



## 4. YOUTH CONSIDERATIONS IN THE ACTIVITY DESIGN STAGE

As the project design process progresses to activity design, youth considerations will likely need to be examined in greater detail. See Figure 1 and Table 3 (above) on how to conduct a youth analysis for activity design.

### 4.1 Utilizing a Positive Youth Development Lens and Approach

Before digging into an activity design, think through how aspects of a PYD approach can be incorporated from a youth inclusion perspective. This subsection reviews some basic PYD concepts; additional information can be found in Volume II of this guide.

Effective youth programming draws upon the evidence-based PYD approach which intentionally increases youth capacity in four key domains: assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment.

Youth are often characterized by the relative “**assets**” that they possess, defined as “the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.”<sup>21</sup> External assets include the ownership of or access to natural resources (water, land, energy, etc.), physical assets (equipment, inputs, facilities, housing, technology), financing, education and skills training, information, personal support systems (family, community members, peers), and networks. Moreover, research shows that youth with relatively high developmental assets—soft skills such as positive self-concept, self-control, higher order thinking skills, communications, and social skills—are more likely to achieve positive outcomes in the workforce, in violence prevention, and in sexual and reproductive health.<sup>22</sup> Many of these assets are interlinked; for example, when women have lower literacy rates, limited mobility, or limited membership in associations, they also have disproportionately lower access to agricultural inputs, technology, and information.

The relative assets of the target youth cohorts must be compared to those that are necessary to achieve intended activity results. For example, a young person likely to make a meaningful contribution to an agribusiness competitiveness activity must have the capacity to easily acquire entrepreneurial or technical skills (or both) and productive assets such as land, capital, vehicles, or machinery; he/she must also have the soft skills and personal agency necessary to take advantage of these resources. Such requirements are distinct from a poverty reduction activity where the youth may lack experience, soft skills, and/or access to external resources to succeed in a competitiveness activity. Youth sub-groups with relatively few assets need more support in order to succeed. It is also important to recognize the external factors that limit the attainment of assets, such as exposure to conflict and/or violence (personal or community-based) that threatens physical safety, disrupts education, causes health and psycho-social problems, or breaks down personal networks and supports. Poverty also creates similar limitations.



Importantly, youth must also have “**agency**” to exert and take advantage of these assets to achieve desired outcomes.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes simply being considered “youth” can inhibit participation because of cultural norms that limit the role of youth in society. Young people—particularly girls—are often excluded from household-level and/or economic decision-making. Exclusion due to gender, race, religion, or other social and cultural factors can also prohibit youth from attaining assets or exercising agency.

“**Contribution**” means that youth are engaged as a source of change for their positive development and that of their community. Efforts to increase youth contribution to the agri-food system often promote youth-led community service (such as 4H or environmental volunteerism), youth-led advocacy, or youth microenterprises. Meanwhile, a supportive “**enabling environment**” is one in which peers, families, communities, institutions, laws/regulations, and norms support youth success. Volume II of this guide provides greater detail on the salient factors promoting an enabling environment for youth in the agri-food system.

Building off of these four PYD domains, research shows that activities that intentionally include youth can magnify youth outcomes when they address seven key PYD features. Several features help to define which activities can be incorporated within each of the four domains. These features, organized by domains, are as follows:

- Assets and Agency
  - › Skill building
- Contribution
  - › Youth engagement and contribution
- Enabling Environment
  - › Healthy relationships and bonding
  - › Belonging and membership
  - › Positive norms, expectations, and perceptions
  - › Safe space
  - › Access and integration among services

Refer to Volume II for more detail.



In extremely gender-sensitive or imbalanced contexts, consider the appropriateness of sex-segregated interventions. A youth-sensitive gender analysis (Annex 4) will reveal differences in female and male youth’s needs, constraints, and opportunities with respect to agriculture, food systems, resilience capacities, and nutrition, and will show the influence of traditional social and gender roles and norms on youth engagement in food systems.





**TIP:** Youth who are considered “vulnerable”—those possessing relatively few external and developmental assets—require a higher level of wrap-around services that allow them to achieve activity results. During design, Missions are advised to:

- Undertake a youth analysis that examines youth cohorts disaggregated by gender
- Budget for and/or coordinate with activities that develop youths’ internal assets, such as soft skills training, accelerated education programs (literacy/numeracy), mentoring, experiential learning, community engagement, caregiver and peer supports, and cross-sectoral supports
- Budget for and/or coordinate with activities that give youth access to important agricultural assets such as finance, land, services, information, and value chain networks
- Incorporate goals that move youth along a continuum of asset attainment and ability to exercise agency, particularly through a gender lens. Design a monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) plan that measures progress in the attainment of developmental assets (refer to PYD Measurement Toolkit)
- Establish numerical indicator targets that are appropriate to the youth cohorts (see below)



## 4.2 Youth Engagement in the Activity Design Process

**Youth Engagement:** Whether an activity undertakes a youth mainstreaming or youth-specific approach, **youth should meaningfully participate in all stages of the design process.** Youth participation ensures that young men and women make meaningful contributions to the USAID objectives that are relevant to them. Because youth are a diverse group with a similarly diverse array of needs, it is critical that youth involved at the design stage are broadly representative of the youth cohorts targeted by the activity (refer to [Section 3.2](#) on defining youth cohorts). The following chart presents ideas for engaging youth at the design, award, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages.

