



## Report

# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT BULGARI (YEB) FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION

April 2021

## Introduction

The [Youth Empowerment Bulgari \(YEB\)](#) project was delivered over a five-year period (January 2016 – December 2020) and aimed to empower marginalised and deprived adolescents and youths (AYs) in Albania, Bolivia, Nepal and Uganda to develop essential life skills and improve their livelihoods, so that they can fulfil their full potential.

The project focused on three key pillars (see figure 1): personal development; education and training; and economic empowerment. In addition, YEB encouraged adolescents to actively participate in their communities and aimed to create an enabling environment by engaging with local employers, services and institutions.

During the five years that the project was implemented in the four countries, the YEB project directly reached more than 47,000 beneficiaries, including almost 27,000 AYs.

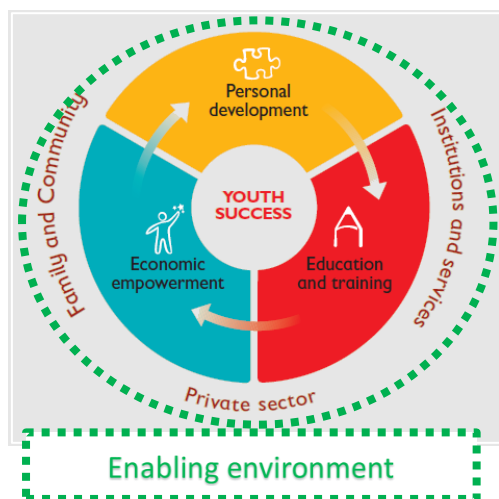


Figure 1: YEB model

This evaluation assesses the performance of the YEB project in each of the four countries where it was implemented, using key [evaluation criteria](#) recommended by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee for evaluating development assistance: relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Overall, the YEB project was found to be highly relevant for meeting the needs of the most marginalised and deprived youths; mostly effective in achieving desired outcomes relating to personal development, education and training, and economic empowerment; and had a positive impact on the youths who participated as well as their families and wider communities.

The global COVID-19 pandemic impacted both the delivery and outcomes of the project in its final year. It was necessary to adapt quickly, in terms of moving training activities online and supporting youths to understand the impact of restrictions, consider alternative livelihoods, and access available support.

This evaluation includes recommendations for future youth empowerment programming, to ensure the most marginalised and deprived adolescents and youths are given the support and opportunities that they need to improve their circumstances, advocate for their rights, and fulfil their future potential.

## Methodology

The evaluation approach was participatory, outcomes-focused and inclusive. Mixed methods were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from primary sources (including surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups and observation with adolescents and youths, their parents, teachers, trainers, health workers, local officials and other stakeholders), and secondary sources (e.g. project reports). Data was disaggregated by age, gender and location.

- In Albania, 112 youth beneficiaries took part in a project survey and 63 interviews were held with youths, parents, teachers and stakeholders, mostly face-to-face but in some cases online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two focus group discussions were held with 10-11 youth participants in each region and the project evaluation team observed the environment and attitude of participants during field visits.
- In Bolivia, more than 600 AYs were interviewed and five focus group discussions were carried out; 60 youth-led ventures were interviewed and structured interviews were held with 136 parents and 78 teachers/facilitators. In addition, 16 interviews were carried out with key stakeholders who had an active role in the implementation of the project (local authorities, implementation partners and national government representatives).
- In Nepal, 310 beneficiaries (200 adolescents and 110 youths) aged 13 to 22 years old at the time of receiving support, were surveyed. Key informant interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out with adolescents and youths, head teachers, school management committee chairs, local leaders, cooperative chairs and representatives, technical service providers, local vendors, and private organisation representatives.
- In Uganda, beneficiary adolescents and youths (AYs) aged 12 – 25 years old from 531 households were surveyed. Parents of very young adolescents were interviewed, and key informant interviews were carried out with district officials, local leaders, community development officers, project team members, peer educators and health workers. Focus group discussions were held with AYs, community-based trainers and agriculture mentors, and community members. The health facility assessment (HFA) tool was used to gather data on service readiness and availability.



## Albania evaluation summary

### Relevance: meeting the needs of youths

- The YEB project reached 1,041 of the **most vulnerable and marginalised adolescents and youths (AYs)** in semi-urban communities in the Elbasan and Shkodra regions, including 745 adolescents (aged 18 or younger) and 296 youths aged over 18.
- Participants included 535 AYs who were not in education, employment or training, including 162 out-of-school AYs from Roma and Egyptian communities, who face severe economic problems and social exclusion, and youths who attended the two vocational education and training (VET) schools of Cerrik (Elbasan) and Bushat (Shkoder).
- Youths from these communities have **limited information, education and opportunities**. Families do not have the education or means to provide life and livelihood skills to their children, and public institutions (schools, vocational training centres, labour offices, municipalities etc.) do not proactively address the needs of marginalised youths.
- The project approach and activities were **relevant to the context** and **met the needs of adolescents and youths who participated**, who feel the project is 'theirs' and have recommended it to siblings, relatives and friends.
- The project overcame resistance from parents to successfully increase the enrolment rate of girls in VET schools and ensure the **participation of girls** from Roma and Egyptian communities, whose parents were most resistant to allowing girls to participate.
- AYs beneficiaries and their parents highlighted the need to **replicate the project to reach more AYs** who do not possess life and livelihood skills. They emphasised the importance of the project having developed competencies **relevant to the local labour market**.

### Effectiveness: achievement of objectives

- The project design was appropriate to achieve the desired outcomes. A few changes were made to activities based on the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation (for example, the entrepreneurship cycle was updated) and as a **response to the COVID-19 pandemic**, when life and livelihood skills sessions moved online, and start-ups were advised of pandemic requirements and assisted to apply for government support.
- Life skills training was comprehensive, based on best practice and participant needs, and helped **73% of out-of-school youths to improve their life skills**; participants and their parents reported that self-control, communication skills, and behaviour improved. Moreover, 90% of illiterate AYs achieved literacy and numeracy skills after attending the courses.
- The interactivity of training was highly appreciated, but youths suggested that sessions could have been scheduled at more appropriate times and included **more outdoor activities** such as excursions and exchange activities, to develop social skills and increase participant satisfaction.
- Youth beneficiaries **increased their capacity to develop business plans and establish start-ups**. The project used an entrepreneurship cycle (an idea generation bootcamp is held; youths submit start-up ideas and develop business plans; grants are provided to implement the business plans; start-ups are established). However, **fewer youths than expected (31 vs. 34) established start-ups and several closed down**, hindered by a difficult economic situation and business development context, and the pandemic.
- The project has successfully facilitated support for vulnerable youths at institutions in Elbasan and Shkoder. Targeted VET schools and **teachers, especially teachers of entrepreneurship, increased their capacity to conduct life and livelihood skills courses**. The project provided labs and materials to the targeted schools, which are appreciated, but schools need further assistance to make the labs fully functional.

### Impact: delivering positive outcomes

- Participation in the project has **positively affected AYs and their parents**. Life skills training has helped youths to develop self-awareness, trust their strengths and skills, and see how they can take positive steps to improve their lives. Roma and Egyptian youths feel equal and appreciated. Parents can see significant changes in their children and have become more open and supportive of the project.



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- The project has **contributed to an improvement in youths' economic situation**. In total, 54 youths became employed, 30 youth start-ups were established, and several youth beneficiaries who had plans to emigrate are now building their future in their communities. Youths and their parents say they have **increased their potential to earn income** and support themselves and their families.
- **Parents in the Roma community have been positively affected** by their children's participation in the project and can now better understand their needs and participate in their development.
- Ensure activities can be **adapted to be delivered online**, in light of the disruption caused by COVID-19.

## Sustainability: preserving project results

- The project has established a nucleus of youths and their networks, who can **positively influence others in the community** by sharing their skills and the experience they have gained.
- The inclusion of life training in municipalities' social plans will ensure that the project **will reach even more youths**.
- In addition, the entrepreneurship curriculum developed for the project has been **approved for use in all VET schools** thanks to collaboration with the National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Training (NAVETQ).

## Recommendations for future programming

- Continue to pay attention to the **inclusion of women and girls** from vulnerable communities. Working patiently with parents and older brothers was an effective way to ensure participation of Roma girls.
- Focus on **capacity building of local public institutions**, especially municipalities, employment offices and VET centres, to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities deriving from current legislation and policies.
- **Improve functional literacy and numeracy** among deprived and marginalised youths with education gaps, so they can participate in life and livelihood training, vocational courses and start-ups.
- Replicate the entrepreneurship model in future projects and **support youth start-ups with ongoing coaching and technical assistance** to keep them on track and help them to grow.
- **Empower youths to claim their rights** and hold others accountable for the realisation of their rights; **encourage youth advocacy** and **strengthen local stakeholder networks** to provide coordinated support to youths.
- **Support municipalities to include life skills training in their social plans** and adopt it for vulnerable youths.



## Bolivia evaluation summary

### Relevance: meeting the needs of youths

- The YEB project applied the Comprehensive Approach for Adolescents and Youth (AYs), which consolidates Save the Children's 18 years' experience of implementing projects for adolescents and young people in Bolivia, with the aim of **empowering the most disadvantaged AYs** to exercise their economic, sexual reproductive health, and social rights.
- The project reached more than 7,000 AYs, established strategic alliances with public and private actors in 20 municipalities across seven regions of Bolivia, and mobilised other stakeholders in the community and local government.
- The approach was **relevant to the context** and **met the needs and priorities of participating AYs**; it had a good reach among those at the lowest economic level and with social disadvantages (for example, people living in shelters and social reintegration centres).

### Effectiveness: achievement of objectives

- A **large percentage of the project's goals were met** thanks to the integrated strategy, a professional and committed team, effective strategic alliances, the participation and commitment of the AYs, and ongoing monitoring of the project's impact.
- The percentage of AYs with a personal development plan who reported correct decisions that would make a positive impact in different spheres of their lives, **exceeded the project target by 64%**, with women scoring highest.
- In terms of economic empowerment, **83% of the target was achieved for the number of AYs who increased their income** through sustainable employment or starting a new business, with females achieving the best results. The target was not met due to factors including the country's political

situation in 2019, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the characteristics of the population.

- Although it is not possible to accurately measure the decrease in the unemployment rate in areas where the project was implemented, due to a lack of data provided by the state, **1,124 of the participating AYs obtained a job with a salary greater than or equal to the national minimum wage** and were employed for three or more months, and **46% also registered with job boards**.
- Securing employment for vulnerable adolescents can be challenging, with obstacles more often leading to abandonment of the process. A labour insertion manual was developed and implemented, which **helped companies to commit** to employment of AYs, and agreements were established with municipal and departmental governments and the Central State Stock Exchange, which increased participation in job boards and therefore **increased opportunities for decent work**.

### Impact: delivering positive outcomes

- In terms of personal development, life skills training helped most adolescents and young people (93%) to **improve their capacity to make positive decisions to live a full and productive life**, with 80% carrying out daily self-care practices. There were also improvements in relationships, social skills, self-concept, self-esteem, resilience and decisions relating to sexual and reproductive health.
- In particular, **females showed improvements in capacity, attitude and practices** as a result of what they learned, and greater discernment in relation to sexual and reproductive health and self-esteem.
- The project also helped 2,226 AYs (89%) to implement social projects that have a **positive impact on the community**.
- In terms of education, AYs with basic cognitive abilities **strengthened their reading, writing and logical comprehension** (71% of target reached), with results higher in mathematics than language, where further improvements can be made. Educators also demonstrated **knowledge of the appropriate practices for development of AYs** (86% of target).
- As a result of economic empowerment activities, 52% of AYs achieved access to decent employment and 54 small productive enterprises were started that offered a variety of quality products and services linked to profitable markets; these youths have **improved their entrepreneurial capacity** permanently.

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- In terms of youth participation, AYs were able to **exercise their social and economic rights** with the support of their families and communities. 250% of the target number of inter-institutional platforms and networks, 100% of the target number of youth councils (or municipal equivalents) and 107% of the target number of public servants, parents and others in the environment of AYs, were supported to better understand and address AYs needs through the project's training module *School for Families*.
- **Support from government, parents and others in AYs' sphere of influence created an enabling environment** that made it possible for AYs to participate in inter-institutional networks and youth councils and influence political decisions that affect their rights and life. There was **positive feedback from AYs about public sector support for the exercise of their rights** (83% of the target).
- Establishing public policies and strategies for AYs is complex, but as a result of coordination with the Ministry of Justice, Plurinational Youth Council, departmental and municipal governments and other actors, the YEB project exceeded its goal for the **implementation of policies and strategies that include the demands of AYs**. It also far exceeded its goal (275% of target) for **institutions that support Save the Children's integrated strategy** for AYs, developed and promoted by our team in Bolivia. 90% of the target was met for allocation of financial resources in strategic areas by public institutions.
- **Tailor employment and entrepreneurial activities to take into account the conditions and characteristics** of each region or area, which will impact the effectiveness and timescales for activities.
- Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure that activities can be adapted if necessary. **Innovate and explore the use of technology** for implementation.
- **Expand efforts to generate awareness and support among families, public officials and others** who have influence within adolescents and youths' environments, as it will help to advance change and AYs would welcome it.
- Encourage the participation of AYs in inter-institutional networks and the formation of youth councils, to **strengthen their ability to influence, design and exercise their own rights**.
- Consolidate progress on policies and strategies for AYs by **strengthening coordination between central, departmental and municipal governments and other social actors**, and strengthening the allocation of financial resources, so that AY issues are addressed in the medium and long term and consolidated as public policy.

## Sustainability: preserving project results

- The **increased capacities, networks and resources mobilised by the project will be maintained**, as will some of the results achieved. However, although local partners have technical and management capacities, they do not in all cases have the economic resources to carry out the necessary work to strengthen the capacities of AYs.
- The wide **support from public and private institutions for the integrated strategy for AYs is promising** for scale and sustainability, as is the allocation of financial resources. However, while the majority of local and departmental governments have the capacity to continue with strategies or actions, possible risks include lack of political will, lack of budget, and change of authorities.

## Recommendations for future programming

- Improve the presentation of projects to **raise awareness of the benefits and engage the support of stakeholders**. This will increase the likelihood of achieving objectives and project sustainability.





## Nepal evaluation summary

### Relevance: meeting the needs of youths

- The YEB project was implemented in ten municipalities across five districts of western Nepal (Achham, Bajura, Banke, Dailekh and Kalikot) and reached almost 9,500 children, adolescents and youth.
- Following recommendations of potential beneficiaries by school and local authorities, joint home visits were carried out by partner NGOs and local authorities to ensure that the project **supported the most marginalised and deprived adolescents and youths (AYs)**.
- The approach was **relevant to the context** and **the needs of youths who participated were largely met** through bursary support, employment support from cooperatives, coordination with local government and the private sector, and the effective timing and sequencing of project activities.
- An **adolescent and youth-centred approach** was taken in the project's design and implementation.

### Effectiveness: achievement of objectives

- The project is widely perceived to have been effective in achieving empowerment of AYs. **Youth employment and micro-entrepreneurship increased** by 97% by the final

evaluation, while the **secondary level education completion rate increased** in the project areas to 95%.

- In terms of personal development, youth participants **acquired skills in emotional management (97%), problem solving (99%), and decision making (98%)**. Similarly, 90% of the participating youths benefited from positive mentoring and career counselling.
- All head teachers who participated in the project showed **increased capacities to keep students in school**. Bursary support ensured that the most deprived **children who had previously dropped out of school re-enrolled** and continued their education.
- The project successfully **reduced the unemployment rate** in the project areas. Following micro-enterprise vocational training (MEVT), **97% of youth participants were offered employment and 78% started their own enterprise or business**. All youths said the training was substantially helpful in starting up their business, and 90% said the financial education provided greatly helped them to invest in their business.
- Regarding economic empowerment, the average income of a Nepalese worker is declared to be NPR 161,400 per year, although other data suggests it is NPR 213,708 per year. **84% of the youths earned at least NPR 72,000 per year**, with average earnings of NPR 133,533 (approx. €950).
- Youths **invested an average of NPR 62,918 (approx. €450) per year for their children and families**, with 87% of the youths investing at least 30 percent of their annual income.

### Impact: delivering positive outcomes

- The project has helped the beneficiary youths to a great extent to **increase their economic opportunities and income**, for which they are grateful. Life skills training helped them to value their time and adopt a savings habit, which led them towards entrepreneurship engagement and, for students, increased their attendance at school.
- Adolescents were **supported to complete their education** through bursary support, remedial classes and provision of materials. Life skills training enabled AYs to sharpen their personal skills ahead of their transition to adulthood.
- Positive outcomes include **empowerment of the AYs** and their involvement in activities implemented by local governments; increased entrepreneurship; increased saving habits and banking practices; and **empowerment of local government** in terms of documentation.

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- **Decision making improved** at the individual, household, and community levels, and youths with micro-enterprises were observed to be **supported in their businesses by family members** (for example, if they pursued poultry farming, their family members would sell the produce; likewise if they set up a bakery, their family members would run a tea shop selling the produce etc).
- The **COVID-19 pandemic reduced the income of youths and hampered the education of adolescents** to some extent, but alternative approaches were developed in some places, which are helping to reduce the effects.
- Provide **adolescent-friendly resources to youth information centers** (YICs) and other community groups with links to local government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) so that they can sustain themselves.
- Encourage **participating schools to continue to deliver life skills training**, which will help them to keep children in school and better manage their performance. Carry out a study to **evaluate the outcomes and impact of life skills training** more fully.
- Encourage **partner cooperatives to continue managing revolving and children's endowment funds**, which would also help them to promote their businesses.

## Sustainability: preserving project results

- Most of the project results are **likely to be sustained because of the active participation of the youths** in income-generating activities; the **ownership of the project taken by local authorities**; the **continuation of the loan programme** through cooperatives; and **commitments of local leaders, vendors and service providers** to continue supporting the youths in the future.
- Youth information centres (YICs) and scholarships are also likely to be continued with resources and support from local governments.
- Despite strong sustainability indicators, the systems developed by the project are perceived by head teachers, local leaders and other stakeholders to not yet be fully matured. To ensure that local authorities and schools are able to capitalise on the progress made so far, the project may need to continue in the districts for at least two years (the remaining term of the current local government), with some modifications.

## Recommendations for future programming

- **Encourage local government to adopt the YEB project approach**, which is in line with Nepalese government policies, and instruct school management committees, cooperatives and other organisations to continue delivering their part of the project.
- Working with partner NGOs, develop **standardised life skills training modules** based on the age and development of AYs, that could be integrated with training on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, financial skills, and employability, and distribute them to every school.
- Develop a community mechanism to **involve and engage parents and other community stakeholders** in youth empowerment and create an enabling and supportive environment. Strengthen **community involvement** in future projects by working with groups such as youth clubs, mothers' groups, and children's clubs.





## Uganda evaluation summary

### Relevance: meeting the needs of youths

- The YEB project was implemented in Amuru, Nwoya and Gulu in northern Uganda, to improve employability and socio-economic opportunities for marginalised and deprived adolescents and youths (AYs), aged 12-25 years.
- The project reached 6,400 of the **most deprived and marginalised AYs**, who were out-of-school adolescents, orphans, from child-headed households, or had disabilities.
- The project design was **relevant to the context and the identified needs of AYs aged 12-25 years old**. This is a vulnerable period in young people's lives, particularly in this context, and while private sector growth has improved, the need for AYs to access these opportunities still exist.

### Effectiveness: achievement of objectives

- The project **played a catalytic role in improving the current and future socio-economic opportunities of adolescents and youths**. Overall analysis showed that the integrative approach, which addresses education, training and economic empowerment, is an effective model.
- **Over half (53%) of youths gained personal development skills** such as positive self-concept, self-control, communication and problem solving, which will help them navigate a challenging work environment in Uganda.

- **61% of adolescent and youth beneficiaries completed their literacy education**, compared with 5% at the start of the project. **Three-quarters (76%) of AYs got a job** compared to 73% at the project baseline.
- The integrative approach created a **high level of local stakeholder involvement**, with parishes and villages participating in the identification and selection of youth beneficiaries. The project engaged with technical and administrative local government staff, community-based agriculture mentors (CBAMs) and trainers (CBTs), village health teams (VHTs), local artisans and vocational institutions, which positioned it as community-owned and helped with effective delivery of the activities.
- The **Youth Advocates platform was observed to be a successful model for adolescent and youth engagement** in civic participation, which increased recognition of the issues affecting marginalised youth.
- The project's contribution to skilled and non-skilled labour in agriculture is limited partly due to **lack of ownership and control of productive resources** (land and capital). However, the fact that youth have been able to maintain farms with limited assets and no fertiliser or pesticides (using sustainable organic farming techniques) is testament to the economy and efficiency of the project.

### Impact: delivering positive outcomes

- The YEB project **significantly improved AY's foundational life skills**. Gains in basic literacy and numeracy competencies saw 64% (literacy) and 63% (numeracy) of AYs transition to education. There was a small **increase in knowledge of youth-friendly HIV/AIDS and SRH services and programmes** in northern Uganda (73%, up from 71% at baseline) and a notable 23% reported **increased use of these services**, however further improvement is needed. 57% of AYs felt **better equipped with information on equitable gender norms and values**.
- As a result of vocational training, **AYs were more able to secure decent work and incomes**. 93% completed vocational training, 65% got a job after their training, and 33% got a preferred and safe job within six months.
- In terms of economic empowerment, **41% of youth beneficiaries established enterprises**, and 75% of those who trained in agri-livestock were able to establish a commercial farm. Well-regarded **coaching and mentoring helped them to maximise production**.
- Youths also **improved their access to financial services**, helping them meet immediate and long-term livelihood needs. 58% of AYs said they now have savings and business

planning skills (a 43% increase) and more than half (53%) who completed vocational training became members of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA).

- In terms of creating an enabling environment, **youth civic engagement increased considerably** to 92% of youths (an increase of 79%). Youth became more aware of their labour and social inclusion rights and empowered to safeguard them, by participation in youth networks and Youth Councils at sub-county and district level.
- **The project's impact was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.** 60% of beneficiaries reported a reduction in income, 31% reported an increase in costs of living and 18% reported that their enterprises shut down. 37% needed financing to recapitalise their enterprises, 20% required refresher training in financial skills, and 23% needed alternative livelihood mentoring.

## Sustainability: preserving project results

- The project is mostly sustainable, especially where youth have gained technical and employability skills. Beneficiaries have been empowered to see themselves as **agents of their own change** and are equipped to become economically active and engaged citizens. They will do better still if they continue to get **mentorship support** from government, community structures and the private sector.
- The **increased capacity of vocational training institutes (VTIs) and local artisans** is sustainable, as they should be able to continue training youths in these courses.
- The **partnership with Voluntary Initiative Support Organisation (VISO)**, which supervises the knowledge extension, coaching and mentorship services provided through village health teams (VHTs), community-based trainers and agriculture mentors (CBTs and CBAMs) and peer educators (PEs), was a cost-effective and efficient strategy that increases the potential for sustainability.
- Involvement of a **wide number of actors at multiple institutional levels**, including at 'grassroots' level, gives a sense of community ownership that will be helpful in sustaining the project outcomes.
- To sustain project outcomes following the COVID-19 pandemic, youth businesses need to be **equipped with the skills to adapt to future shocks and recapitalise** their businesses. Their **social capital should be strengthened**, by supporting youth structures and networks, community structures, government structures and development partners. **Information flow should be improved** to help youths, especially girls, make informed choices for their business, sexual and reproductive health, and protection.

## Recommendations for future programming

- Focus on **diversifying livelihoods approaches**, using a participatory approach to define and explore 'alternative' livelihoods, which might include retraining in areas such as mechanics, textiles and crafts, beekeeping, carpentry, etc.
- Carry out solid **market needs assessments to inform a comprehensive, holistic vocational training programme** with a curriculum that covers diverse vocations, to ensure youths are able to find jobs in today's dynamic market. Teaching the same few skills can lead to labour supply saturation in some industries.
- **Integrate social, financial and livelihood education into national curricula** and ensure that educators have the knowledge and skills to teach these topics. This will help children and youth to develop foundational skills and behaviours; to save, budget and make responsible and informed financial decisions; and to develop the employment and entrepreneurial skills and attitudes they need to navigate a changing labour market.
- Build an **increased sense of ownership and confidence of participants in the enterprise youth groups**, working with village health teams, community-based trainers and mentors, and peers.
- Identify and **support youth advocates with the potential to become future community leaders**, using an **inclusive approach** to support greater diversity and sustainability.
- **Advocate to improve the policy and service environment for youth-friendly SRH services**, and strengthen the capacity of service delivery points in record keeping and reporting, to ensure service statistics are gathered by gender and age band. **Involve youths in planning, implementation and evaluation of ASRH programmes.**
- **Assess how COVID-19 has affected AYs**, what needs must be addressed, what interventions are feasible, which implementation models will be effective, how community outreach can be maintained, and how programming can support disease preparedness and response.
- Develop standalone **guidance on gender issues** with input from national or global gender specialists. Incorporate gender sensitisation in engagement with stakeholders and young participants, to enable young women to seek to become leaders of their communities.

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