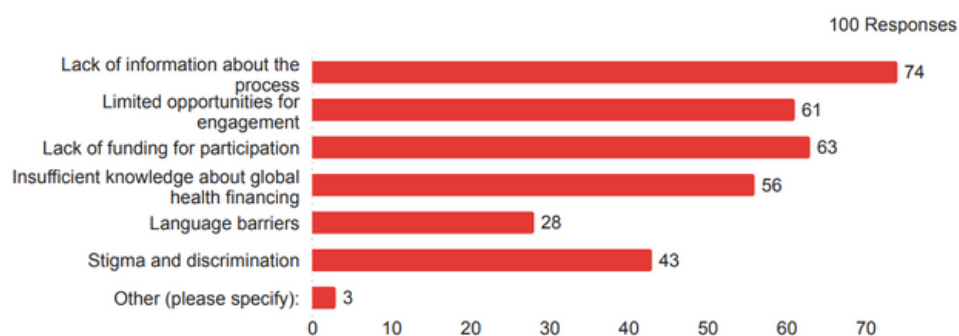
The findings reveal significant disparities in engagement levels across different countries. At the country level, the data reveals notable variations in engagement. Bangladesh demonstrates high engagement rates, with only 11% reporting no interaction with the council. In Kyrgyzstan and Zimbabwe, no YKPs indicated never engaging with the council, although certainty about engagement was low or not reported. Only 33% of respondents in Kyrgyzstan confirmed participating in the council’s activities, while no affirmative responses were computed in Zimbabwe. The variations between countries suggest that local contexts, including cultural factors, accessibility issues, and the effectiveness of outreach strategies, play crucial roles in determining youth engagement levels.

Graph 7. YKPs that have faced a significant barrier to participating in Global Fund-related advocacy



Uganda stands out with more than half of participants reporting that they have faced significant barriers, while Bangladesh presents a contrasting scenario with many respondents indicating no obstacles. This stark difference underscores the importance of context-specific approaches in addressing barriers to YKP engagement.

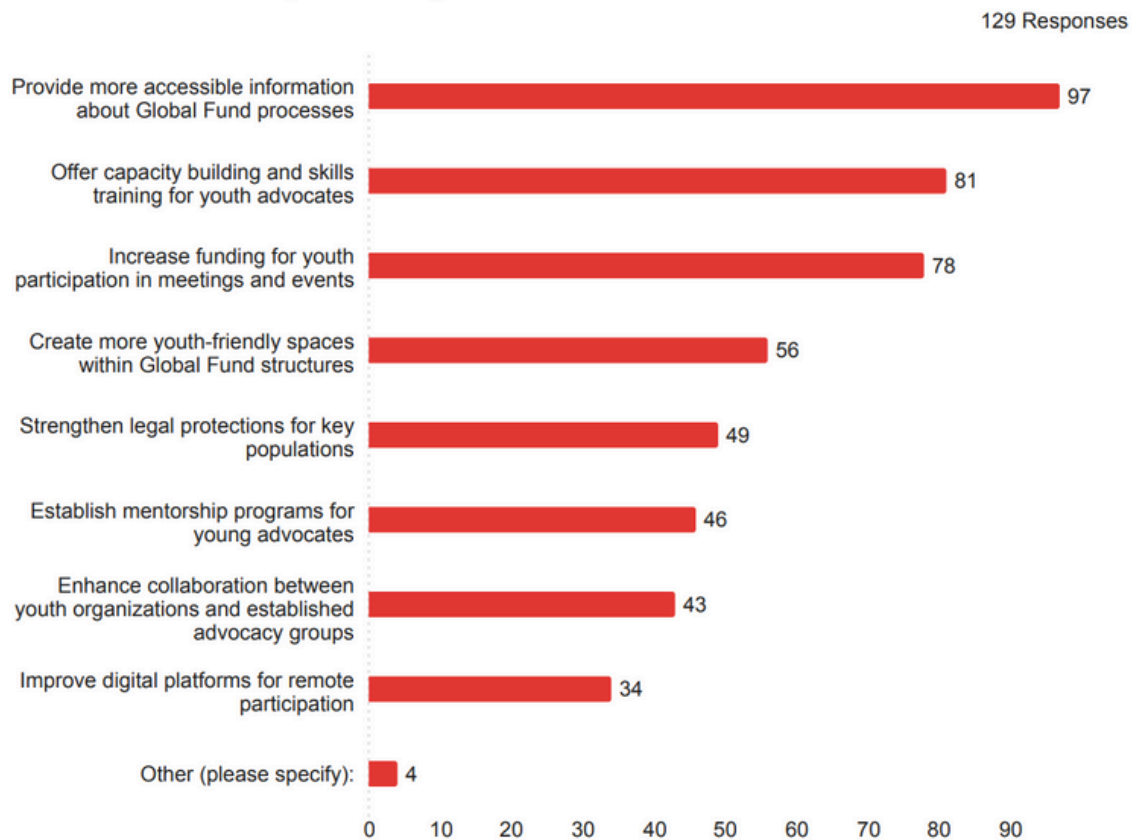
Graph 8. Barriers preventing YKPs from being more involved in the Global Fund replenishment process



Graph 8 delves deeper into the specific barriers preventing YKPs from being more involved in the Global Fund replenishment process. These findings echo earlier sections of the report that highlighted the general lack of awareness about Global Fund processes among YKPs.

Other closely ranked barriers include limited opportunities for engagement and lack of funding for participation in the advocacy ecosystem.

Graph 9: Most effective ways to address barriers and increase participation in Global Fund advocacy, according to YKPs



The three main ways identified by YKPs to address barriers and increase participation were to provide more accessible information about Global Fund processes, offer capacity building and skills training for youth advocates, and increase funding for youth participation in meetings and events

The table below delves into the factors that have already helped YPWUD engage with the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem. The top three factors are: training or capacity-building programs (125 out of 311 responses), access to information about Global Fund processes and opportunities (104 out of 311 responses), and mentorship or guidance from experienced advocates (98 out of 311 responses) These results corroborate the effectiveness of existing initiatives aimed at enhancing YKP engagement.

They also emphasize the importance of sharing knowledge and building skills to support meaningful participation. The high ranking of mentorship stands out due to the value given to learning through experience and receiving guidance from more seasoned advocates.

Table 1. Factors that have helped YKP to engage with the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem.

S/N	Factors	Number of responses
1	Training or capacity building programs	125
2	Access to information about Global Fund processes and opportunities	104
3	Mentorship or guidance from experienced advocates	98
4	Funding support for participation in meetings or events	75
5	Peer support and networking with other young advocates	70
6	Involvement in youth-led organizations or networks	66
7	Safe spaces for open dialogue and sharing experiences	58
8	Opportunities for virtual participation	57
9	Support from community leaders or organizations	56
10	Personal motivation and interest in global health issues	47
11	Availability of youth-friendly resources and materials	46
12	Inclusion of youth representatives in decision-making bodies	37
13	Recognition of youth contributions by the Global Fund	34
14	Encouragement from educational institutions or workplaces	33
15	Language support or translation services	32
16	Supportive policies for youth engagement at national or global levels	29
17	Positive experiences in previous Global Fund-related activities	27
18	Clear communication channels with Global Fund representatives	27
19	Flexible engagement options that accommodate different schedules	25
20	Other	9

From the Quantitative analysis, it is evident that youth engagement in the advocacy ecosystem can be strongly linked to a lack of awareness about the Global Fund processes and the activities of the Country Coordinating mechanism, amidst other factors such as resource limitations, and need for capacity building.

Qualitative Summary

This section presents the results of the qualitative method- the NGT session, highlighting key responses by participants in this study recruited from all of our selected countries. The first question was:

“What barriers limit your engagement in the Global Fund Advocacy Ecosystem?”

In response to this question, 16 responses were generated, and after ranking by each country participant in terms of significance and relevance, the following four responses ranked highest:

1. Limitation of funding resources and opportunities:

Participants from Uganda, Ghana and Tanzania share similar perspectives on the limitation of funding resources as a key challenge to their engagement in the advocacy ecosystem. In direct quotes:

“limitation resources for facilitating our engagements in the Global Fund ecosystem”- Uganda

“lack of opportunities and funding for travels for the youth”- Ghana

2. Limited vibrant youth platforms to mobilize and engage in meaningful participation:

This was the second most significant barrier that limit the engagement of our participants in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem. This barrier refers to the absence of engaging youth-friendly programs to stimulate participation.

“Limited opportunity for youth to engage”- Ghana

“The main barrier is that there are no programs for young people in general”- Kyrgyzstan

3. Under-representation of young key populations

A third prioritized barrier is the lack of spaces for participating in advocacy and decision-making. Many are restricted from leadership roles, lack representation in key decision-making bodies, and are part of under-resourced networks that limit their influence on policies and funding priorities. These are obstacles that compromises their engagement in issues that directly impact them.

“Young people in my context are not given the liberty to lead interventions even those supposedly designed for young people. There is always an age grade and experience intimidation that limits how much we are allowed to contribute”- Nigeria

“Effective engagement in advocacy requires strong, organized community representation. In Bangladesh, drug user networks and community-based organizations are often under-resourced, lack visibility, and are sometimes excluded from policy-making spaces. This lack of representation further isolates drug users from advocacy efforts”- Bangladesh

4. Lack of education about projects and initiatives:

Participants also highlighted the lack of awareness of the activities and projects of the Global Fund in their countries.

“Limited knowledge of Global fund activities and awareness”- Zimbabwe

“Lack of information about the Global Fund”- South Africa

“Lack of access to up-to-date information about projects and initiatives”- Kyrgyzstan

During this section, participants provided responses to the second question:

“What factors promote your engagement in The Global Fund Advocacy Ecosystem?”

The top four responses from the session were: training and education, repealing key policies and programs to include the needs of adolescents and young people, resource mobilization and funding for YKPs to be actively involved in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem, and Consultation and engagement at advocacy design levels. These top responses were mostly ranked by participants from Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Ghana. The most significant factor by a South African participant is the passion for human rights, while for Kyrgyzstan, networking opportunities is most important. For Bangladesh, representation within the Country Coordinating Mechanism stands out.

1. Training and education

Increasing youth engagement is directly linked with increasing access to opportunities and youth capacity for engagement. Direct responses that demonstrate this theme are:

“Build the capacity of young key populations in the Global ecosystem. Create advocacy platforms for young key populations where they can engage in the Global ecosystem”- Uganda

Training is broad and can span from school-based drug education for teens and adolescents to training programs for youths to be actively involved in advocacy initiatives in their regions.

2. Repeal key policies and programs to include the needs of adolescents and young people

In many of the participants’ countries, there are policies that limit engagement of YKPs, such as the drug use policy which criminalizes YPWUD, laws against sex work, and laws against men who have sex with men.

There is a need to revise these policies to ensure that YKPs are able to access services for their wellbeing.

“Improvement of drug policy”- Tanzania

3. Resource mobilization and funding for YKPs to be actively involved in the Global Fund Advocacy ecosystem

Scaling up youth engagement in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem is highly reliant on external funding and since many local governments do not prioritize YKPs, access to funding should be increased to improve youth engagement.

“Mobilize resources for information education and communication materials about Global Fund processes”- Uganda

4. Consultation and engagement at advocacy design levels

Young people do not want to be only beneficiaries of a program. Participants recommended that they want to be involved at all stages of advocacy from the CCMs down to their community organizations. Here are some of their responses:

“Strengthening digital advocacy, engaging young people or youth-led networks in the designing and implementing of advocacy initiatives”- Ghana

“Representation within the Bangladesh Country Coordinating Mechanism provides drug users with a voice”- Bangladesh

“Collaboration with community and organizations”- Tanzania

The GIPA Framework

GIPA (The Greater Involvement of People living with HIV) is a principle that enables people living with HIV to be included in decision-making on issues that affect them. We have adopted this principle as a framework to also guide the involvement and effective engagement of YKPs in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem.

Key components of GIPA include:

- Policy-making process
- Programme development and implementation
- Leadership and support, group networking and sharing
- Advocacy
- Campaigns and public speaking
- Personal
- Treatment roll-out and preparedness.

Policy-making process

Themes surrounding policy-making emerge in both question phases of the NGT. Common issues include the absence or non-inclusion of current policies. For example, a participant from Kyrgyzstan mentioned that there are no new programs for new psychoactive substances and current programs are obsolete. In Zimbabwe, restrictive laws and policies hinder advocacy work. In Tanzania, improving drug policies will promote youth engagement and in Uganda, participants argue that some laws should be repealed for more YKP engagement in the ecosystem. In the quantitative section, participants choose policy discussions as one of the purposes for interactions between young people and advocacy-related stakeholders. Furthermore, the understanding of policy and political landscapes is identified as a critical area for improving YKP engagement in the Global Fund advocacy. These show that the dissemination of information on new policies to young people is just as important as youth involvement in policy making.

Programme development and implementation

In the qualitative session, some of the participants talk about the current state of under-representation in programme design and implementation. For example, a Ghanaian participant mentioned that youths are underestimated in the country. This is further corroborated in the quantitative section where involvement in youth-led organizations or networks is a prioritized factor that has helped YKPs to engage with the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem. It is quite rational that young people are empowered to be fully engaged in the design of programmes that affect their lives.

Leadership and support, group networking and sharing

In many countries, increasing youth leadership, support, networking and collaboration is quite essential. This entails increasing leadership and ownership of drug harm reduction programs by young persons (Nigeria), community involvement (Ghana), collaboration with community and organizations (Tanzania), training and frequent communication (Kyrgyzstan), networking opportunities (Zimbabwe) and training opportunities in leadership, advocacy strategies, and understanding policy frameworks (Bangladesh). Also appearing as a significant factor in the quantitative section, the lack of mentorship or guidance highlights a critical need for improved communication and outreach strategies to inform YKPs about potential engagement avenues and the necessity of ensuring these spaces are tailored to the needs of younger populations, particularly those most affected by societal stigmatizing attitudes.

The GIPA Framework

Advocacy & Campaigns

Youth advocacy is strongly linked with capacity building and awareness of information and activities in the ecosystem. A cited barrier by a Nigerian was that “***I do not have the required capacity to participate in the design of advocacy, therefore participation for me is difficult***”. Participants suggested that digital advocacy should be strengthened to engage youths and youth-led networks in the design and implementation of advocacy initiatives.

In addition, quantitative evidence shows that 47% of YPWUD reported no involvement in community organizations or advocacy groups, while 26% reported no current involvement but some in the past. These reported low levels could be attributed to various factors such as the overall lower socio-economic status of YPWUD which might impose a barrier to their active participation and/or societal stigma and criminalization usually faced by young people who engage in drug-using patterns. These insights can also be applied to other YKP groups.

It is very important that this issue is addressed holistically and that YKPs are actively engaged in Country Coordinating mechanisms to encourage access to information and facilitate effective advocacy at all levels. The lack of access to updated information about Global Fund projects and activities is a common concern among participants (Kyrgyzstan, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Bangladesh). Increasing youth capacity to advocate for themselves and increased awareness of Global Fund activities is encouraged.

Personal

Personal issues surrounding YKPs mentioned by participants in both quantitative and qualitative sections include unemployment, language barriers, stigma and discrimination; and the need for access to increased opportunities for self development and advocacy engagement.

Generally, there are recurrent themes in both the quantitative and qualitative sections in barriers that limit engagement and factors that promote engagement in the Global Fund advocacy ecosystem.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research methods used for this project, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhanced Economic Support and Accessibility:

- Implement targeted financial support mechanisms for youth advocates from low-income backgrounds.
- Develop flexible participation options that accommodate various socioeconomic circumstances.
- Create sustainable funding streams for travel and participation in Global Fund processes.

2. Strengthened Capacity Building:

- Establish comprehensive training programs focusing on advocacy skills and Global Fund processes.
- Develop mentorship programs pairing experienced advocates with youth representatives.
- Create youth-friendly educational resources about Global Fund mechanisms

3. Improved Structural Support

- Design inclusive spaces that address the specific needs of YPWUD and other marginalized groups.
- Implement anti-stigma initiatives within Global Fund processes and associated organizations.
- Develop protective policies for youth advocates facing legal restrictions or criminalization.

4. Enhanced Communication Strategies

- Create targeted outreach programs to increase awareness of Global Fund processes among YKPs
- Develop multilingual resources and communication channels.
- Establish clear pathways for youth engagement in Country Coordinating Mechanisms

5. Institutional Reform.

- Review and modify existing engagement structures to ensure meaningful youth participation
- Establish quotas for youth representation in decision-making bodies
- Create accountability mechanisms to prevent tokenistic inclusion

These recommendations should be implemented with consideration for country-specific contexts and challenges. The significant variations in engagement levels and barriers across different nations highlight the need for tailored approaches that respond to local realities while maintaining consistent support for youth participation.

Moving forward, the Global Fund should prioritize the development of comprehensive youth engagement strategies that specifically address the identified barriers while building on existing strengths within the advocacy ecosystem. Special attention should be given to supporting marginalized youth populations who face multiple layers of exclusion and discrimination. Success in implementing³ these recommendations will require sustained commitment from the Global Fund and its partners, adequate resource allocation, and regular monitoring and evaluation of progress. The goal should be to create an inclusive, supportive environment that enables meaningful youth participation in all aspects of Global Fund processes, ultimately contributing to more effective and equitable health outcomes for young people globally.

Conclusion

This is the first report in the “*Elevating Youth Voices: Strengthening Advocacy and Engagement for Young People Who Use Drugs and other YKPs in the Global Fund Ecosystem*”.

Combined evidence from the survey and NGT sessions show that youth engagement in our focus countries is commonly limited by similar factors and can also be promoted with similar approaches as well. Prevalent themes involve funding, training & capacity building, resource mobilization and access to information.

In the next phase of this project, we will also be releasing another report involving youth stakeholders in these countries.

Annexes

Annex 1 (Quantitative section) can be accessed here: [Google Drive](#)

Annex 2 (Qualitative section) can be accessed here: [Google Drive](#)

References

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- Ruby Lawlor (Executive Director) reviewed the report.

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- Zimbabwe- Lace Boot Initiative For Women Who Use Drugs (LaBWWUD).
- Uganda - Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN)
- Tanzania - Tanzania Network For People Who Use Drugs (TaNPUD).
- South Africa - Students for Sensible Drug Policy International
- Nigeria - Youth RISE Nigeria
- Kyrgyzstan- ATTIKA Public Fund
- Bangladesh - Ashokta Punarbashan Sangstha (APOSH) and Network of Asian People Who Use Drugs (NAPUD)
- Ghana- Hope for Future Generations

