



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

The world has changed with the emergence of COVID-19, with unprecedented impact on people's lives across the world. The innovation and creativity of young people's responses to COVID-19 ought to be recognised and harnessed, and their own vulnerability to the health, social educational and economic effects of the crisis addressed.



This report shares findings from rapid research aimed at exploring the **impact, actions, approaches, challenges** and **suggestions** of VSO's youth networks in response to COVID-19 across three countries: Kenya, the Philippines and Sierra Leone.

Key findings include:

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

Young people are taking action, using technology in innovative ways.

Young people are collaborating and leveraging existing networks.

Young people are supporting each other to build resilience during the crisis

Young people are pivoting to respond to COVID-19 while drawing attention to ongoing development needs.

Young people are raising their voices and showing leadership, highlighting how the response could be improved.

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

Young people are concerned about who is being left behind in the move to online engagement.

Young people are facing challenges having their views heard by and finding support for their ideas.

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

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

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.



Health

- Access to healthcare, especially antenatal clinics and SRH services.
- Increased fear of hospitals and clinics.
- Mental health challenges.
- Increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Increased water needs.



Education

- Disruption to education at all levels.
- Increased risk towards teenage pregnancy.
- Limited access to menstrual hygiene management materials for girls.
- Disruptions to university and college study.



Livelihoods

- Businesses forced to close.
- Travel restrictions limit access to opportunities.
- Difficulty abiding by guidelines and meeting basic needs.
- Increased crime, domestic violence and personal safety concerns.
- Lack of employment at VSO.

ACTIONS: How are young people responding?

Young people are taking action, using technology in innovative ways to bring together online and offline elements to support their communities with accurate information and identify fake news.

Sensitisation

- Creating and sharing media spreading awareness and information.
- Addressing fake news and misinformation.
- Creating and distributing homemade PPE.

Resilience

- Supporting the most vulnerable communities with their immediate needs.
- Distributing food and hygiene products.
- Providing psychosocial support to vulnerable groups and each other.

Social inclusion

- Increasing awareness of limited access to online resources
- Using radio to broaden reach and providing messages in local languages, using networks in remote communities.
- Varying online/offline approaches in response to network challenges and data costs.

Advocacy and accountability

- Advocating for inclusion of people with disabilities and supporting girls' education.
- Highlighting the increased risk of SGBV and teenage pregnancy.
- Campaigning to thank and support frontline healthcare staff through social media campaigns



Online activism may become the norm but there are serious questions about inclusion and equity in engaging with decision-makers and partners.

APPROACHES: How are young people supporting themselves and others?

VSO's role is as a convener, providing platforms through which young people can engage and have their needs and concerns heard by decision-makers, organisations and institutions. Young people are embracing this collaborative approach, leveraging these platforms to provide sensitisation and address impact of restrictions through relief and hygiene materials.

Youth leadership and voice

- Amplifying youth leadership and voice with young people in convening roles.
- Collaborating effectively where relationships with partners exist.
- Advocating for youth leadership & representation at every level

Online activism

- Using online engagement and activism as a tool for information sharing, social accountability and mutual support.
- Recognising online platforms will be increasingly important in a post-COVID-19 world.
- Raising concerns about those excluded from online spaces and how to ensure their inclusion.

Community-led approaches

- Recognising young people's ability to understand the needs of people within their own communities.
- Understanding the value of trust building and leading/promoting on community-led actions
- Complementing the common top-down approaches followed by governments to contain COVID-19

Asset-building and partnerships

- Using and building on existing assets of youth organisations and volunteers.
- Using their skills, capacities and connections to initiate projects and initiatives.
- Some have engaged with existing partners but many young people, especially volunteers, feel excluded from the government response

CHALLENGES: What difficulties are young people facing?

Young people are facing challenges in ensuring their views are heard by other organisations



Safety and security

- Government restrictions including threat of arrest and harassment.
- Limited access to appropriate PPE.
- Mental health impact and discrimination against young volunteers.

Capacity and resources

- Data and mobile network access and affordability.
- Movement restrictions and cost and availability of transport.
- Access to hygiene and sanitation materials.

Partnerships and support

- Challenges accessing networks, building partnerships and finding support for their ideas and projects.
- Lack of parental support.
- Lack of access to training opportunities

COVID and youth volunteers

Young people who are part of VSO's youth networks often face the same challenges as those they are trying to support and their needs must be acknowledged too. VSO can support them through:

Psychosocial support: to respond to the mental health impact of the crisis.

Secure livelihoods: Acknowledge concerns for loss of income from volunteering and freelance roles, moving training online so facilitators can continue to be contracted to deliver services.

Learning opportunities: Invest in online training to support learning and contribution to resilience and recovery strategy.

Future development: Take the opportunity to amplify youth leadership in the development process more broadly, acting as convener for young people to and other organisations and

SUGGESTIONS: How can we amplify and support their work?

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

Resources

- Items such as food relief, PPE and hygiene and sanitation materials.
- Support and provision of means to do the work – such as lunch and transport.

Providing platforms and support

- Strengthening youth networks to position well for advocacy and influence actions.
- Partnerships and support to lead sensitisation and relief work.
- Better youth representation at the county or district level.

Social accountability

- Better youth representation in decision-making spaces.
- Oversight of budget and resource spend by governments and other partners, and promote demand for accountability on digital inclusion policies and actions

Online spaces

- Support and training in online advocacy and using online platforms to connect.
- Support and training in spotting and combatting fake news

Recommendations for VSO

The findings support the creation of platforms to amplify youth leadership within COVID-19 response and recovery, 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.



Young people are ready to respond to COVID-19, but they are also tired of only being called upon in times of crisis. They want to use this as an opportunity for broader recognition and representation of young people as leaders in the development process.

Policy and advocacy

- Provide platforms to bring young people together with each other and with governments and partners to push for youth inclusion of COVID-19 response and broader development.
- Develop online engagement and activism – thinking about how VSO can best support efforts and mindful of those left out.
- Support young people to take up leadership and share their voice to shape a changed and hopefully better world.

COVID-19 response

- Support young people in addressing dis-information online and offline. Focus on social inclusion by extending online reach.
- Recognise the impact of COVID-19 on young people themselves. Take measures to address the safety and security concerns of young people in VSO's networks.
- Continue to build the capacity of young people to meaningfully engage in disaster response. Work with young people to develop alternatives to 'traditional' approaches. Invest in inclusive online training capacity.

Programming

- 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.
- Double-down on 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.

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.



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.