Catalyst 2030: Youth Perspectives

Recommendations from #DOTYouth

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In the midst of a global pandemic, youth are innovating.

Youth are identifying challenges and needs in their communities, and moving rapidly to address them to get ahead of the pandemic as it hits the continent, and to build community and system resilience in its aftermath.

At Digital Opportunity Trust, we're seeing inspiring and hopeful examples in our network of more than 6,000 youth.

Youth know what is most needed in their communities; they have the ability to adapt and respond quickly to an emerging crisis situation; and youth in DOT's network have the digital skills, gender equality, and facilitation knowledge necessary to rapidly intervene where their communities need it most.

UNHCR agrees: they recommend that one of the primary tactics to combat the spread of the virus in vulnerable communities must be to engage local youth and youth networks.

DOT's global network of youth social entrepreneurs are innovating across sectors.

They are tackling the education crisis with localized and accessible digital approaches; they are addressing the fact that the global health crisis is also a mental health crisis; they're working in refugee camps and prisons, and among some of the most vulnerable populations, to ensure equitable access to care, information, and opportunities.

Youth are critical to shaping the future of their communities. As social entrepreneurs and innovators, they are on the frontlines of the pandemic - working to build resilient and inclusive communities and systems that adapt to our changing world.

In this brief, youth from DOT's network have provided recommendations for how to meaningfully engage young social entrepreneurs and innovators in meaningfully building our future economy, systems, and structures.

These recommendations were prepared by:

- Aoise Keogan-Nooshabadi (United Kingdom), social entrepreneur and co-founder of Supply Change;
- Olivier Nukunzurwanda (Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Uganda), social entrepreneur and founder of the Refugee Innovation Center.

Their recommendations are based on their own experiences as social entrepreneurs as well as DOT's youth-led research into the needs of young social innovators.

Key recommendations from #DOTYouth about how to meaningfully engage young social innovators in inclusive pandemic recovery and resilience efforts:

1.   Systems change must be radically inclusive

Systems change doesn't happen on its own, and it isn't driven by just one or two organizations, governments, initiatives, or movements. It is necessarily collaborative, and must bring together stakeholders from across all sectors, demographics, geographies, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

We know that systems must radically change in order to recover from the global pandemic and build resilience in our rapidly changing world. Everything from education systems to local economies to how we connect with each other is rapidly changing, and will continue to do so.

Radical systems change must be radically inclusive. This means that all partnerships, coalitions, and movements must meaningfully include youth, vulnerable and marginalized persons, equity-seeking communities, and community-based organizations in their efforts.

Without this effort, no change will be sustainable. People will be left out. Existing inequalities will be magnified.

In a 2020 report, Dalberg outlines concrete ways that partnerships can be inclusive. It includes consulting and including community members early in the process; radically expanding networks; changing partnership funding to be supportive of the realities of community-based groups; and a bold shift to community-led accountability.

2.   Digital and entrepreneurial skills

Youth innovators need digital and entrepreneurial skills. These are critical skills that allow innovative young people to meaningfully engage in their communities and contribute to change.

Both long-term and targeted digital and entrepreneurship support enables youth to thrive. Digital technologies and skills are important tools for many young entrepreneurs. With technology, young people are better able to scale their visions for community change. Gaps in their immediate networking and training ecosystems are plugged by leveraging online platforms and courses. As these young people grow their social initiatives, so too grows their impact, bringing change and job opportunities to more communities.

3.   Invest in the impact of youth

Supporters must go beyond agreeing verbally that youth play a central role in building a better system; action is needed too.

Organizations must invest in the impact of youth by both investing in their ideas, and

investing in their potential. This means: a) supporting youth initiatives financially so they can grow and scale their ideas, and achieve impact; and b) ensuring that youth are present at summits, critical decision-making events, and at the table when decisions are being made.

It also means recognizing their important contributions publicly in a way that will both motivate other young people and recognize youth-led initiatives as real, respected contributions to society.

4.   Move from youth as beneficiaries to youth as partners

Centring the youth requires a move away from perceptions of young people as 'beneficiaries." Underutilizing the innovation potential of young people to overcome local, national or global challenges can only lead to short-term, partly-adopted solutions.

Co-designing with youth as genuine partners is the only way to create a system that empowers and supports young people to enact change, and for that change to be sustainable in the hands of future generations.

In addition to these recommendations, we would also like to encourage members of Catalyst 2030 to further review DOT's 2019 YouthLAB report, "Youth Voices: Youth-led social entrepreneurship in East Africa and the Middle East," which includes recommendations for providing broad systems of support to youth across sectors; strengthening services that can offer long-term and targeted support; and providing bridges and linkages for youth to government agencies, NGOs, and companies that support youth.

For more information

For additional information on the recommendations made by #DOTYouth or inquiries about future engagements with #DOTYouth or DOT's Youth Leadership Advisory Board, please contact:

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