



USAID YOUTHPower JORDAN NATIONALLY SCALABLE STRATEGIES

Youth Leaders and Influencers: A Technical Brief

This technical brief is one of three that USAID YouthPower developed documenting high-impact strategies that proved effective across the activity and show promise for scale. They are as follows: 1) Youth in Governance, 2) Youth Economic Empowerment, and 3) Youth Leaders and Influencers.

Introduction

Jordanian youth often feel unable to create change and take personal responsibility for issues in their communities. The few spaces for youth engagement that do exist, such as student parliaments, are adult-led and perceived by youth to be ineffective, leaving youth to feel disenfranchised and limited in their ability to affect change. These issues are magnified for female youth and youth with disabilities, who are often excluded from decision making and lack safe spaces to engage with their peers, while Syrian youth residing in Jordan face additional discrimination that further affects social cohesion and leaves them without the opportunity to channel their voices.¹

Although youth widely agree that active youth citizenship requires a strong sense of membership, belonging, and responsibility, youth often lack the skills to advocate for themselves and opportunities to exercise critical thinking and collective action. Civic engagement and volunteerism provide a means for youth to learn more about

themselves and their communities, while social capital and social networks are critical to facilitating youth's access to information and opportunities.

To foster youth social cohesion and provide skills and opportunities for increased collective action among youth, USAID YouthPower formed cadres of youth changemakers totaling 2,270 youth (1,314 female, 956 male) across 60 communities in Jordan. These highly motivated youth became experts in subjects that matter to youth, trained in mobilizing youth to drive solutions in their communities, and skilled in influencing their peer community and decisionmakers alike to make sustainable change. As a result of their work, these youth leaders and influencers have trained and mobilized 11,654 other youth to engage in local development, implement 584 community initiatives, and reach a vast network of public and private sector stakeholders. This technical brief outlines the elements of USAID YouthPower's model for cultivating youth leaders and influencers and provides lessons learned and recommendations for its use as a nationally scalable strategy.

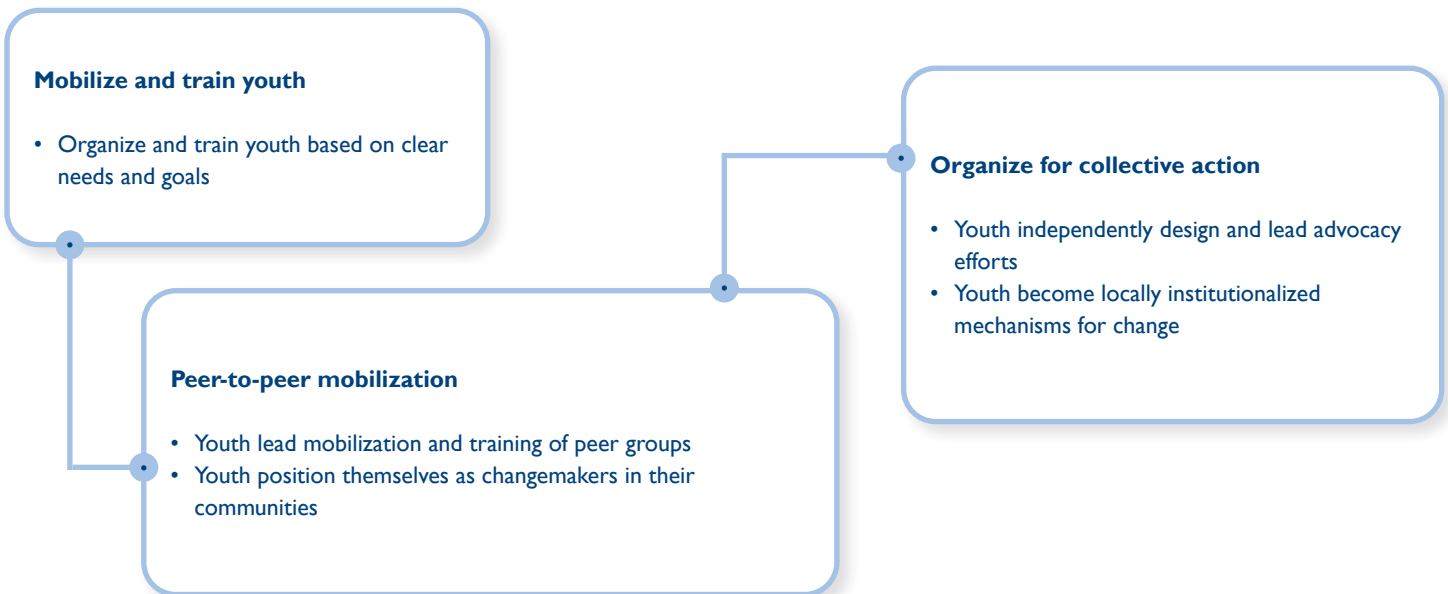
¹ USAID. 2015. Jordan National Youth Assessment. USAID. Accessed at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KBZD.pdf

Launched in 2017, USAID YouthPower Jordan was a five-year program that engaged 16,415 youth ages 10-29 to act as engaged citizens and productive members of society with the agency to advocate for themselves and shape services designed to better prepare them to enter higher education, vocational training and the workforce.

A model for building cadres of youth leaders and influencers

To advance opportunities for youth collective action and leadership, USAID YouthPower worked to build youth's advocacy and training skills in the issue areas they prioritized. By fostering an enabling environment where youth could develop a positive self-identity as changemakers, youth were able to mobilize their peers and galvanize cadres of youth leading change in their communities. This marked a fundamental shift away from top-down, short-term youth volunteerism to youth

embedded in and recognized by their communities as advocates, leaders, and influencers of collective action and change. The model for this approach is summarized in the figure below and detailed in the following sections across three groups of USAID YouthPower leaders and influencers – the Volunteer Ambassadors Network (VAN), youth learning facilitators and trainers, and Gender Champions.



Mobilize and train youth

USAID YouthPower’s cadres of youth leaders and influencers were organized around **clear needs and goals** and then trained in youth-identified skills and abilities necessary for achieving those goals.

- Volunteer Ambassadors Network (VAN):** USAID YouthPower recognized a need early in the activity for a group of inspiring youth leaders who could mobilize and deliver messaging to their peers and invoke a spirit of advocacy to unite youth with their community leaders to create change together. As a result, USAID YouthPower established the VAN (participants referred to as VANers) by recruiting highly motivated youth activists and training them to lead peer mobilization by developing competencies in a range of advocacy and communication skills. Additionally, the VANers became the face of USAID YouthPower youth for local and national policy change efforts (see the *Youth in Governance* technical brief for more details on the VANers youth policy work).
- Youth facilitators and trainers:** Critical to USAID YouthPower was its Transformational Learning (TL) curriculum, an intensive learning program and community-based practicum experience that provided youth the foundational concepts and skills to view their communities through an assets-based lens and interact positively with other youth. To multiply the reach of USAID YouthPower, the activity developed a rigorous Training the Facilitators (TtF) program for high-performing youth to become trainers of facilitation, specialized in administering the TL curriculum and adept in learning theories and facilitation methodologies. Youth also had the opportunity to become trainers and master trainers in specific topic areas, such as the PAVAL (problem solving, advocacy, volunteerism, awareness-raising, learning and further education) toolkit for youth-led initiative design and were required to train other youth to receive certification.
- Gender Champions:** As youth journeyed through the TL curriculum and practicum experience, they identified a series of thematic interest areas on which they wanted to focus, one of which was

gender. USAID YouthPower helped youth organize Learning Clubs around these areas, where youth could have an informal, community-based safe space to learn and practice their skills. Through the Gender Learning Club, a core group of 20 youth were initially trained as Gender Champions, enabling them to better understand gender issues in Jordan and become changemakers in their communities by promoting positive gender social norms and positive masculinity while challenging harmful stereotypes. Initially apprehensive in selecting their issues to tackle, USAID YouthPower connected the Gender Champions to advocates, lawyers, and human rights specialists to widen their knowledge and encourage them to confront sensitive gender-related issues and collectively embrace any topic and solution of interest.



Peer-to-peer mobilization

After developing their skillsets, the youth cadres expanded their reach by **leading mobilization and training** for groups of their peers. With more experience, they **developed their identities** as changemakers and began to **establish their independence** from USAID YouthPower support. Youth cadres were able to mobilize and self-organize through the in-person Learning Club spaces as well as the virtual space of USAID YouthPower’s closed Facebook group (which includes more than 30,000 members).

- Volunteer Ambassadors Network:** The VANers worked throughout USAID YouthPower’s 60 target communities to support outreach and engagement efforts to new youth and encourage them to join the activity. By the end of USAID YouthPower, the VAN had created a network of 300 VANers (134 female, 166 male) from across Jordan, who reached an additional 1,107 youth (658 female, 449 male) through their efforts. The VANers also developed and led 72 youth initiatives to contribute to the real-world implementation of three pillars under the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025) (Youth Engagement and Effective Leadership, Youth Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment, and Youth Education and Technology), engaging 1,000 youth in their implementation, and worked with 179 youth (93 female, 86 male) with the support of industry experts to develop dozens of policy papers and municipal initiatives.
- Youth facilitators and trainers:** In total, USAID YouthPower certified 1,220 (776 female, 444 male) youth facilitators and trainers on topics including PAVAL, gender, social inclusion of youth with disabilities, and youth community initiative design, who trained 11,654 additional youth. These youth were force multipliers for the activity, allowing it to exceed its targets and expand to many more youth, including a number of youth who USAID YouthPower could not initially reach. This cadre of youth also provided a “youth spin” to the training materials and activities, rendering them more accessible and easier for youth to replicate. Additionally, 31 youth with disabilities became certified facilitators and adapted and

applied the TL curriculum to 150 other youth with disabilities in all 12 governorates. The youth trainers and facilitators were embedded across the activity’s components and Learning Clubs, facilitating the mobilization and customization of activities to specific peer groups as needed.

- Gender Champions:** Through gender trainings, the Gender Champions succeeded in raising awareness among their peers and affecting transformative change; stories emerged of male youth who advocated for their female siblings to participate in USAID YouthPower only after receiving gender training, and trained youth who were able to recognize and address gender-based violence (GBV) in their lives and households. This was not without its challenges – female Gender Champions were confronted by negative social norms and attitudes and had to draw upon their newly-acquired tools and knowledge to shift the minds of male participants. Ultimately, from an original 20 (13 female, 7 male), the Gender Champions grew to more than 300 youth (141 female, 159 male).



Organizing for collective action

Over the course of USAID YouthPower, the youth cadres began to **independently organize and lead** initiatives and advocacy efforts while linking to larger-scale initiatives for collective action. These influencers and leaders also shifted their focus to sustainability, seeking **partnerships and mechanisms to sustain their efforts** past the life of USAID YouthPower.

- Volunteer Ambassadors Network:** The VANers became experts in communicating with decisionmakers and designing and advocating for solutions to challenges faced by youth, and in doing so shifted the way decisionmakers viewed the role of youth in their work. After implementing youth initiatives under the National Youth Strategy (2019-2025), VANers presented their achievements to the Ministry of Youth and discussed opportunities for sustainability and support from the Ministry to scale their model across other pillars of the strategy. They also held 149 meetings with decisionmakers, policymakers, and influencers nationwide to discuss key challenges and share their ideas. Five of their initiatives established youth units at their municipalities, signing MOUs directly with the municipalities and developing action plans to ensure youth are embedded in municipal service delivery and decision making over the long-term.
- Youth facilitators and trainers:** USAID YouthPower administered a \$3.7 million Innovation Fund that sponsored hundreds of youth initiatives through in-kind grants and projects administered through grantee organizations. Many of the initiatives



leveraged the skills and abilities of the youth facilitators and trainers to achieve their goals. This network of youth trainers will continue to ensure knowledge transfer to other peers beyond the lifetime of USAID YouthPower and mainstream the understanding and knowledge on youth priorities using PYD tools.

- Gender Champions:** In 2019, the Gender Champions launched a campaign titled “Violence isn’t Power” in line with the annual United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign to raise awareness of GBV issues among their peers. They gained national attention for their efforts and were able to scale their campaign over the following two years with support from the Jordan National Commission for Women (JNCW). The Gender Champions also partnered with the Family Protection Department (FPD) to advance recommendations on a youth violence referral system and develop a training manual entitled “Youth for Response and Prevention of Gender-based Violence” specifically for youth. A subgroup of 52 Gender Champions received training on the manual, who in turn trained 996 additional youth nationwide; subsequently the FPD adopted the manual for similar campaigns. In the final months of USAID YouthPower, the Gender Champions presented their approach and sustainability framework to the JNCW Secretary General and received commitments from the JNCW, FPD, and peer organizations to collaborate with the Gender Champions throughout their future activities and programs.



Going to scale: Lessons learned and recommendations

1. Continue to invest in youth cadres

By the end of USAID YouthPower, the cadres of youth leaders and influencers had grown to become institutions in their communities, developing solid networks and partnerships. They are now the go-to leaders and champions in their communities for advancing new concepts and ideas. To sustain and scale their work, it is important to invest more financially in these groups for them to grow their capacities and reach. National and international organizations who utilize their services must also provide youth with fair compensation for their expertise, versus a volunteerism model. Such incentives will help these cadres keep their competitive edge and help prevent youth from becoming disengaged.

2. Establish dedicated partnerships with national-level entities

Youth cadres would benefit from dedicated national-level partners to support their continued growth and learning, and help build their visibility, credibility, and network at a national level. A strong entity in the Jordanian youth sector, such as the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) or the Crown Prince Foundation, could play this role for youth facilitators and trainers to ensure these cadres have opportunities to further grow their capabilities. The Gender Champions have already received commitment from the FPD for continued mentoring and technical support, while the JNCW and Tadamun Social Society committed to incorporate the Gender Champions into the future *16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence* campaigns and provide training, support, and linkages to their network and other donors to sustain and expand their activities.

3. Formalize youth cadres into NGOs, businesses, or other official entities

To scale beyond their achievements under USAID YouthPower, it is also recommended to support these groups of youth influencers and leaders to formalize their networks as the youth see fit – whether that is by becoming NGOs, businesses, or formally housed under other entities. For example, to continue to deliver in-demand trainings to youth nationwide, some youth trainers are exploring a collaboration to establish their own company. This will help cadres to better access resources, negotiate opportunities, and increase their credibility.

4. Formalize and expand youth units and learning clubs as sustained mechanisms

By utilizing the youth units and Learning Clubs, the youth cadres have already demonstrated how they can integrate into municipal and community activities and planning. Replicating and formalizing these spaces across Jordan via the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs would provide a physical network for the youth cadres to mobilize and connect across geographies.



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