TOWARDS A THRIVING, CREDIBLE, AND SUSTAINABLE YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

Evidence and research into the status of southern-based youth civil society - forging a vision for the future

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SUMMARY

This report collates research, discussions and evidence into the state of youth civil society, carried out as part of the Development Alternative. It sets out the current challenges faced by a diverse youth civil society and outlines the shared vision and necessary actions needed to better build and support a thriving global youth civil society.

The Development Alternative is a new consortium co-designing alternative ways to do development that are truly led by young people. In the next 18 months, the consortium will work closely with young people and their communities, and youth-led and focused organisations to co-design approaches to development that ensure these groups define, own and lead solutions to the problems they face.

CURRENT STATUS: YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ARE LARGELY SURVIVING RATHER THAN THRIVING

LIMITED RESOURCING

Youth civil society funding is fragile; while many youth civil society actors question the development funding system, most are at the mercy of its landscape. The shape of development funding accessed is almost exclusively short term, highly restrictive and prohibitive of institutional development; and dependency on donor funding - although scarce - often reduces youth civil society to 'strategy takers' at the whim of funders.

Limited resourcing has led to skills gaps - especially the skills to attract and manage funds - as well as fluid volunteer and staff bases and knowledge management.

UNIQUE LEADERSHIP & CAPACITY GAPS

Individual leaders often start young and age out quickly, creating both opportunities but also a very unique leadership challenge unlike any other sector. Limited confidence and space for strategic thinking/visioning is common, as is the risk of elite/urban/male capture in leadership roles.

Talent tends to be linked to individuals rather than institutionalised. Common organisational capacity gaps include: fundraising and resourcing, strategic visioning, knowledge management, and external collaboration.

INEFFECTIVE COORDINATION

Youth civil society is largely limited to a delivery role, or occasionally to an influence role, but rarely seen as a strategic asset capable of broader leadership beyond the bottom of the delivery chain. The diverse sector is often represented homogeneously, the lack of access to power and decision-making leads to a struggle to imagine a strategic identity beyond the status quo.

Youth civil society often lacks the awareness and skills to best collaborate cross-sectorally and crowding out by large youth civil society actors or development partners is commonplace. A "twin track" approach maintains competition on delivery programmes and funding at the same time as collaborating on advocacy. The lack of coordination threatens trust within the sector risking siloed work, duplication and inconsistent downward accountability to communities.

PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

A gap in evidence regarding the impact of youth-led change limits the effectiveness of influencing initiatives and strategic partnerships with development partners.

Youth engagement by most power holders and development partners remains limited, it is often rudimentary, and can be tokenistic, reinforcing negative perceptions of youth and youth-led civil society and increasing the risk of elite capture in well-intended initiatives to engage youth. Meanwhile, 'capacity development' by INGOs toward youth civil society is largely transactional training in how to be good sub-grantees rather than in true institutional strengthening.

Lack of trust in youth from those in power is common, linked to prevailing models of transactional engagement. Youth are trusted to bring energy and passion, but less as leaders. On the other hand, distrust of youth toward power shapes where and how they engage in patterns distinct from previous generations.

BROADER CONTEXT

Shrinking civic space and lack of trust in civil society at large inhibit youth-led civil society.

Increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous landscapes (social, political, economic, cultural, conflict) are a universal trend that hurt the youth sector worst, given its already challenging context.

Donor trend setting and the way in which large donor investments are made nationally can lead to entire sector pivots toward the new focal issues, many times overriding strategic or long-term priorities in favor of 3-5 year national donor cycles.

YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY'S VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE:

During the consultations, we asked youth civil society organisations to share their vision of success for the future.

INDEPENDENT YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY	Independent organisations able to secure sufficient resources to be sustainable, financially stable and making decisions about how they work, how they design programmes and who they are accountable to.
PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT	Working together in partnership with donors, other youth civil society organisations, government and private sector through cooperation, collaboration and a 'two-way learning' mindset from the outset.
SUFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE	Capacitated volunteer and staff teams able to manage all the essential aspects of the organisation.
FOCUSED ON DOWNWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY	Accountable to their grassroots constituents and designing programmes based on their needs, as a priority over donor-demands.
INCLUSIVE APPROACH	Taking an inclusive approach to all types of youth and all types of civil society set ups and contexts, attentive to capture, co-optation, as well as power and gender imbalances.
LEADERS & LEARNING HUBS	Recognised as leaders and strategic partners and acting as a hub of innovation, learning and work which can underpin youth-led change.

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY

Alongside articulating their visions for future ways of working, youth organisations shared the changes needed to achieve their vision, built out further during the London Workshop and through the Evidence Review.

- New ways of securing finance and partnerships
- Bridging the gap between civil society and stakeholders
- Changing power dynamics with key stakeholders
- Mutual relationships and accountability
- Co-ordination, platforms and networks
- Developing human resources
- Youth organisations as centres of learning
- Support responding to the diversity of youth civil society

[1] The Development Alternative, funded by the UK's Department for International Development, is being led by Restless Development and coordinated in collaboration with seven partners: Restless Development, Accountable Now; DOT Lebanon; Integrity Action; INTRAC; War Child; and Y Care.

INTRODUCTION

Youth civil society is only managing to survive rather than thrive. It is fragile in its resourcing, is not seen as a core asset to development partners and, consequently, unable to operate effectively as agents of change. The potential of civil society most representative of the largest youth generation in history - and the largest opportunity to scale new development approaches today - is relatively untapped.

Development all too often fails to engage youth and youth civil society to maximum effect. By failing to address these power imbalances, development is hindered and huge swathes of the population remain in poverty. Traditional approaches to development continue to ignore the power of young people as capable agents of change. The knowledge, agency and capacity of young people, youth networks and civil society must be recognised and strengthened if we are to see transformative change.

In 2018, a new consortium, the Development Alternative[1], came together to bring to bear the power of the biggest youth generation in history to improve development outcomes. We propose new ways of working that challenge current power imbalances in international development which pigeon-hole youth civil society actors into delivery roles or to online voice roles, rather than seeing them as strategic actors with an equal place at the decision-making table. We aim to enable a youth-led alternative way for development; identifying key principles and processes that, in turn, ensure young people are able to lead, partner and forge a way forward for civil society to achieve global change.

Research into Youth Civil Society

A first step has been to understand what knowledge exists in this area, what the experiences and views of youth civil society are, generating evidence and knowledge that can be used in the sector as well as to inform design and engagement in the Development Alternative approach. This report outlines what youth civil society told us via an intensive consultation with youth-led civil society that defined challenges as well as mapping approaches needed to tap into the power of this sector as a credible scalable alternative.

In January 2019, the consortium began the process of co-creation: working with youth civil society and wanting young people and youth civil society to be at the centre of programme design. Insight was sought from a range of sources: 199 youth-led civil society actors from 32 countries, focus group discussions in five countries, an evidence review of 65 sources and a workshop in London convening young leaders and consortium partners.

The research included:

1. An Evidence Review: A Rapid Review of academic and grey literature to assess the existing evidence base
2. Youth Civil Society Consultations: Primary data collection with youth civil society organisations working in the south - collected through an online survey and a series of in-country focus group discussions.

Key Learning Questions

In the context of southern-based youth organisations working with youth:

- What does your vision of success (new ways of working) look like outside the parameters set by donors and INGOs?
- What are the barriers to achieving it?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- What needs to change in terms of people, relationships, resources, technology and influence and decision-making to achieve this?

1. CURRENT STATUS OF YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY KEY FINDINGS

1.1. LIMITED RESOURCING

Youth civil society organisations report that they are surviving; their precarious financial situation means they are having to work day-to-day rather than planning for, and investing in, the future. This way of working limits capacity for learning, development and impact as the organisation and its people are focused on immediate financial needs therefore dedicating their efforts towards securing funds. Overall, this 'survival' culture restricts growth, the ability to be strategic and long- term, innovative thinking and the capacity to add value to their work and the sector.

"There are many great ideas dies because of limitations in funding resources, this leads to having organizations trying to be surviving organizations rather than inventing ones." ***(Survey, 2019)***

One of the large challenges is the perceived dependence on donor funds, and how these are provided. Some youth organisations believe that the situation needs to change and they want to find other ways to finance their work but the reality is high competition for limited funding and the lack of skills and opportunities to access alternative sources of funds.

Commenting on donor interests in Lebanon…"Cover entire universe and this is not true in every country" and "Donor objectives are being considered not relative to the youth needs…prioritisation of donor objectives over needs on the ground." ***(KII Lebanon, 2019)***

Organisations report funding tends to be short-term, project oriented and based on pre-prescribed areas of intervention. The landscape is often set around 'donor trends' which the sector then pivots towards. As a result, programmes are designed for donors rather than based on the needs of grassroots communities in their specific contexts or leveraging the strengths of youth organisations.

"Global funding patterns being about short-term projects rather than long-term programming, formal established organisations funded rather than informal CSOs and traditional organisations funded rather than innovative start-ups." ***(Analysis FGD Uganda, 2019)***

"INGOs prefer organisations that have many years of experience which makes it difficult for new organisations to get partnerships."***(FGD Iraq, 2019)***

THE PROBLEM: YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY IS FAILING TO THRIVE

The smallest grassroots organisations are most impacted - the most informal, often based at the heart of communities, are likely to be closest to the need. Youth organisations note that this is often where the 'real work' is being done, having the most impact, and where innovation is taking place. Yet lack of skills and capacity means local, small organisations are the most disadvantaged when it comes to meeting donor-credible requirements (such as submitting at least one year of audited accounts) and often have to access funds through approved middle organisations. All too often youth civil society lack the power, skills and funding to fully own the decision making and their direction of work.

The informants reported some cases where donors have tried to do things differently by working together with youth organisations to design programmes more effectively, rooted in the needs of communities - they were keen to learn from these experiences and explore more opportunities.

"There is a need to move our organisation away from crisis/survival mode to pivotal, leadership role in society...Being in crisis mode leads to a loss of focus and chasing after anything that enters the periphery of the organisation."
(Survey, 2019)

1.2. UNIQUE LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY GAPS

The survey highlighted that one of the other significant barriers youth civil society organisations face is limited capacity and human resources - in particular low staff capacity, the over-reliance on volunteers and lack of people to undertake essential tasks. Leadership was flagged as a core area for capacity development. Many stated their wish to be able to invest financial resources into the necessary organisational development.

"There is a huge shortfall and gap within and among the CSO sector for the importance of process documentation, impact learning and changes which should feed into the enhancement of their operations." ***(Survey, 2019)***

Discussions around human resource gaps centred around skills: raising and managing funds, building and managing strategy and organisational development in general. The high staff and volunteer turnover, common in the youth sector, particularly in youth-led organisations, frequently leads to a 'brain drain'. Partly this is attributed to employing young people who are often at the start of their career, therefore requiring significant skills building and, at times being, prone to move on to other careers/educational steps in quick succession.

Having young people in leadership positions ensures authenticity, insight and representation but also presents a unique challenge - as leaders quickly 'age out'. Compared to other sectors or larger development organisations that invest in long-term leadership, the strength and challenge for youth leadership is providing and investing in structures that are flexible, representative and ensure regular renewal.

Smaller youth organisations are more likely to have younger and less elite staffing structures, than their larger and better funded counterparts. Whilst a strength in terms of relevance and representation this is a unique challenge and requires particular investment and support. Likewise, support is needed to work with young people from diverse backgrounds, especially those living with disabilities, and young women, who too often experience greater barriers to accessing funding, decision making opportunities, programmes and jobs.

1.3. INEFFECTIVE COORDINATION

Youth civil society struggle on how best to collaborate and coordinate across the sector. All too often youth civil society organisations are seen for their role in programme delivery and, occasionally in influencing and advocacy, but rarely seen as strategic leaders shaping the direction of development. This, coupled with inconsistent experiences of having access to decision-making spaces, mean they struggle to imagine and achieve a 'strategic identity' beyond this status quo of delivering programmes.

Frequently, youth civil society has a "twin track" approach to collaboration - where they compete and work in silos on their programmes, and collaborate on advocacy efforts, where funding is more available. Some youth organisations reported an unwillingness/inability to share programmatic learning and information, feeling a mistrust towards others without a "shared mindset" (FGD Madagascar, 2019). This isolated approach is reflected in their relationship with other key stakeholders and exacerbated by the way that funding works: distributed to individual youth organisations and government separately, leading to a lack of "joined up way of thinking" (FGD Uganda, 2019). This can entrench existing power structures. Although the move to consortium working is growing, which is welcomed, there are some reservations as people try to understand how this will work in practice.

A notable theme is the desire among youth organisations to work more closely with the state in order to have a more "holistic approach to development". However, this desire is complex considering the youth civil society's important role as "watchdogs" of government, expected to "hold them (government) to account" (KII Zimbabwe).

Youth organisations also reported that in more developed national youth civil society sectors, scenarios often arise where actors proclaim to be youth organisations (such as political bodies, youth elite, INGO you wings) but are not always authentic (much older-adult-led or youth participation is talked of but in practice is tokenised).

The significant potential of youth civil society, and therefore the collective power of the largest youth generation in history, is currently being underutilised. The strengthening and sustainability of the sector requires investment in identity, operations and the resilience of youth organisations.

1.4. PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

A perception gap was noted with regards to the impact of youth-led change, and targeting youth organisations as the most relevant strategic partners. Many times, youth participation and input was seen as tokenistic, or viewed in the same vein as youth elites.

In most cases youth are included to bring 'passion and energy' but not seen as thought leaders, or strategic drivers in decision making spaces. The persistent attitude is that expertise comes through experience and this is something that young people lack. This damages the trust between young people and power holders and means that a negative attitude towards young people and youth civil society persists.

Young people's level of interested in engaging with youth organisations varies, sometimes only willing to participate if they are compensated in some way. However voices from the focus groups also point out that it is important to be aware that young people can be 'poor in cash and skills' and it is necessary to invest in this to facilitate their participation.

In some of the focus groups and in the survey (2019), participants pointed out that some young people have a negative attitude to civil society and their involvement in it.

"Young people are not anymore aware of the importance of their contribution to the community and they even don't want to be involved."*(Survey, 2019)*

1.5. BROADER CONTEXT

Youth civil society differs from country to country. It is clear from voices gathered in the focus groups that economic and social contexts influences the youth sector's identity, funding flows and attitudes towards youth civil society. It affects the interplay between different stakeholders, the power holders and the lives of the people who they target through their programmes. The impact of political context was identified as another of the 'most significant barriers' that youth civil society face (Survey, 2019). As one respondent in Madagascar pointed out, "The political, social, economic situation of the nation influences (positively and negatively) the actions of each CSO" (FGD Analysis Madagascar, 2019).

These specific contexts underpin the diversity of different national youth civil society sectors and, within that, the varying types and experiences of individual organisations. In contrast, the focus groups highlighted that though operational contexts vary, this diversity is rarely reflected in how stakeholders work with youth - the approach is commonly 'one size fits all'.

In many places youth organisations, and the literature, report 'shrinking civil society spaces' with attitudes towards them increasingly negative and a lack of 'trust' in civil society at large. The Evidence Review found that 'globally youth CSOs are excluded from formal political processes'.

In Madagascar CSOs are often "not respected, not consulted, not invited into decision-making spaces." ***(KII Madagascar, 2019)***

In Iraq "mistrust" of CSOs and they are seen as "foreign agents" and not capable of delivering "quality work." ***(KII Iraq, 2019)***

"Mistrust between NGO and youth, losing trust with the youth because the program has ended." ***(FGD Lebanon, 2019)***

The Evidence Review also found that these factors can constrain youth organisations to operate at the margins of civil society (where they still do important work to ensure civil society remains alive, creating alternative channels for political engagement). When youth movements operate in these contexts, they often indicate receiving little support and solidarity from international NGOs and donors.

Youth organisations also report that across national contexts there is no common definition of civil society; varying understandings their own identity and role. In some cases civil society organisations are seen simply as another name for 'businesses' (FGD Iraq 2019 and Evidence Review). At times this is about identifying in a certain way in order to survive amongst operating restrictions for youth organisations or, in this case, due to the history of civil society in a country (e.g. established to deliver aid programmes for foreign countries rather than as part of a functioning civil society). This has various roots, but highlights the importance of the historical development of youth civil society and how they react and adapt to survive. In some cases culture, traditions and religion have had a significant influence on the civil society space and the nature and experience of organisations (FGDs Iraq and Palestine, 2019). For those facing conflict and political instability, the impact can be even more profound (FGDs Iraq, Palestine and Madagascar and KII Zimbabwe, 2019).

SPOTLIGHT ON EVIDENCE REVIEW

THEME 1: ***Legitimacy and credibility as development actors***

Across the literature, youth organisations demonstrate their unique legitimacy and credibility as development actors .

- INGOs are important policy influencers and brokers that open up opportunities for southern youth civil society to flourish but currently hold power over them.
- Established national youth organisations have the know-how and technical capacity to manage larger projects. However, they are often led by elite youth who are disconnected from the most vulnerable youth groups.
- Grassroots groups offer a proximity to youth as well as innovative methodologies, yet they can also face stigmatization from local communities.

THEME 2: ***Ability to mobilise resources***

A lack of institutional capacity to secure funding as well as heavy reliance on volunteers constrain youth organisations' ability to mobilise resources. The development system favours established organisations who can comply with donor requirements at the disadvantage of more grassroots groups. To overcome these challenges, organisations pursue relationships with INGOs to access funding and training to strengthen their technical capacity and attempt to diversify funding sources. Youth civil society are calling for donors to offer more flexible funding in terms of size, thematic areas and scope.

THEME 3: ***Ability to navigate political space and legal regulatory frameworks***

Globally youth civil society are excluded from formal political processes. This has led many organisations to find alternative venues of political engagement, including protests and media. In some cases, protests opened the doors to more organised engagement with established political spaces. However, the majority of youth organisations operate in a context of repression that constrains them to the margins. Youth movements operating in repressive contexts, indicate that they receive little support and solidarity from international NGOs, institutions and multilateral bodies.

THEME 4: ***Sustainability and resilience as organisations***

The youth sector's organisational and financial sustainability is precarious. The evidence shows that short-term grants stunt the growth and value-added of organisations, while access to multi-year and unrestricted grants can help build sustainability and resilience. Youth organisations are experimenting with new models, like social enterprise, to generate their own funding. In volatile socio-economic contexts, they are adjusting the way they organise to navigate shrinking civic spaces. Youth civil society are also a source of resilience for their communities, taking up civic duties when state and civil society are unable or unwilling to.

THEME 5: ***Ability to advocate and influence on behalf of their constituencies, and hold duty bearers to account***

Youth organisations are able to leverage a variety of tools to strengthen social accountability, including technology, media and arts-based practices. According to various studies, youth organisations are capable of influencing highly technical processes, including budgeting and auditing. Their contribution is more effective when they are supported with technical skills, such as research and the ability to formulate effective demands. There are added benefits for youth civil society when they can align local campaigns with international ones. Urban elite- capture and lack of access to technology and decision-making spaces for rural youth are some of the biggest barriers.

THEME 6: ***Ability to be accountable to their constituencies***

The literature suggests that by participating in accountability initiatives, young people help to institutionalise practices of accountability in their own networks and organisations. Youth organisations are able to allocate time and resources towards accountability. Peer-to-peer, collaborative and experiential learning appear as the most effective methods used by youth organisations. However, they are often required to 'professionalise' and meet certain performance and reporting standards. This is threatening the informal accountability potential of the youth sector, as well as the long-term survival of more grassroots organisations. These mechanisms force prioritising accountability to donors and partners rather than over their constituencies and limit the potential to create youth-relevant and innovative accountability systems.

SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY VOICES

As a result of the co-creation approach to this research, each in-country focus group shared a pressing issue facing organisations in their country uncovered during the discussions. This provided an opportunity to hear directly from southern-based youth organisations, to expanding on the barriers they face, their lived experiences and their contextual diversity.

dot. LEBANON

Relationship between youth civil society and donors in Lebanon

- Donors can dictate 'trends' for funding in a country causing organisations to shift their programmatic focus
- Programmes are designed according to a donor call rather than the needs of young people
- Smaller youth organisations struggle to access funds due to donor requirements and distribution of money through INGOs
- There is a lack of transparency on donors calls
- Youth organisations want things to change and be considered equal partners

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT UGANDA

Diversity of youth civil society voices in Uganda

- Attendees represented a range of organisations in terms of size, focus, level of formality and views on the issues
- Youth organisations want to recognise the diversity of civil society in their own work and for other stakeholders, particularly donors, to do the same
- Need to find ways to define different individual organisations' identity as well as civil society's.
- The group placed emphasis on size and level of formality significantly impacting differences between youth organisations

Interplay between government and youth civil society in Zimbabwe

- The effect of political instability on the operations of civil society
- The nature of donor operations mean civil society and government work separately
- Youth civil society are seen as the "watchdogs" of government
- They recognised the importance of working with government to bring about wide reaching change
- Going forward, they want to focus on how youth civil society and government can work together and role of donors in this

Role of civil society and the identity of youth organisations in Madagascar

- Youth organisations don't always know what their identity and role is. This is linked to not fully understanding the role of civil society as a whole.
- At times, youth civil society organisations can also lack commitment to their role
- There is a lack of "shared mindset" across the youth sector and a need for a coordinating mechanism

"Twin Track" approach of focusing on service delivery and advocacy in East Jerusalem

- They highlighted the importance of both advocacy and service provision – taking a dual approach to delivering programmes and doing advocacy within the organisation
- The impacts of advocacy can take a long time to materialise and, during that time, people and communities are in need
- There is a need to keep focusing on, and including, 'marginalised groups' such as children and young people with disabilities and address their ongoing needs

"Outside of the current context established by donors, we consider that our biggest success would be working independently without being accountable to the donors and become capable of financing by ourselves our activities."
(Survey, 2019)

2. YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

2.1 VISIONS FOR SUCCESS

During the consultations, we asked youth civil society organisations to think beyond the parameters of donor requirements and share their vision of success. These visions form an exciting narrative, led by youth organisations themselves, on the vital changes required to increase the impact, fulfill potential and move towards a thriving, credible and sustainable youth sector.

Whilst there were differences in the types and geographical contexts of youth organisations who contributed towards this research, their were common elements in their visions for success:

- **Independent youth civil society** - To be independent organisations able to secure sufficient resources (including flexible and long-term finance) to be sustainable and financially stable, in a position to make decisions about how they work, how they design programmes, who their primary constituents are and who they are accountable.
- **Sufficient and sustainable human resources** - To have the right staff, provided with the necessary support, so that they develop their capacity to plan and manage their operations, as well as their programmes.
- **Focused on downwards accountability** - To focus on communities and youth with the freedom to prioritise the needs and approach of their work ahead of donor needs.
- **Partners in development** - To partner on equal terms and be free from tokenistic and top-down approaches, moving beyond representation to co-ownership of spaces, processes and agendas.
- **Leaders and learning hubs** - To develop as leaders and recognised as a source of innovation, learning and deliverers of work essential for the flourishing of civil society at the grassroots, national and global levels.
- **Inclusive approach** - To work in an inclusive way - open to all types of young people and all types of civil society structure and contexts; attentive to capture, co-option, as well gender and power relations.

"7 key principles of a vision for success; youth; cooperation/inclusion; opportunity; trust; dignity and respect; dialogical decision-making; and freedom/equality."*(FGD Uganda, 2019)*

"We vow to be self- sustainable youth led organisations. Less of donor assistance and remove the syndrome." *(Survey, 2019)*

"...capacitated development organisations who are credible and effective to work on the development challenges, who also facilitate innovation in development and collaborate with key stakeholders such as Government, PRIs, Corporates and Research Institutes." *(Survey, 2019)*

2.2 BUILDING BLOCKS FOR YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY

Alongside articulating their visions for future ways of working, youth organisations shared the changes needed to achieve their vision, built out further during the London Workshop and through the Evidence Review.

I) New ways of securing finance and partnerships

Much of the focus group discussions and survey focused on the desire to change the partnerships that youth civil society has with donors - towards more flexible and long-term approaches to funding, "strengthening civil society as the end goal, rather than focusing on what civil society is meant to achieve." (Analysis Uganda, 2019). A crucial change is needed in donors assessing viability of organisations; moving away from how 'established they are' to focusing on their ability to meet the needs of constituents, being an innovative and being a learning organisation. There's a need to move towards working in partnership - where donors and youth civil society can both learn and design programmes together.

Fundamental change is needed in the way youth organisations work with donors. The relationship needs to develop towards partnership: working and learning together, building programmes based on the needs of the communities they work with.

"Building our capacities and engaging us to know more about our areas of intervention and why we choses that part might help us more as compared to just sending funds from abroad." ***(Survey, 2019)***

"Our ideal vision would be: 1) to improve the type of partnership, have the equal partnership based on respect in cooperation, a partnership that gives us a space to formulate recommendations with the objective of improving the approaches using bottom up approaches instead of top down approaches.." ***(Survey, 2019)***

The Evidence Review highlighted several examples of youth organisations actively seeking out and testing new ways to finance their work, such as entrepreneurship and service provision models. This turn to social enterprise models has been a growing global trend among youth civil society, yet varies in interpretation.

"There was a strong impulse from the CSOs to break free of traditional funding cycles.... some suggested their own initiatives that would fund the organisation." ***(Analysis Iraq, 2019)***

However, several focus groups found it hard to imagine a future without being dependant on donors. As the focus group facilitator in Madagascar found "It was difficult to introduce the thinking that there was (an)other way for CSO to be successful other than funder." (Analysis Madagascar, 2019). This speaks to the need to invest in key fundraising and strategy skills, enabling youth civil society to still succeed in volatile funding landscapes.

II) Changing power dynamics with key stakeholders

A core component of youth civil society organisations' visions for success are relationship dynamics. There is a strong desire for top-down relationships to move towards partnership and collaboration - finding ways to 'respond to southern youth civil society organisations as equal partners' (Evidence Review). To achieve this, there is a need to think more 'radically' - away from 'representation' to 'co-ownership of spaces, processes and agendas'. The civil society consultations highlighted this is particularly relevant for actors with the 'money' and in control of financial distribution – donors as well as INGOs. INGOs support the work of youth civil society organisations, at times brokering relationships and influencing policy but they also 'hold power over them' (Evidence Review).

III) Developing human resources

"Capacity gaps was seen as a barrier and capacity building was seen as a key way for CSOs to be supported and for other stakeholder groups such as youth and the community to be supported" ***(FGD Uganda, 2019)***

Appropriate human resources are central to youth organisations' vision of success, but they need help and support to develop this. They believe this is about "professionalising civil society organisations and CBOs [Community-based Organisations]" (FGD Uganda, 2019) - increasing skills to run the organisation as well as programmes (e.g. reporting, financial management and resource mobilisation, accountability). However, this is not simply about implementing set capacity building programmes - it's about investing in youth organisations, building and supporting a sustainable staff base, and recognising the diversity amongst these organisations and the people who work there. Central to achieving this is understanding who works at youth organisations, their motivation for being there, the skills they need based on the work they do and differing education and experience to date. New open source and virtual ways of learning and reflecting on how learning takes place in civil society organisations also needs to be considered, building on current ways people are learning, often in 'peer-to-peer, horizontal and experiential learning processes' (Evidence Review). This also involves thinking about how to manage and retain young staff and volunteers who are often at the start of their career path, recognising the impact of including them in internal decision-making processes might be the start of resolving some of these issues (Evidence Review).

IV) Bridging the gap between youth civil society and stakeholders and working holistically

Alongside their relationship with donors, civil society organisations want to work in new ways with stakeholders, a vision of cooperation and collaboration (this includes not just donors but other civil society organisations, government and the private sector):

- Sharing and learning together
- Underpinning work and programmes with a "joined up way of thinking" (FGD Uganda, 2019).
- Establishing "tripartite relationships" (KII Zimbabwe, 2019) between donors, youth organisations and government to ensure that programming and development is holistic and sustainable.

"Including us all in all levels of decision-making. And do it well. Not as manual labour. But to actually listen to us and take our ideas into account. We would also like to listen to how these stakeholders want to engage us. We want to work together as equals." ***(Survey, 2019)***

For some organisations, this type of relationship with government is not conceivable (FGDs Iraq, 2019) but the general approach of working cooperatively was in the main part of all focus groups' visions.

Particular emphasis was placed on changing the way that civil society organisations work together; moving away from intra-youth sector competition and subsequently "overlapping efforts" (KII Palestine, 2019) towards "harmonized CSO agendas" (Analysis Madagascar, 2019). However, in some cases, the sense of "dog eat dog" (KII Iraq, 2019) was so entrenched that a collaborative approach was not envisaged as part of the way forward.

"Map what different stakeholders do in order to compliment and being able to come up with a comprehensive approach of different NGOs. Map the NGOs different strengths and weaknesses for them to be able to complement each other with different approaches...There should be very comprehensive collaboration among the different NGOs." ***(FGD Lebanon, 2019)***

V) Mutual relationships and accountability

Another aspect of visions about relationships is the concept of trust. Trust is the cornerstone of developing collaborative and mutual relationships. However the complexity of moving from mistrust to trust in relationships with stakeholders was identified: trust is not simple to achieve or to measure. Spaces need to be identified and created to provide opportunities for organisations (and people) to be together and collaborate in new and positive ways that, over time, can build trust.

VI) Coordination, platforms and networks

Organisations agreed that a central coordinating mechanism, as well as networks and platforms where civil society could work together is required - "Platforms of interactions" where people "Listen-Learn-Co-create" (KII Zimbabwe). This platform could be to share, learn and begin to develop relationships that may lead consortium-style approaches. Platforms and networks were seen to provide the opportunity for organisations to work together in positive ways and facilitate shared learning and joint advocacy initiatives. Digital and online was a key feature of these discussions emphasising how this could further increase the potential of platforms, networks and learning.

"More focus on virtual education, which has made it easier to give courses, disseminate information and receive education." ***(Survey, 2019)***

The research found that youth organisations are already harnessing the potential of digital and online , previously using it to promote issues, raise funds, communicate and generally improve aspects of their programming and operations. However, organisations point out that while their staff regularly use digital and online technology, they do not often transfer this to their 'work' where they need support and capacity building to leverage it appropriately.

"Organisations are less progressive and able than individuals are in this" (speaking about tech)..."not enough weight given to this"..."individuals can do it but in CSOs there is a low level of digitalisation." ***(KII Palestine)***

Furthermore, although online access is growing, there are still many who do not have adequate access to open internet or to the devices needed. Therefore, online networks and platforms are excluding more rural and grassroots civil society.

VII) Support responding to the diversity of youth civil society

Youth civil society does not operate in a vacuum; influenced by the context it is embedded in and the web of organisations it is part of. Achieving these visions of new ways of working in youth civil society will therefore involve understanding, and being responsive to the context and diversity within the sector. It is clear from this consultation that there is a need to find ways to recognise diversity

and put in place inclusive approaches. Inclusive approaches must speak to size, level of formality (including whether an organisation is registered or not), country context, urban and rural location. Through the process of defining civil society, and the organisations within that, it became evident that different civil society actors face different issues and capacity building needs, are influenced differently by donor landscapes and have different sets of relationships. An inclusive approach can maximise the uniqueness of smaller youth organisations who are often missed out but are where learning and impact can be most prominent with the potential to reach more vulnerable young people.

VIII) Youth organisations as centres of learning

The research shows that organisations working with youth are learning organisations: adapting and learning from their experiences and putting in place new approaches, ideas and programmes. In smaller and more grassroots-focused organisations, learning can be particularly innovative. Some of this stems from these organisations being flexible and less technocratic and therefore more agile, responsive and able to trial new things. An interesting question was raised during the Uganda focus group (2019) on this area: Does a move towards sustainability focus attention on replication, which in itself can quell attention to new approaches and innovation? Furthermore, the Evidence Review found that as organisations are required to professionalise they can lose their ability to be 'learning laboratories' as their priorities and structures change. This presents an opportunity for all stakeholders (including other civil society members) to learn from youth organisations. They need to find ways to support and capture this 'learning laboratories' approach, potentially through greater collaboration via networks and platforms.

In summary, the desire and commitment exists from youth civil society organisations to change the way they work. They want to become partners with their key stakeholders, but they also recognise this requires stakeholders to reflect on and commit to these new ways of working as well. This would mean breaking away from entrenched ways of working, taking risks and potentially giving up underlying power bases. Instead, pathways need to be established to bridge gaps between youth organisations and other stakeholders through co-creation, collaboration and consortium style approaches.

WHAT NEXT?
THE DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

3. TOWARDS A THRIVING YOUTH SECTOR

This research, discussions and review have been an essential part of designing the next steps for 'The Development Alternative'; the consortium is committed to testing alternative models to development and building a resilient, thriving, credible and sustainable youth sector, that is able to respond effectively to development needs.

The consortium will work with over 200 youth civil society actors - along with governments, development partners and the private sector - to strengthen the youth sector and create a package of support for grassroots organisations, maintaining a co-creation approach throughout the programme design and designating key resources for constant feedback and dynamic accountability. This will happen through:

1.	INFORMING	Producing evidence, insights and best practice to inform the package of support for grassroots organisations, and makes the case for youth-led change.
2.	INFLUENCING	Using research to supporting funders to work more effectively with youth civil society: advocating for alternative funding structures that meet youth civil society's diverse needs and offers.
3.	MOBILISING	Bringing youth civil society together to collaborate and self-organise to achieve greater collective impact and attract support to scale youth-led change.
4.	SUPPORTING	Enabling the youth sector to build successful, sustainable and well-resourced organisations.

HOW MATTERS MOST.

Keen to steer clear of the existing limitations the Development Alternative seeks to support youth civil society to build its capacity through the practice of collectively solving the challenges detailed in this report, practically and dynamically learning and growing through the very act of creating the solutions youth civil society demands. Elements of this approach will include, but not be limited to, the below, allowing for co-creation and evolution of this approach throughout the course of this work.

- **Innovating capacity development.** The consortium will practice an experiential learning approach, understanding communities of practice as living labs. Rather than passively 'building capacity' in workshops, training will take the form of 'innovation labs', convening youth civil society to tackle problems together and to develop practical solutions as a means to learn and to develop their own capacity in the key gap areas identified in the problem analysis. We will work with development partners and national governments to understand their needs and aspirations, supporting them in their capacity to work more effectively with the youth sector.

- **A youth sector collective.** Consultation respondents from youth civil society indicated a strong desire to remain engaged in the initiative over time, continuing the co-creation approach. The Development Alternative will work with a collective of youth civil society to validate solutions, to test approaches, to hold the consortium to account, and to generally co-create and co-deliver the project over its life cycle.

- **Mobilisation at the heart.** While over 200 youth organisations will be actively involved and supported through a transformative package of support, the Development Alternative envisions reaching thousands of youth civil society actors over time with this work, very much setting out an ambition for scale, sustainability and and exit strategy that transcends this initiative from the outset.

- **Diverse leadership & dynamic accountability.** Youth civil society is comprised of a diverse range of organisational structures (organisations to movements to youth groups). In response to the problem analysis, the consortium will work to develop the leadership skills within youth civil society, with particular focus on 1) understanding the unique nature of leadership in this sector given the challenge of elite capture common in all civil society and of the 'ageing out' phenomenon unique to youth civil society, 2) building the leadership of women and underrepresented groups within this sector's leadership, and on 3) supporting youth civil society - and particularly its leadership - to practice dynamic accountability within its work.

- **Partners for change.** The consortium will unapologetically balance two important resources: 1) the participatory youth-led elements of this work that will offer a radical alternative to development approaches as usual, and 2) the expertise and experience of a set of pioneering members of the Development Alternative. The consortium chooses to walk this line and to create a dynamic tension into its ways of working, allowing it to draw on the best of all parties.

- **On the ground, on line.** Understanding that less formal and more rural organisations are often overlooked as programmatic partners, but are often the best placed actors for creating change, the consortium will build mobilisation approaches offline. Careful to avoid the "online and offline" mantra of our sector, the consortium will partner with youth civil society networks to test, refine and adapt these approaches in country contexts. These activities will inform, test and refine the mobilisation approaches for youth networks, offline or online, to be built out over the course of this initiative for scale. At the same time, a digital platform will be developed to allow for broader access to mobilisation activities, to training resources, to networks of youth civil society actors, to evidence and influence materials.

ANNEX

A co-creation process underpinned the analysis and reporting of the data, as well as the development of the learning questions and design of the methods. It culminated in a face-to-face workshop in London in February 2019. This report combines the key findings from the analysis of the survey, focus group discussions, the Evidence Review and discussions at the London Workshop and aims to provide a platform for further conversation, learning and action by, and with, youth civil society. Direct reference and extracts from these two reports are used throughout.

YOUTH EXPERTS

The workshop aimed to bring together the data, findings and learnings from the evidence review and consultations, along with the experiences of experts in the room, to inform The Development Alternative's programme design for strengthening southern-based youth civil society. Attendees included focus group discussion leads, consortium partners and young leaders.

Faith S. Kaoma, Copper Rose Zambia:
"I come from a background where if you don't have money, you don't have a say in anything, you just look like a bunch of kids that are passionate about a cause, but you don't have the right resources (funding, skills). You could be passionate about sexual reproductive health rights for young people, but you're terrified of speaking to an audience who might have the resources you need to push an agenda forward.Actors in the sector should be more open to teach you the new entry points into the sector, as well as taking time to share best practices."

Osama Muhammad, War Child Iraq:
"Civil society is beyond agencies, it's youth unions, student movements etc., but they are working randomly without coordination or strategy. The solution is to start clustering or cohorting our efforts."

Cheska Patow Barrios, TECHO:
"The biggest barrier is the system itself, the credibility we give to young people and the way they have to prove their value when they already have value enough to participate in different spaces. We need a better education system to build capacity in young people to believe in themselves and know how to access the system."

ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INGO	International Non Government Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview

DEFINING YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY

Through the Evidence Review, definitions relating to youth civil society organisations were developed. In line with Beauclerk et al (2011, p9), it is recognised that civil society includes a diverse range of associations (formal and informal) including community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, issue-based social movements, trade unions, media, and development NGOs.

In defining youth civil society organisations, the terminology in the table below will be used. The definitions are based on the literature and interpretations of the authors of the Evidence Review, as the existing evidence is vague in its use of terms. The term 'youth organisations' includes youth-led and youth-focused organisations, as well as those with youth as a major component of their work.

TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS IN YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY[2]

Type	**Characteristic**
INGOs	Bigger and more established globally, with offices in the Global North as well as the Global South. Youth-focused and with access to global funding opportunities. Often administer grants for and provide support to established southern youth organisations. Policy influencers and organisers of global campaigns.
Regional organisations	Youth civil society organisations with a regional scope. Sizes vary greatly, and networks are important to the model.
National and local youth organisations	Larger and well-established southern youth civil society organisations, with a paid staff base and bigger budget compared to grassroots groups. These may be 'partners' of INGOs (i.e. they collaborate to implement programmes, projects and activities).
Grassroots organisations	Limited staff and heavy dependence on volunteers. Small operating budget, with a more established presence at the local and community level. These may be registered or not.
Social movements, networks and coalitions	Loosely organised, often informal, limited budget, can be small or large and with local or/and global reach, online and offline.

[2] These definitions are not all encompassing.

METHODOLOGY

The consultations endeavoured to understand the barriers preventing southern-based youth civil society from being effective, and to start mapping potential ways forward. With the aim of gathering geographically diverse views from a range of organisations sizes and types, the survey was conducted globally online, and the focus groups were hosted in six countries. The Evidence Review was conducted alongside the focus groups and the survey.

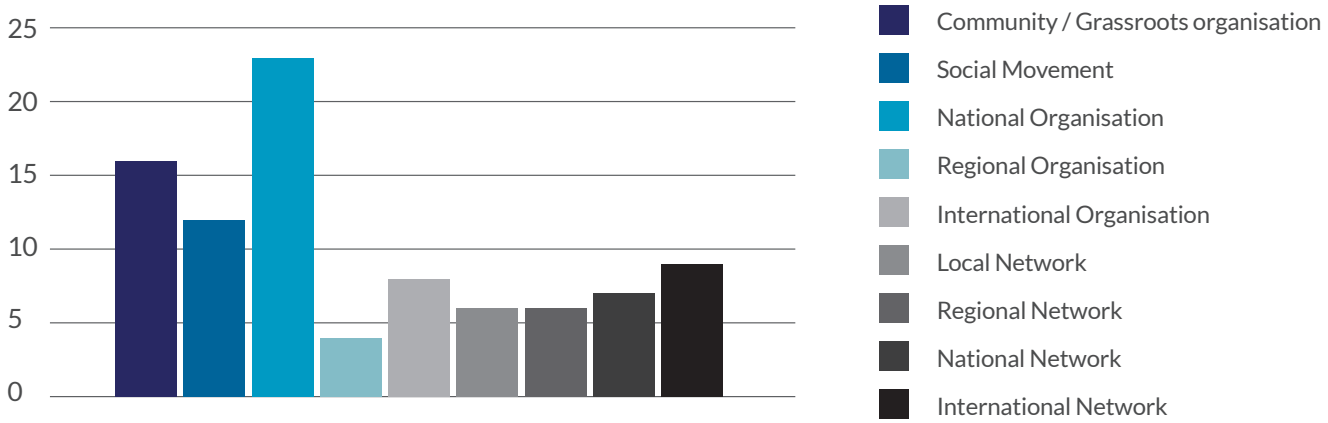
Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups were designed to create a safe space for in-depth and complex discussions of the learning questions. A deliberate decision was made for the groups to be led by consortium partners based in the South, working with youth and with established in-country networks to reach out to. This approach sought to redress acknowledged power imbalances between INGOs and civil society organisations from the start of the process by working in partnership with youth civil society organisations and consortium representatives embedded at a local level. Focus Group facilitators led aspects of the research process and then fed that into further programme design and work. Consortium partners conducting these discussions included DOT Lebanon, Restless Development Uganda, Restless Development Zimbabwe, YMCA Madagascar, YMCA Palestine and War Child Iraq.

Focus group facilitators were supported through the development of a guide and online support call and then worked with their teams to identify youth organisations to invite to the focus group, lead the discussions, record the proceedings and conduct a first level of analysis of the data.

To establish a diverse representation of youth civil society voices during the discussion, in-country consortium partners were asked to conduct a brief mapping of actors in their country working with youth, or being led by young people. They identified those organisations usually best placed to respond to development challenges, but often overlooked in delivery: 'grassroots' organisations (based or focused on issues/needs of young people). In addition, both formal and informal organisations (along with a mix of local, regional and national actors) were invited to attend included.

Altogether seven focus group discussions were facilitated in five countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Madagascar, Palestine and Uganda) over a two-week period in late January/early February 2019[3]. Overall, approximately sixty youth civil society organisations attended the half-day focus groups (an average of ten per group), with a good range of organisations types represented, as illustrated in the graph below:

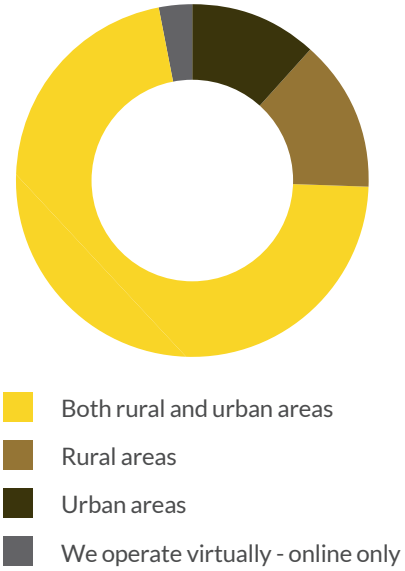


[3] The original plan was to conduct a focus group in Zimbabwe but this was not possible due to the political situation at the time – although Restless Development Zimbabwe was involved in the design and analysis of the data. War Child Iraq arranged focus groups in three sites in total in recognition of the regional differences in the country.

Attendees also represented a range of youth organisations: youth-led, youth-focused and organisations who identified working with youth as a key component of their work, similar to the mix of survey respondents. The majority of organisations worked in urban areas, differing from the survey respondents. Only four out of the sixty organisations attending focus group discussions were unregistered. Participants represented a range of ages and positions in the organisation from Executive Directors and Chief Executives to Researchers and Volunteers. It is important to note that whilst women were present in all groups, in some cases there was a majority of males present (Uganda and Iraq).

Survey

An online survey was designed to reach out to a geographically wider number of youth civil society organisations. It was disseminated through the consortium partner networks and social media, completed by 198 respondents over a two-week period starting in late January 2019. Achieving this high number of responses in the short time frame was largely due to the established networks of the in-country consortium partners. Respondents were individuals who work/volunteer for youth organisations from over 30 countries in the South, the majority being from Africa. The countries with the largest number of respondents were Lebanon (20), Uganda (18), India (15) and Zimbabwe (13). There was good representation in terms of rural/urban focus.



There was also an even response across 'types of organisation', with 54% describing themselves as 'community/grassroots organisations' and 47% as 'national organisations'[4]. Only two of the organisations that responded to the survey were 'unregistered'.

The survey was in two parts:
Part 1: Background information (e.g.type of organisation/size/their work with youth)
Part 2: The learning questions.
All respondents completed Part 1 and around 70% completed Part 2.

Evidence Review

This was a rapid review of the academic and grey literature (a partial list of references available in appendix) on the enablers and barriers (internal and external) to the effectiveness of southern-based civil society working with youth and what needs to change in the development system to see their work strengthened. This was coordinated by INTRAC (a Development Alternative consortium partner) and delivered by Recrear International (an organisation with extensive experience in working with young people and youth civil society). The literature was reviewed in light of six themes for youth civil society:

1. Legitimacy and credibility as development actors
2. Ability to mobilise resources
3. Ability to navigate political space and legal frameworks
4. Sustainability and resilience as organisations
5. Ability to advocate and influence on behalf of their constituencies and hold duty bearers to account
6. Ability to be accountable to their constituencies.

[4] Organisations could select multiple categories – see bar chart on previous page.

The review discovered that literature on youth-focused and youth-led organisations is scarce, especially from the Global South. In addition, the research highlighted limited nuancing how young people organise and in identifying the differences between types of youth organisations leading to broad generalisations on youth civil society. Literature on youth organisations and their experiences and responses to the situation they face was also found to be limited.

A co-creation approach to analysis and reporting

Analysis started in-country and was led by the consortium partners who had facilitated the focus groups. This was then shared and further extrapolated via a Key Informant Interview (KII). The basis for this thematic analysis was an inductive and deductive approach – seeking to answer the key learning questions as well as being open to new insights. The discussion data was combined with the survey data and presented alongside the Evidence Review at the London Workshop in February 2019, where representatives from the focus group facilitators worked with key staff from The Development Alternative partners and young leaders to further discuss and learn from the data gathered.

Dynamic accountability in action

There was positive feedback about the focus groups and the co-creation approach: In-country consortium partners reflected that they (and the groups that took part in the discussions) saw their engagement in this consultation and the way it had been designed as the start of a 'new way of working' with INGOs. They felt a sense of being more of an equal partner: being responsible for collecting the data and part of the team analysing the data and identifying what the key findings were. Through the process relationships between in-country consortium partners and between youth civil society organisations were developed and deepened and the start of a community focused on doing things differently in youth civil society was initiated. This importantly indicates the start of a two-way ongoing conversation that will underpin programme design, delivery, and evidence generation.

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[5] http://recrearinternational.org/

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[6] This is a partial list of references - the most relevant for this report. For a full list of references for the Evidence Review please see the full report found at (link)

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