Rapid research: VSO youth networks' response to COVID-19

Project	VSO Youth Networks and COVID-19
Author	Alice Chadwick
Collaboration	Rebecca Pursell-Gotz; Sosina Yirga Meheretu; Anne Kahuria; Anne Karau; Ivy Delos Santos; James Ndungu; Samuel Turay
Contact person	Sosina Yirga Meheretu
Photo credits	Abdul Rauf (the Philippines); Samarudin Tundok Samsudin (the Philippines) Samuel Turay (Sierra Leone); Collins Masinde (Kenya)
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Youth Community Volunteers and U-Reporters taking part in one of the COVID-19 relief initiatives of VSO Philippines' local partner in Lanao del Norte.

Acronyms and abbreviations

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019

ICS: International Citizen Service (ICS) is a development programme that brings together young people from the UK and developing countries to volunteer in communities in Africa and Asia. More than 35,000 young people have volunteered across the world in the past 10 years.

SGBV: Sex and gender-based violence

UNESCO: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund

VIONet: Volunteer Involving Organisations Network, network of volunteers and organisations in Sierra Leone

VSO: Voluntary Services Overseas

YES Bangsamoro: Youth Engagement and Network Strengthening (YES) of the Bangsamoro region on Mindanao island in the Philippines, network of youth organisations.

YSD: Youth for Sustainable Development, youth network in Kenya

Contents

Summary

This report shares findings from a rapid research aimed at looking at how VSO youth networks are responding to COVID-19 across three countries: Kenya, the Philippines and Sierra Leone.

Qualitative data was gathered via online platforms and interviews to understand the:

- IMPACT of COVID-19 on young people and their communities;

- ACTIONS young people are taking to respond;

- APPROACHES young people are using to support each other and their communities;

- CHALLENGES youth networks are facing; and

- SUGGESTIONS young people have for how to amplify their work and support them.

The findings are presented alongside other emerging evidence to support VSO's youth engagement team in policy and advocacy and programming to amplify youth voices in the response and recovery to COVID-19. The research used online methods to engage a range of young people through interviews and social media channels. Although young people are diverse and facing different contexts of COVID-19, the issues and challenges they are facing are similar. Young people are creating solutions rooted in their own contexts. However, similarities can be found in terms of the approaches they are taking such as the use of technology; working collaboratively; and sharing their voice.

Young people are impacted negatively by COVID-19 and the restrictions that have been put in place to address it.

Young people are taking action, using technology in innovative ways to bring together online and offline elements to support their communities with accurate information about COVID-19, and to address the broader impacts of COVID-19 disruption.

Young people are using a collaborative approach, leveraging existing networks and partnerships.

Young people are supporting each other to build resilience through the uncertainty and stress caused by the global pandemic.

Young people are raising their voices and showing leadership through their actions by highlighting how the response to COVID-19 could be improved, especially in terms of social inclusion accountability from decision-makers.

Young people are demanding recognition of the work they are doing and requesting representation and support so that they can do even more.

Young people and their organisations are pivoting to respond to COVID-19 whilst also drawing attention to ongoing development needs.

Young people are concerned about who is being left behind in the move to online engagement in terms of access to networks and data.

Young people are facing challenges in ensuring their views are heard by other organisations and institutions. They are facing barriers to finding support for their ideas and projects and are struggling to build partnerships and have influence where relationships with government, institutions and organisations are not strong.

Young people see an opportunity to amplify and strengthen youth leadership in development.

Context

The world has changed a lot in the past few months with the emergence of COVID-19, which has had an unprecedented impact on people's lives across the world. COVID-19 emerged in the city of Wuhan in China in December 2019. Towards the end of January, other countries started to confirm cases, and by March, there were significant outbreaks across the world with most other countries reporting confirmed cases. On 11 March 2020, WHO declared the Coronavirus outbreak to be a pandemic, confirmation of the geographical spread of the new disease. The disease continued to spread around the world with countries implementing measures to contain its spread including lockdowns.

Restrictions put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 have had a range of disastrous repercussions for people's livelihoods, health and education. Restriction measures have most adversely affected those working in the informal economy. The lockdown in India, for example, led to the estimated loss of 122 million jobs with the unemployment rate approaching 27%[1]. As countries' health systems have pivoted to deal with COVID-19 other health needs are being ignored. A UNFPA briefing on the situation in the Philippines draws attention to the impact on women and girls' access to SRH services as well as increases in SGBV during quarantine measures[2]. Education has also been impacted with UNESCO estimating that 1.2 billion students across 165 countries are being impacted by school and university closures[3], with concerns about the most vulnerable students' access to remote learning approaches.

The crisis has impacted all of VSO's programming and there are grave concerns about how communities will be affected both in terms of the immediate risk of infection but also the broader consequences of the containment measures on all aspects of people's lives. Questions have been raised about how people can stay at home and practice social distancing when living in densely populated and insecure housing and when reliant upon daily incomes to survive. VSO has rapidly pivoted its programming towards COVID-19 response through four pillars: supporting health systems; continued access to education; supporting Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) for livelihoods and business continuity; and emergency coordination systems strengthening. Within the final pillar, there is a commitment to supporting and expanding volunteer platforms, especially for youth volunteers, engaging them to think creatively about potential ways to engage in COVID-19 response and recovery.

VSO's youth engagement work

The role of young people and youth volunteers in responding to COVID-19, through their innovation and creativity, ought to be recognised and harnessed. Furthermore, young people are themselves vulnerable to the health, social, educational and economic effects of COVID-19 and this should also be addressed. VSO's youth engagement work is committed to supporting young people as partners and leaders of development at the local and national level. Within the V4D framework, youth engagement contributes towards programming, engagement and leadership through a positive youth development approach focusing on assets, agency, contribution and an enabling environment. VSO is seeing emerging evidence of youth networks adapting their activities to respond to the situation. We already know that volunteers, especially youth, play an important role in response to disaster and crisis as previously shown by the role of local volunteers supporting communities and health systems in Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak, or in Mozambique following Cyclone Idai. These experiences provide invaluable insights, but the COVID-19 pandemic requires different approaches and provides an opportunity for VSO to strengthen our youth engagement approach.

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[1] BBC May 2020

[2] UNFPA 2020

[3] UNESCO Global Education Coalition 2020

Country specific background

Kenya has a young population and VSO supports a range of youth engagement programmes in the country, including the ICS programme. Youth engagement work focuses on Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship supporting the most marginalised, especially those living with disabilities. VSO also supports platforms for youth leadership and voice to support social accountability and development, which led to the formation of the Youth for Sustainable Development (YSD) county chapters. YSD chapters bring young people together to promote inclusive policies and participation, focus on youth rights and youth-friendly services and enhance access to employment and entrepreneurship activities.

In response to the spread of COVID-19, Kenya imposed full lockdowns on badly affected counties including the capital, Nairobi. Other areas are also subject to movement restrictions, bans on gatherings and school closures, all of which are having a terrible impact on people's livelihoods and access to education.

The Philippines is an island nation and VSO focuses on the island of Mindanao, which contains eight of the country's ten poorest provinces and areas of armed conflict. VSO supports youth volunteering initiatives, especially in fragile areas of Mindanao, to empower young people to improve their leadership skills, develop a sense of agency and play an integral role in addressing social issues within their communities. VSO, in partnership with UNICEF and local partners, supports the Youth Engagement and Network Strengthening (YES) of the Bangsamoro Project and U-Report on the island of Mindanao, which builds the capacity of youth organisations in the area of community organising and policy and advocacy skills.

In response to COVID-19, the Philippines imposed very restrictive lockdown measures on the country's capital, Manila, and other large cities. Areas of Bangsamoro in Mindanao have been under enhanced community quarantine, which has badly affected people's livelihoods in the region due to curfew and restrictions on movement.

Sierra Leone is a country with a very young population which, in recent years, has overcome many challenges including the Ebola outbreak (2014-2016) and mudslides and flooding. VSO, in partnership with UN Volunteers, has supported the creation of VIONet, a network of volunteer-involving organisations focusing on empowering young people through volunteering. VIONet, is active across all regions of the country and brings young people together to address development challenges and promote the role of volunteering to achieve sustainable development.

In Sierra Leone, the government responded to COVID-19 by instigating curfews and a series of 72-hour total lockdowns. These measures have badly impacted young people's livelihoods and have restricted people's movements. Schools have been closed and, just as during the Ebola outbreak, many have been reluctant to attend hospital with other medical issues.

What are we trying to understand?

This rapid research project seeks to understand how VSO's youth volunteering networks are adapting and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gathering evidence to understand how young people are being affected and how they are responding can guide policy and advocacy, programming and leadership to support resilience-building for a changing world. Additionally, this will capture evidence for VSO's youth engagement value proposition around the role of youth volunteering and leadership in fighting poverty and supporting the most vulnerable. This will provide learning for VSO country offices and inform VSO's approach around how they can support and strengthen the unique and important role that youth networks can play in development and crisis response both during this current crisis and as communities recover from it. Figure 1 shows the research questions.
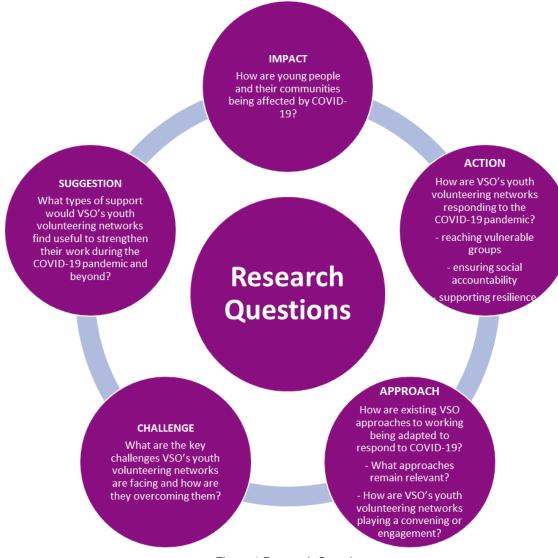

Figure 1 Research Questions

Study approach

The current containment measures represent a unique challenge to methods of data collection which rely on face-to-face interaction with participants. Additionally, the rapidly evolving situation demands a flexible and adaptable approach to react to emerging knowledge. Given the exploratory nature of this piece of work and the lack of existing knowledge, the research was qualitative – looking at questions of how rather than to what extent. The research used a rapid online approach, which is suited to the current context in which travel and movement are restricted and physical meeting advised against. This method involved engaging young people via social media channels. Many young people live out their everyday lives via social media, recording and sharing their activities and experiences – and this has become more relevant now many young people are subject to lockdown measures restricting their movement.
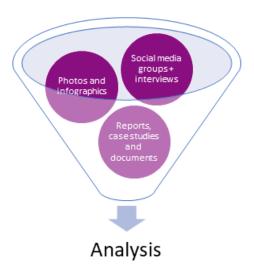
Sampling

Sampling was purposive and pragmatic. The youth engagement team identified countries which have strong youth volunteering networks across a variety of different contexts: Kenya, Sierra Leone and the Philippines. The data collection approach was then tailored to each country context – to ensure use of appropriate platforms.

Process

The primary researcher joined social media groups with VSO's youth volunteering networks and collected several forms of data:

- Photos and videos of volunteer activities

- Sensitisation resources developed by volunteer networks e.g. health promotion videos and graphics

- Group contributions via WhatsApp or Facebook groups

Members of online groups were told about the purpose of the research to allow them to decide whether they would like to contribute. This data was combined with one-on-one WhatsApp or Facebook messenger interviews either through voice call or online chat with members of the youth networks and VSO youth engagement leads. For the interviews, participants were talked through the research and its aims to ensure informed consent to participate; confidentiality was also ensured. The use of social media chats enabled two-way communication with the researcher, allowing for follow-up questions and clarifications to be made and analytical observations to be tested with participants. Table 1 summarises the 21 one-to-one interviews.

Interviews	Kenya	The Philippines	Sierra Leone
VSO youth engagement lead	1	1	1
Youth volunteers	6	7	5
TOTAL	7	8	6

Table 1

This data was analysed and synthesised along with relevant secondary data such as country youth engagement reports and VSO Yammer conversations to create this narrative report, which also includes supporting examples from youth networks in other countries.

Limitations

Network, connectivity and data use

There were connectivity challenges for participants in all countries, and this made it hard to reach those that are not online due to either network challenges or costs. In the Philippines and Sierra Leone, we used a template questionnaire for the VSO youth engagement lead to capture data from some people who were not online. Caution is needed around equitable access to networks, smartphones and data, which is a limitation of online approaches. It was also acknowledged that young people have a lot of competing demands upon both their time and data and might understandably be prioritising other needs right now.

Trust and social media groups

The researcher was introduced to participants through youth engagement leads to try and build trust. The purpose of the research was communicated with participants and they were given space to ask questions before sharing information or agreeing to participate in interviews to ensure informed consent and build rapport. Young people seemed unwilling initially to contribute to social media groups but were more likely to take part in the one-to-one interviews. Additionally, it may be that young people are less likely to trust an outside researcher so it may be more successful to support young people to carry out their own research through social media in the future or work through VSO youth engagement leads.

Gender and social inclusion

More male participants were spoken to than female participants and young people with disabilities were not knowingly engaged. This may be due to differences in accessing data and other competing priorities. Language may have also been a barrier to inclusion, future research should try to use the language that participants feel most comfortable with, youth-led research will support this. A key learning is a need for a more inclusive strategy from the outset when using a rapid adaptable research approach.

Ethical considerations

It was harder to gain informed consent for participation using online approaches as opposed to face-to-face. The issue of confidentiality may have less meaning when social media profiles are used, which is something to be aware of for future online research methods. This may need to be an area that is looked at as online methods of   data collection are increasingly used within VSO.

Scale of sampling and participants

This analysis is only based upon the views and experiences expressed by a limited number of participants who contributed to social media platforms and interviews. It should therefore not be seen as representative of the views or experiences of all young people and is limited in scope to the sampled countries.

Findings

IMPACT: How are young people and their communities being affected by COVID-19?

Young people, their families and their communities are being negatively impacted by COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed because of it. This impact is being felt across VSO's core programme areas of health, education and livelihoods. Young people said that young people, women and girls, and people with disabilities and other vulnerabilities were the most impacted. The pandemic has also disrupted existing development activities that young people have been engaged in, making them unable to carry out planned community cleaning, workshops or monitoring exercises.

VSO Kenya and Youth for Sustainable Development Chapters

In Kenya VSO has been supporting a network of Youth for Sustainable Development (YSD) Chapters. There are currently 10 county-based chapters across the country. The chapters bring young people together to promote inclusive policies and participation, focus on youth rights and youth friendly services and enhance access to employment and entrepreneurship activities.

VSO supports YSD chapters to carry out Participatory Action Research (PAR) to identify community needs, take part in citizen-led monitoring (CLM) and budget analysis, and develop their leadership and advocacy skills.

COVID-19 has impacted on planned trainings and expansion of the network but youth from the chapters have used their skills and partnerships to support both their communities and each other through online sensitisation, reaching out to vulnerable groups through food and sanitary donations and providing psychosocial support.

Health

COVID-19 is impacting young people's ability to access healthcare, especially antenatal clinics and SRH services. As countries' health systems focus on COVID-19, other areas of health are being neglected and people are more fearful of going to hospitals and clinics. In areas with pre-existing challenges around access to water, this has been amplified by increased water needs and restrictions on movement. The restrictions are increasing risks of Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as people are trapped at home. Young people are concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their own and others' mental health, due to both anxiety about the disease and how restrictions are disrupting livelihoods and normal coping mechanisms.

"Illness is considered the most important and very complicating issue we've been facing…people have been encouraged to visit the nearest hospital for earlier treatments. On the contrary, people have been so reluctant to go to the hospitals with the fear of been treated as COVID-19 patients." VIONet Member, Kenema, Sierra Leone

Education

The restrictions in all the countries included in this study have led to education disruption at all levels. In Sierra Leone and Kenya there are concerns about the impact on teenage pregnancy[4]. In Kenya, young girls' access to menstrual hygiene management materials has been impacted as they often get them at schools. Members of youth networks are themselves facing disruptions to university and college study, which is making them fear for their future.

Livelihoods

Disruption to livelihoods was a big concern for young people in all countries. The measures to contain COVID-19 have led to many people being unable to leave their house for day-to-day livelihood activities that they rely upon to support themselves and their families. This disruption is felt at all levels of the economy as businesses are forced to close and travel restrictions lead to inability of young people to take up opportunities elsewhere. For VSO, it is important to note that for young people in their networks this also meant lack of access to temporary employment as trainers and facilitators at VSO as well as limited opportunities with NGOs, which can come with an allowance or per diem.

"Most of my work is based on field work as I worked as a project officer to a CBO just a few weeks before Corona hit and I quit to explore new opportunities unfortunately Corona came and am left with no work as organisations have closed shop and are working from home." YSD Member, Kilifi County, Kenya

The difficulty of people abiding by the guidelines due to the need to make money and thereby get food is a challenge and people are hungry.

"Most of the people are experiencing hunger since it's hard to go out to buy food and other basic needs without a pass. And this also applies to those who don't have enough money to buy some groceries." YES Bangsamoro Member, the Philippines

Security challenges and vulnerability were also mentioned, with people reporting increased crime and domestic abuse as well as concerns about their own safety.

"There are increased family quarrels since the parents and the kids are home when cash flow is poor and demand is too high." YSD Member, Bungoma County, Kenya

"I am scared of COVID-19, it will not choose whether you are a volunteer or not, everyone is vulnerable." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, the Philippines

Young people who are part of VSO's networks are in many instances facing the same challenges as those they are trying to support or reach, especially in terms of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on their livelihoods.

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[4] During the Ebola outbreak school closures led to an increase in SGBV against girls and rates of teenage pregnancy see Save the Children 2015.

VSO Philippines working with YES Bangsamoro and U-Report

Report PHILIPPINES VOICE MATTERS

VSO Philippines in partnership with UNICEF and local partners support the Youth Engagement and Network Strengthening (YES) of the Bangsamoro Project and U-Report on the island of Mindanao. Prior to COVID-19, VSO trained members of 36 youth organisations on community organising and policy and advocacy skills.

Young leaders and their organisations are initiating their own relief efforts and sensitisation campaigns. They are also sharing their voice through U-Report polls providing important contextual information to influence decisions.

Youth leaders have come up with many innovative responses to COVID-19 and the restrictions including organising an online youth summit and social media campaigns to raise awareness and support frontline staff.

ACTIONS: How are VSO's youth networks responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Although all young people are facing the COVID-19 pandemic, different countries are responding in different ways, which means that young people are responding to different contexts. For example, lockdown in the Philippines has been very restrictive, and there are also differences across counties and regions in Kenya and Sierra Leone. Despite these differences, there are commonalities in how young people are responding across three areas: sensitisation about COVID-19 and support for national responses, addressing broader impact of COVID-19 restrictions, and advocacy and accountability.

1. Sensitisation about COVID-19 and support for response

Young people are carrying out online and offline sensitisation to make people aware of Coronavirus disease and provide people with information about how they can protect themselves.

Online sensitisation has included creating and sharing infographics in appropriate languages, sharing photos and videos of behaviour changes and encouraging compliance with restriction measures. Young people are working to address fake news and misinformation about COVID-19 to ensure young people and others have access to accurate information to help protect themselves, their families and their communities

In Kenya, YSD chapters started a social media campaign using #volunteersagainstCOVID19. The campaign went viral and other organisations started to use it, so they created a Kenya specific hashtag - #KEvolunteersagainstCOVID19. Over two weeks, the hashtag had 800K impressions sharing information and showing what volunteers can do to support their communities and each other.

Young people have creatively responded to the need for personal protective equipment (PPE), by making their own DIY protection in the form of face coverings for themselves, community members and, in some cases, frontline staff.

"In our organisation, we innovated a PPE Face Shield and Face Mask Cloth that we gave to the frontliner and health worker" YES Bangsamoro Member, Tawi-Tawi, The Philippines

"We have partnered with local tailors for them to make reusable cloth masks to give out to people." YSD Member, Taita Taveta County, Kenya

Some young people have also been able to contribute to official government responses through food distribution with the county government in Kenya, working with Sangguniang Kabataan (community-based youth component of a local government unit) in the Philippines and feeding into pillars of the government response in Sierra Leone.
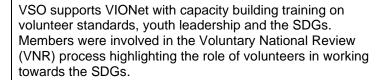
In the Philippines, young people have led a campaign to provide support for frontline healthcare staff. This has included providing chocolate and packed lunches.

"We have started a chocolate for frontliners campaign, chocolate is something romantic and we are doing this posting on social media and collecting chocolate for frontline staff" YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, The Philippines

VSO Sierra Leone and VIONet

VSO supports VIONet (Volunteer Involving Organisations' Network) in Sierra Leone. VIONet brings together young volunteers and VIOs to work together towards promoting volunteering and achieving sustainable development. VIONet is established in all regions of Sierra Leone and includes alumni from ICS.

VSO supports VIONet with capacity building training on volunteer standards, youth leadership and the SDGs. Members were involved in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process highlighting the role of volunteers in working towards the SDGs.

For the COVID-19 response, volunteers have been drawing upon the approaches learnt during the Ebola outbreak –working within their own communities to provide accurate information and address people's concerns.

Social inclusion

Young people are very aware that online sensitisation messages do not reach the most vulnerable and have come up with approaches to broaden the reach of their actions. In Kenya, a member of the YSD chapter in Nairobi described how they were trying to reach out to people who did not have access to online information.

"The people we would want to target are the marginalised and therefore may not have access to the internet. We are using linkages with existing organisations that are already doing something inside communities, to connect people on the ground with information."

YSD Member, Nairobi, Kenya

Radio has been an important medium in many communities to broaden the reach of sensitisation messages. In Sierra Leone, radio is an important means of communication and has much broader reach than online messages.

"We are providing sensitisation through radio discussion programmes and airing of jingles in different local languages to help raise the awareness of people on the prevention and key messaging on COVID-19." VIONet Member, Makeni, Northern Region, Sierra Leone

In the Philippines, a combined approach has been taken with radio complimenting other online approaches.

"For the locals in those community that we always reach, the grassroots community of Lanao del Norte, we always remind them to tune in their radio to our frequency so they can listen to our program. Also, we believe that once we go on Facebook live, our partners and/or our staffs' friends list will listen and watch our program since we share the live video once aired." YES Bangsamoro Member, the Philippines

Fighting fake news in the Philippines

"We create infographics to target fake news, which is rampant, the infographics show how to stop fake news spreading – you can be arrested in the Philippines for spreading fake news." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City

Young people in all countries identified the importance of providing messages in languages that people understand, and all were working towards this.

Other ways of increasing the reach of messages included the targeting of those most vulnerable due to their occupation – motorbike riders and market sellers in Kenya and Sierra Leone. Additionally, messages were shared with contacts in other parts of the country in Kenya to ensure sensitisation materials reached more remote communities – showing the importance of networks. In the Philippines, messages were printed and shared at community checkpoints to reach those not online.

There was variation in the use of online approaches, several YSD chapters in Kenya and YES Bangsamoro in the Philippines already had a strong social media presence, which may have enabled them to quickly pivot towards online sensitisation. In Sierra Leone, although WhatsApp is an important means of information dissemination radio and face-to-face communication are very important due to network challenges and data costs.

Online does not equal free. Online approaches and networks are valuable sources of information, but they are not always inclusive and come with their own costs as young people need a smart phone and data to both provide messages and access them.

"A big challenge for us moving forward is how to engage young people in this context – some youth have limited access and cannot go outside of their homes to buy cellular load and mobile data just to get connected online. And this can be frustrating to some: when you are at home without any internet access you feel alone and helpless." VSO Staff Member, the Philippines

2. Addressing impact of COVID-19 restrictions

Although the restrictions to address COVID-19 vary from country to country, they are all having an economic impact, especially on the most vulnerable and those working in the informal sector. Young people are also carrying out actions to address support people's livelihood, education and health needs.

Young people in Kenya introduced the 'adopt a family' initiative to provide vulnerable families with food and other supplies during lockdown. Food distribution has been a key response to supporting those who are impacted by the disruption to livelihoods. In addition, volunteers have carried out online fundraising campaigns to provide sanitary towels to girls who are missing out due to school closures.

Resilience

Another important avenue of support has been psychosocial, supporting resilience for vulnerable groups and young people as they navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A youth leader in Sierra Leone spoke about how his role in the community enabled him to provide support.

Adopt a family project in Bungoma County Kenya

"I have a role in counselling people, as a youth chairman in my community I can influence a lot of people" VIONet Member, Bo, Southern Region, Sierra Leone

In Kenya, young people have been providing psychosocial support to vulnerable groups in their community as well as supporting each other.

"We provide psychological counselling to the vulnerable, we send one social worker to each community and they follow the government protocols in terms of wearing a mask and sanitising." YSD Member, Bungoma County, Kenya

Young people supporting each other and raising awareness in Kenya

"Young people are providing psychological support to each other, these are not normal times, we are encouraging people to talk when they are stressed and find coping mechanisms such as going for a walk – mental health is a big challenge." YSD Member, Nairobi, Kenya

3. Advocacy and accountability

Another area where young people are taking action is in the area of advocacy and accountability.
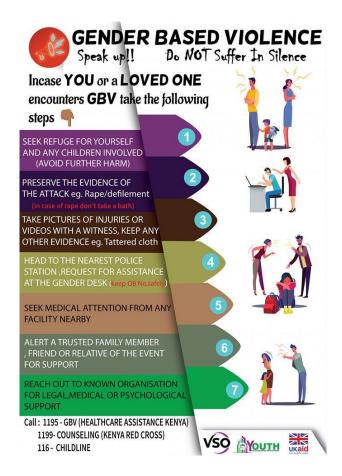
In Kenya, young people have been advocating for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the response as well as highlighting the increased impact of the restrictions on them. Young people have also been highlighting the increased risk of SGBV due to the COVID-19 restrictions and sharing avenues of support – see poster opposite.

In Sierra Leone, For Her (a member organisation of VIONet) has been advocating for girls' education and the risk of teenage pregnancy because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

In the Philippines young people have come together to share stories around the impact of COVID-19. This has been through U-Report but also through social media.

"I have been going to communities to gather stories from frontline and share on social media – the powerful thing to do right now is to share correct information and experiences on social media." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, The Philippines

Poster raising awareness and sharing information about SGBV in response to COVID-19 restrictions in Kenya

Young people have also come together to thank and support frontline healthcare staff through a social media campaign called "Thank You #Frontliners!".

Young people taking part in "Thank You #Frontliners!" social media campaign in the Philippines

Member of VIONet in Sierra Leone carrying out sensitisation in market in Bo, Southern region

"We cannot deny that some of us are experiencing multiple stages of panic, paranoia, fear, uncertainty and disbelief or even denial! 'How could this happen', or 'this could never happen to me'! It is happening to us, all of us, and all of us together. But mostly it's compounding the already uncertain future that young people face today! Young people can make change with their own initiatives, an opportunity to use social media as a tool for community therapy and communication with each other in a positive way and providing awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic, Unfortunately, fake news spreads so fast in times of uncertainty. So be responsible."

YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotabato City, The Philippines

APPROACHES: How are existing VSO approaches to working with communities being adapted to respond to the unique restrictions imposed by COVID-19?

Youth Leadership in The Philippines – Youth Action Summit

A Peaceful Day! SPARTAN, Check this out 👆 The Online SDG Youth Action Forum, in partnership with Tau-Social Peace Advocate of Tawi-Tawians Active Network (Tau-SPARTAN), and other youth organizations, would like to invite you to join the Online Filipino Youth Action Summit 2020 (#OFYAS2020) happening this May 08 - 10, 2020 through Facebook and Zoom! With the theme of "Filipino Youth Action in COVID-19", the summit aims to realise the Filipino youth's importance in contributing to the COVID-19 response.

"We organised an Online Filipino Action Summit our organisation is one of the active partners we are trying to get everyone to join us and register to the event." YES Bangsamoro Member, Tawi-Tawi

The training on community organisation, leadership and advocacy provided by VSO to youth networks have given young people the skills and capacity to innovatively respond to COVID-19, despite the adverse impact of the global pandemic on young people's lives. This shows in the innovative ways young people have provided sensitisation despite social distancing measures, as well as how young people have leveraged their networks and existing partners to respond to the pandemic and the impact of the restrictions. Young people also felt a strong need to respond as volunteers, showing that they see themselves as agents of change in their lives and their communities.

"My VSO experience helped me in the COVID-19 situation due to the training sessions, activities such as roleplay, I faced this pandemic case with no fear I used my skill in terms of leadership which I learned from the VSO during my training to lead my fellow youth to help fight against COVID-19."

YES Bangsamoro Member, Tawi-Tawi, The Philippines

What aspects of VSO's approaches remain relevant and important?

Youth leadership and voice

The importance of amplifying youth leadership and voice was common across all contexts, with examples of how young people are playing convening and engagement roles by bringing together and influencing other actors. Where youth networks had existing relationships with partners, including the government, they have been able to work with them effectively. This was especially true of relationships with the county government in Kenya.

"We are fairly new chapter that was recently formed but we leverage the network the YSD have with the county government as we have been involved in various county initiatives and some of us as part of the various county task forces and technical working groups." YSD Member, Kilifi County YSD, Kenya

"I proposed youth be trained by the government. A proposal which was approved by the county Government. We submitted the list on Saturday. Hopefully by the end of the week we will have organised the training." YSD Member, Makueni County YSD, Kenya

However, it seems that existing barriers to young people's participation in decision making and leadership remain and that it has sometimes been hard for young people to develop new networks and partnerships at this time, making it hard for them to make their voices heard. It may be that at times of crisis institutions and organisations have reverted to 'traditional' ways of working and bypassed broader engagement.

"The regulations set by government do not recognise the work of young people. The continuous lockdown and pass system tend to significantly limit the zealous work of young people." VIONet Member, Makeni, Northern Region, Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, there was a sense that young people, especially volunteers, were being excluded from the government response. In the Philippines, young people, including volunteers, were subject to enhanced security measures and were being arrested if they were caught outside after curfew.

"A lot of young people are being arrested as they are caught outside after curfew – there is a need for legal support for people to know their rights" YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, The Philippines

Although, young people have been able to take on leadership roles the barriers to their inclusion remain and may have been amplified in some instances by the crisis.

Community-led approaches

Another VSO approach that remains relevant is the importance of community-driven responses as opposed to top-down or centralised actions. Young people felt that they were better able to understand the needs of people within their own communities and were therefore in a good position to be able to respond to vulnerable groups with the support of other organisations or the government.

This was a concern in Sierra Leone, where experience from the Ebola outbreak had shown that messages need to come from people that community members trust and respect.

"We need to do sensitisation at grassroots level as it is there it will have impact" VIONet Member, Bo, Southern Region, Sierra Leone

"It could be used to support young people to play a role in sensitising people in their communities, people will listen to them. You will run or not listen to a policeman but if someone you respect tells you something you will listen to them. There needs to be massive youth engagement, including the voice of those who people will respect and listen to." VSO Staff Member, Kenya

The important role young people can play in influencing those around them and providing community leadership remains an important approach in terms of addressing COVID-19 and in the recovery process. However, this is not always being realised as governments resort to top-down measures to contain COVID-19.

Online activism

An approach that young people are using that has become and will remain important is online engagement and activism as a tool for information sharing and social accountability. Young people are also coming together and supporting each other in online spaces, as shown by social media campaigns run by young people in the Philippines and online conversations hosted by YSD chapters in Kenya. However, there were differences across countries, with this being more prevalent in Kenya and the Philippines. As these countries were already engaged in online interventions pre-COVID, they were positioned well to maximise doing so, as compared to Sierra Leone.

Platforms for online activism will be increasingly important as the world adjusts to COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines remain in place. However, all young people were also concerned about who was left behind from the use of online approaches.

> Online activism may become the norm but there are serious questions about inclusion and equity with the shift to online approaches to engaging with decision-makers and partners.

Asset-building and partnerships

The approach of building on (and the deployment of) existing assets of youth organisations and volunteers, including their skills, capacities, social networks and partnerships, have enabled them to remain empowered and energised to face and respond to the difficult circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people have made use of their skills, capacities and connections to initiate projects and initiatives to respond to local needs, shown by Online Filipino Action Summit which initiated by youth organisations that are part of the YES Bangsamoro network.

Collaboration and partnership have been important parts of this. Some youth networks have engaged with existing partners to provide services and collaborate in their response. In Kenya, for example, YSD chapters are working with The Red Cross and Childline for psychosocial support and, in Sierra Leone, the member organisations of VIONet are collaborating within their response and sharing information and knowledge to ensure sensitisation activities reach those in need in different regions of the country.

CHALLENGES: What are the key challenges VSO's youth volunteering networks face and how are they overcoming them?

The challenges that VSO's youth networks are facing divide into two segments. Firstly, challenges relating to young people's ability to respond and react to COVID-19, and secondly, challenges relating to broader COVID-19 concerns within countries and communities.

Youth network responses to COVID-19

Safety and security

Government restrictions

PPE access

Discrimination

Capacity and resources

Data and mobile networks

Transportation

Hygiene equipment

Partnerships and support

Access to networks

Training opportunities

Support to carry out work

Safety and security

A big concern for young people in all countries was safety and security of volunteers carrying out activities to sensitise communities to COVID-19 or to respond to the impact of restrictions.

"It has not been easy because we too ought to observe our safety. Getting accessibility to PPEs has been a big challenge owing to the fact that majority of our members are unemployed youths who offer themselves as volunteers in sensitization, hence purchasing PPEs to participate in emergency response team is difficult. Nevertheless, we have taken an initiative to purchase protective items that we can manage." YSD Member, Kisumu County, Kenya

Movement restrictions make it hard for young people to move about and carry out sensitisation safely. This is due to the threat of arrest and harassment. In the Philippines, there have been reports of young people being arrested for being outside after curfew, making the situation very challenging for young volunteers.

"A lot of young people are being arrested as they are caught outside after curfew – there is a need for legal support for people to know their rights." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, The Philippines

In addition, access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) has also been a barrier to young people carrying out voluntary work safely in all countries.

"Young people lack PPE to move out and assist in working in the community nor is there an assurance of any support." YSD Member, Machakos County, Kenya

In some places the mental health challenges young people are facing have been amplified by discrimination facing them due to the voluntary work that they are involved in. In Sierra Leone, there are reports of hostility from some communities towards volunteers, especially in the capital Freetown. Communities have also sometimes been sceptical of volunteer motivations, which puts young people in difficult positions.

"People are saying that the government has given us money to accept that Coronavirus disease is real." VIONet Member, Bo, Southern Region, Sierra Leone

In the Philippines, there were reports of discrimination towards volunteers from other community members.

"There is a problem with discrimination in the community, I go out and interview people, when I return people discriminate against me, it really hurts me, they tell me to go to the hospital and get tested, even though I know I have taken the correct precautions." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, The Philippines

The safety and security of young people is a challenging area for youth networks who are impacted by government restrictions, access to PPE and discrimination.

Capacity and resources

Young people felt they did not have access to enough resources to carry out the type of response that they felt was needed in their communities or the capacity to expand their existing activities. The types of resources required varied across contexts, but a key finding is that work in this area requires online connection to get access to information, this was true for both those carrying out online sensitisation and those working on the ground. The cost of data is a big barrier to connectivity and engagement.

"The challenge is how to support young people who have no access to internet or smartphones. How can information and engagement be given to them." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, The Philippines

This was also a concern for young people who had access to smartphones but whose livelihoods had been impacted and therefore were no longer able to afford airtime for data.

"Most contracts for community volunteers were ended thus there is no money, no support for some airtime to help in online sensitization." YSD Member, Machakos County, Kenya

Transport difficulties were raised in all countries, this was due to movement restrictions as already discussed but also related to the cost and availability of transport.

"Supporting ourselves to move from one center and boda boda shades to another requires fare and it's difficult for majority to acquire, hence reducing the number of reaching out to targeted individuals." YSD Member, Kisumu County, Kenya

Access to hygiene and sanitation materials was also seen as a challenge in all areas.

Young people often have the ideas and the will to carry out sensitisation activities or other interventions, but can be limited by their access to the appropriate equipment and materials – this included access to mobile data and transportation.

Partnerships and support

Young people faced challenges in building partnerships and garnering support for their work and youth organisations.

In Sierra Leone, young people were concerned about how the government framework and response to COVID-19 was restricting or limiting the activities of young people to support the response. There are young people who feel they are not adequately represented in the district Emergency Operations Centre for COVID-19. VSO staff expressed concern that sensitisation activities were not allowed to continue during lockdown, which was a prime time to able to reach people with important messaging about COVID-19. There is a pass system in operation in Sierra Leone, but it was judged to be not accessible to most young people as it focused mostly on politicians and medical personnel.

"The regulations set by government do not recognise the work of young people. The continuous lockdown and pass system tend to significantly limit the zealous work of young people." VIONet Member, Makeni, Northern Region, Sierra Leone

In some counties in Kenya, young people were unable to work in partnership with the county government, which limited the work they have been able to do.

"The county government does not seem ready to partner with us at this time – they have the money, but they are not partnering with groups working on the ground." YSD Member, Bungoma County, Kenya

"Youth are dynamic so hard to restrict them to one place, right now there is a lack of capacity to get into the county response team, but we have the knowledge of who needs help." YSD Member, Taita Taveta County, Kenya

In the Philippines young people identified lack of parental support as a challenge to young people's involvement in responding to COVID-19.

"Parents are sometimes unsupportive on activities being done outside the homes as young people should be staying at home—not doing relief outside." YES Bangsamoro Member, Brgy Sinulatan, The Philippines

Young people are facing challenges in ensuring their views are heard by other organisations and institutions, they are also facing barriers to finding support for their ideas and projects.

Tension between need to work with government and holding government to account
Young people are facing challenges in gaining representation within the government response to COVID-19, which is also limiting their ability to hold institutions to account for their actions and budgets. Those who are supporting the government response may also face barriers to their freedom to speak up and share their views due to restrictions on civil society and freedom of speech.

Broader challenges concerning spread of COVID-19

Alongside challenges faced by young people as they try to respond to the pandemic, both individually and within their organisations, young people have identified broader challenges in terms of reactions to COVID-19, which they fear are hampering efforts to contain the spread of the disease.

Behaviour change and beliefs about disease

All young people identified the challenges of misinformation about COVID-19 and the impact on providing appropriate messaging and people's adherence to public health guidance.

In both Kenya and Sierra Leone, young people identified people's lack of belief in the reality of COVID-19 as a key challenge to containing and responding to the pandemic.

"Many still believe that COVID-19 is manmade, so they don't respect for it, compliance rate to the precautionary measures is still a challenge." VIONet Member, Kenema, Eastern Region, Sierra Leone

"People in the villages. They still don't believe the virus exists." YSD Member, Makueni County Kenya

In the Philippines, the spread of fake news online was a concern for young people.

Young people identified the spread of misinformation and doubts about the reality of the disease as huge challenges to containing the pandemic.

Social inclusion – reaching out to the marginalised

Another related concern was who the messaging about COVID-19 was reaching. Young people are concerned that distant and remote communities are not being adequately targeted or reached by current sensitisation messages and approaches.

"One big challenge is the lack of the right messages about COVID-19, our organisations are more focus with interacting with the local people, and yet still these people hardly received the right messages on COVID-19, as a result of remoteness of these communities to get the radio discussion that goes on in the cities or towns." VIONet Member, Kenema, Eastern Region, Sierra Leone

"Some of the challenges in reaching people in terms of online platforms those from isolated areas with low signal or slow internet." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotabato City, the Philippines

SUGGESTIONS: What types of support would VSO's youth volunteering networks find useful to strengthen their work during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond?

Young people had lots of suggestions for how the work they are doing could be amplified as well as how they could be best supported going forward. Suggestions have been divided into those relating specifically to the COVID-19 response efforts of youth networks, and those relating to capacity and support for young people who are themselves being impacted negatively by the current situation.

Responses to COVID-19

Suggestions for how to respond included both areas where youth networks are already willing and ready to contribute and areas that need support or strengthening.

"Young people can play a very significant role by becoming champions of COVID-19 response, frontline soldiers in ending the fight, use their power and strength to debunk fake news which is another killer virus that's more dangerous that COVID-19 at the moment, young people becoming community volunteers at every community across the nation. But all these can be achieved if the government or donor partners empower them to do what's due them." VIONet Member, Kenema, Sierra Leone

Resources

One area of suggestions concerned immediate resource needs to carry out response activities. Items such as food relief, PPE and hygiene and sanitation materials were requested everywhere.

Alongside this were suggestions for support for young people to carry out activities relating to COVID-19 response. This included the means to do the work – through lunch and transport provision.

"Volunteers require some motivation to do their work in the form of lunch provision, they are also having to provide their own masks" YSD Member, Bungoma County, Kenya

Providing platforms and support for community level youth-led approaches

Young people know the challenges their communities are facing and how they can be overcome but they don't always have the avenues and networks to share and develop these ideas. This relates to youth-led approaches delivered at the community-level. In Sierra Leone, the importance of dialogue and community-led responses to sensitisation and awareness was suggested.

"Volunteers can target people in their own community using their local language, I am Fulah so I can speak with other Fulah people in their own language." VIONet Member, Bo, Southern Region, Sierra Leone

Young people also felt that they were able to respond quickly and had an awareness of those who are vulnerable in their communities, they just needed more partnerships and support to carry out sensitisation and relief work.

"Youth are creative and energetic we can go out there and respond before the government, we can do civic education, youth can identify those who are vulnerable and be involved in distribution of materials – young people are there but need partnership and support to do the work." YSD Member, Bungoma County, Kenya

Young people, especially in Kenya and Sierra Leone felt that more needed to be done to ensure youth representation within the response at the county or district level.

"We need to make young people part and parcel of this fight, so many committees but I tell you young people are not being involved – they need to be involved as change makers, creating platforms for them to lead and take responsibility." VSO staff member Kenya

Social accountability

One area where young people felt they needed support was in the area of social accountability. This relates to issues of representation in decision-making spaces within the response and to budgetary oversight and concerns with how resources are being spent by the government and other partners. This was a concern in Kenya and Sierra Leone.

"We need more social accountability at the national and county government level, how is the government spending money? They are spending 1 billion shillings a day, but what we are seeing doesn't make sense." YSD Member, Nairobi, Kenya

Combatting spread of fake news and maximising online platforms

Fake news was a challenge in all countries and most young people felt that this was an area where young people could have real impact, but they suggested they needed support and training on how to do this effectively and how to maximise the use of online platforms to connect and respond.

Support for youth networks

Young people also had a lot of suggestions for how youth networks could be supported and strengthened not just in terms of how they are responding to COVID-19 but going forward – seeing an opportunity for amplifying youth leadership and voice in the response and recovery.

Impact of COVID-19 on young people

Young people who are part of VSO's youth networks are themselves being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of the restrictions and limits that have been placed on their lives and the broader economic and health implications. Young people said that their needs must be acknowledged as well.

They are requesting psychosocial support to respond to the mental health impact of the changes that have happened over the last few months. This was especially felt by those who had stated instances of discrimination and other personal challenges arising from the restrictions.

"Concerning discrimination, there is the need for some kind of psychosocial intervention, talking with other people, to stay motivated and positive." YES Bangsamoro Member, Cotobato City, the Philippines

Additionally, young people state that more support is needed for volunteers in the area of livelihoods across all countries. In Kenya, young people were concerned about the loss of income from existing volunteering roles, and freelance work in the NGO sector. The example of VSO's use of freelance trainers came up, with a suggestion that training be moved online, and facilitators and trainers continue to be contracted to deliver services.

Sharing training and development opportunities

Young people were keen to use the current situation as an opportunity to learn new things and develop themselves to adapt to a different future and build their resilience. It was suggested that VSO should invest in its online training capacity to enable continued support and opportunities for young people in the future, especially if disease outbreaks become more commonplace and something society must learn to adapt to.

"For all the youth volunteers here in Tawi-Tawi, were hoping that after this COVID-19 that VSO will do more seminars and training for the youth for us to become ready in all disaster and pandemic diseases like COVID-19." YES Bangsamoro Member, Tawi-Tawi, the Philippines

Young people want to come together and contribute towards plans for resilience and recovery.

"People are going to continue to suffer, we need a plan for the future, for how to push on and protect the vulnerable as epidemics like this continue." YSD Member, Bungoma County, Kenya

In addition, young people want VSO to connect and share opportunities for learning and sharing their experiences through online conferences, webinars and other platforms.

Opportunity for amplifying youth networks leadership and voice

Although young people acknowledged the specific need for youth leadership in the COVID-19 response, they also requested taking the opportunity to amplify youth leadership in the development process more broadly by bringing young people together to share and develop ideas for the future.

"Volunteers can be supported by providing them knowledge. Acknowledging them and as young people you can support us by sharpening our ideas through engagements in programmes that let them share their ideas in the situation. Youth now can be a role model. Developing us can make big impact in the future." YES Bangsamoro Member, the Philippines

Suggestions for how to achieve this included bringing young people from different parts of the country together virtually to share ideas and develop their voice. Another is for VSO to support young people with opportunities and platforms provided by other organisations and institutions to share their ideas and drive change.

> Young people are ready and prepared to volunteer to respond to COVID-19 but they are also tired of only being called upon in times of crisis when their actions are needed to support government and other partners. They want to use this as an opportunity for broader recognition and representation of young people as leaders in the development process.

Examples from other countries

In addition to the countries included in the sample, evidence is emerging from other countries of how young people are designing and supporting initiatives to share accurate information about COVID-19 and address the impact of restrictions. The three examples below provide further evidence of how young people are using online approaches, addressing livelihood needs and ensuring social inclusion.

Bangladesh – youth mobilising online networks against COVID-19
In Bangladesh, the National Youth Engagement network (NYEN) has come together online to share information on vulnerable areas and available support. They have connected 600 volunteers through their online knowledge platform, who are running an online awareness campaign for COVID-19. Volunteers are able to share relevant information with each other and learn from each other's initiatives in different areas.

This online approach is accompanied by on-the-ground distribution of relief materials by members of the NYEN.

Tanzania – supporting youth entrepreneurship during COVID-19
In Tanzania, the National Youth Engagement Network (NYEN) has come together through a radio show to discuss the economic impact of COVID-19 and explore potential livelihood opportunities to address it.

Jamila from Zanzibar who represented persons with disabilities (PWDs) and Zanzibar Youth Council said, "We need technical training on producing local sanitisers, soap and masks which can be sold cheaper than imported and many people can afford". Hellen, a NYEN member in Mwanza, said that "We need to think very well during COVID-19 and do things we love most especially those help us earn money such as food delivery, typing, writing stories and songs".

VSO is providing training for SMEs (many run by youth) to make soap, hand sanitiser and masks, which will be sold at affordable prices to enable people to protect themselves against COVID-19.

Malawi – youth supporting an inclusive COVID-19 response
In Malawi, VSO's youth networks are making sure that PWDs are included in the response through community outreach campaigns in targeted districts. VSO's Youth Champions worked alongside district youth officers and technical specialists such as sign language translators to ensure PWDs get the right information about COVID-19 to keep themselves and their communities safe.

Findings conclusion

Young people are impacted negatively by COVID-19 and the restrictions that have been put in place to address it. Their ability to make a living is being affected as is access to healthcare and education. The mental health impact of restrictions is a real concern.

Young people are taking action, using technology in innovative ways to bring together online and offline elements to support their communities with accurate information about COVID-19 and how to protect themselves and their families. They are using their online influence to identify fake news and avoid the spread of misinformation, and using technology to collaborate, fundraise and address the broader impacts of COVID-19 disruption.

Young people are using a collaborative approach, leveraging existing networks and partnerships to provide sensitisation and address impact of restrictions through relief and hygiene materials. They are also networking and sharing opportunities with others via online platforms.

Young people are supporting each other to build resilience, through the uncertainty and stress caused by the global pandemic, learning from each other and trying to stay connected.

Young people are raising their voices and showing leadership, they are highlighting how the response to COVID-19 could be improved especially in terms of social inclusion. They are demanding representation within the COVID-19 response. They are talking about the negative impact of the restrictions on young people's lives and sharing ideas for how to address it.

Young people are demanding recognition of the work they are doing and requesting representation and support so that they can do even more.

Young people and their organisations are pivoting to respond to COVID-19 whilst also drawing attention to ongoing development needs and demanding to be part of a different future as leaders of development in their communities and countries.

Young people are concerned about who is being left behind in the move to online engagement. Access to networks and data is a problem for many and limits how they can contribute and stay informed. They also worry that the most marginalised will be further left behind by shifts to online training as opposed to face-to-face meetings.

Young people are facing challenges in ensuring their views are heard by other organisations and institutions. They are facing barriers to finding support for their ideas and projects and are struggling to build partnerships and have influence where relationships with government, institutions and organisations are not strong, especially when institutions are in crisis mode and unwilling to open up platforms for contribution and decision-making.

Young people see an opportunity to amplify and strengthen youth leadership in development. The actions young people are taking need to be highlighted and their initiatives supported as they design and build a better future to recover from COVID-19, with acknowledgement of the impact crisis has had on young people themselves.

Recommendations for VSO

Policy and advocacy

- Provide platforms for bringing young people together to develop and share their ideas for COVID-19 response and recovery.

- Bring young people together with government stakeholders and other partners to push for greater inclusion of youth voice in COVID-19 response and other development efforts.

- Develop work around online engagement and activism – thinking about how VSO can best support such efforts whilst also being mindful of who may be left out of such approaches.

- Answer the question of what happens next. Supporting young people to take up leadership and share their voice to shape a changed and hopefully better world. Looking specifically at how online engagement can advance social accountability work.

- Look at ways to bring youth together from different countries to share experiences and learning and to develop ideas.

Programming

- COVID-19 response:

  o Supporting the role of young people in addressing dis-information, both the spread of fake news online and rumours and beliefs offline.

  o Focusing on social inclusion by extending the reach of online sensitisation through innovative partnerships with community volunteers and other partners who know who is vulnerable and are more likely to be trusted.

  o Recognising the impact of COVID-19 on young people themselves – blurred boundaries between advocates, agents of change and primary actors. Responding to mental and physical health needs of young people in VSO's networks.

  o Measures to address the safety and security concerns of young people in VSO's networks.

  o Continue to build the capacity of young people to meaningfully engage in disaster response mechanisms at local and national level, this also includes capacity for engaging in accountability in times of disaster

- The 'traditional' VSO programmatic approaches of bringing people together physically to learn from each other may no longer be viable. Programming needs to work with young people to develop alternatives. VSO will need to invest in online training capacity and think about innovative ways to get around the cost of online engagement and include those who may be left behind by such approaches.

- Reflect upon how our livelihood programmes are reaching those who need them most. Exploring immediate areas to intervene to ensure resilience to the economic shock of COVID-19.

- VSO needs to double-down on its commitment to involving youth networks in programme design, supporting young people to work with stakeholders and other decision-makers to put young people in leadership positions for development at the community, national and international level.

Research approaches

- Youth networks can gather evidence and voices to understand deeply how the lives of youth and/or other vulnerable groups are affected and start thinking about interventions that can support resilience-building efforts towards a different future.

- Developing youth-led research approaches using appropriate online and offline methods, giving youth networks the skills to deliver their own youth-led research projects addressing issues that concern them and designing for COVID-19 recovery.

The findings support the creation of platforms to amplify youth leadership within COVID-19 response and recovery. Recommendations are to support young people's advocacy and accountability efforts, develop effective programmes to support youth networks in COVID-19 response and recovery, and drive youth-led research approaches. Data was only collected in three countries, but there are likely to be areas of similarity across other contexts. This work is being built upon through a global youth insights and story gathering projects to understand how young people are experiencing and responding to COVID-19.

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Annexe 1: Analysis framework

Impacts

- Effect of COVID-19 and Coronavirus disease
  - Access to healthcare
- Impact of restrictions in place to limit spread of COVID-19
  - Education interruption
  - Loss of livelihood
  - Disruption of other development work
  - SGBV
  - Mental health needs
- Who is impacted most?
  - PWDs and other vulnerabilities
  - Youth
  - Women and girls

Actions

- Sensitisation and awareness about COVID-19
  - Online campaigns
    — Addressing fake news
  - Face-to-face awareness
    — Distribution of information and protective and hygiene equipment
  - Radio awareness raising
- Addressing impact of COVID-19 restrictions
  - Service delivery – food distribution
    - Psychosocial support

- Fundraising
- **Advocacy and voice**
  - Communicating stories and experiences
  - Working towards social accountability
  - Creating platforms for connection and sharing
  - Support for frontline staff

Approaches

- Collaborative working with partners
  - Government support
  - Working with young people as partners
- Community-led response efforts
  - Working with local leaders
  - Youth supporting local response
- Youth leadership and voice
  - Social accountability
  - Networks for developing ideas and sharing experiences

Challenges

- Youth networks response
  - Capacity and resources
  - Network and data access
  - Resources to carry out work
  - Transportation
- Safety and security
  - Access to PPE
  - Discrimination against volunteers
  - Movement restrictions
- Partnerships and support
  - Unequal partnerships
  - Lack of access to opportunities
- Broader COVID-19 concerns
  - Fake news and miss-information
  - Inclusion and reaching those not online

Suggestions

- COVID-19 response
  - Resources such as transport, lunch provision and hygiene equipment
  - Recognition and platforms for youth to respond at community-level
  - Ensuring social accountability of response
  - Addressing spread of fake news and maximizing online engagement
- Support for youth networks
  - Sharing livelihood opportunities
  - Psychosocial support
  - Access to development and training opportunities
  - Amplifying leadership and voice of young people