



EVALUATION OF MEANINGFUL & INCLUSIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION (MIYP) IN CENTRAL OPERATIONAL RESEARCH

POWER TO YOUTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | AUGUST 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the process and results of training and engaging young people as co-researchers in central operational research in the Power to You(th) programme in 6 countries. The purpose of this evaluation is to learn what, according to the young co-researchers, enabled or hampered them to participate meaningfully in the central operational research. The primary purpose of this report is for sharing and learning within the Power to You(th) consortium. The results are used to formulate recommendations for future research projects and youth engagement strategies and to contribute to the knowledge base on meaningful and inclusive youth participation (MIYP) in research.

Evaluation Objectives

1. To learn what, in the perspectives of young researchers, enabled them to participate as researchers in a meaningful way and what elements of the process hampered this.
2. To test and validate central assumptions on drivers for successful youth engagement in research and strengthen the theoretical understanding of MIYP in research.
3. To develop clear recommendations for future MIYP in research.
4. To support the development of a Young Researchers Network and its activities.
5. To share results, insights and recommendations with and by young researchers at the PtY learning festival and other conferences/events in 2025.

"We are confident facing the authorities now, and they invite us to meetings. This is very beneficial from this research."

– Senegal, male researcher, 22

"As a young person, it's easier to voice out your feelings on certain aspects when you have the evidence of what is really happening."

– Malawi, female researcher, 25

Evaluation Research Questions

This evaluation aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What enables young people to meaningfully engage as co-researchers?
2. What are key challenges and how can these be addressed / overcome?

Methodology

Group interviews with young researchers from all COR countries were conducted online through Microsoft Teams and Zoom in February and March 2025. The interviews were semi-structured, using open-ended questions, while allowing ample space for the young researchers to steer the direction

of the conversation. The interviews were conducted by researchers from the COR coordinating team at Rutgers with whom the young researchers were already familiar through the project. The interviews in French were conducted in collaboration with a translator. A total of 9 group interviews were conducted with a total of 36 young researchers who volunteered to participate in this evaluation. The ages of the young researchers ranged from 22 to 31 years old.

"This research gives legitimacy to the work we are doing. Before, people thought we were just talking without evidence. Now we have a reference point that will continue to spark conversations and push for stronger laws."

– Ghana, male researcher, 27

Findings and Discussion Highlights

The evaluation demonstrated both the transformative potential and the practical challenges of engaging young people as co-researchers in the Power to You(th) programme.

- **Motivation & Empowerment:** Young researchers were strongly motivated by opportunities for skills development, career growth, and contributing to social change. Their involvement boosted confidence, created role models in communities, and deepened understanding of SRHR and GBV issues. Empowerment was strongest when youth were engaged in all phases of research, from design to dissemination. Conversely, limited involvement, time pressure, or poor follow-up sometimes could have a disempowering effect. Having youth in coordination roles helped mitigate power imbalances.
- **Capacity & Support:** Training, peer-to-peer learning, daily debriefs, and senior mentorship were critical for building skills, ensuring research quality, and providing emotional support. Teamwork enhanced confidence and mutual learning, while consultants played a decisive role: those who understood MIYP principles fostered meaningful engagement, while others who had a limited understanding of MIYP risked undermining it.
- **Quality of Data:** Peer-to-peer approaches built trust, especially around sensitive topics, generating richer and more authentic insights. When youth shaped research tools and methods, ownership and data quality improved. Where tools were not adapted to local contexts or translated appropriately, data collection was hindered. Participation in analysis and reporting strengthened young researchers' ownership and skills, though its effect on report quality was less evident.
- **Representation:** Although most youth researchers were already active in PtY, they successfully created safe spaces for peers to share lived experiences. Their authentic engagement in follow-up advocacy and dissemination allowed them to represent marginalized voices with credibility and passion.

- **Action Effect:** Participation was described as "eye-opening", giving youth deeper insights into diverse community realities and inspiring action. The COR process raised awareness of SRHR and GBV, helped break taboos, and created new opportunities for youth engagement with authorities. In some cases, it influenced local policies and accountability structures. Young researchers stressed that sustained opportunities to follow up on recommendations would enhance long-term impact.
- **Challenges:** Persistent barriers included time constraints, weak communication with consultants, logistical and technical difficulties (e.g., transport, devices, software), and limited youth involvement in design and report-writing stages. Power dynamics with authorities also restricted young researchers' access and influence.

"I think it also has an impact on the research that we interview the young people, to use peer-to-peer... they were openly discussing with us and giving information freely."

– Ethiopia, female researcher, 25

Recommendations

1. **Value MIYP as a driver of empowerment, data quality, and social change.**
2. **Plan sufficient time and resources** for youth to engage fully across all research stages, including design, data analysis, and reporting.
3. **Select supportive leadership**—consultants and coordinators must understand and facilitate meaningful youth engagement.
4. **Provide adequate tools and resources**, including laptops, analysis software, transport, and timely compensation.
5. **Strengthen logistics and communication**, with clear schedules, advance planning, and consistent feedback loops.
6. **Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and senior mentorship**, using daily debriefs and continuous support, especially during fieldwork.
7. **Create opportunities for youth to research beyond their own communities** to foster broader learning and perspectives.
8. **Develop long-term engagement plans** so young researchers can follow up on findings and continue advocacy, ensuring MIYP is not a one-off experience.

"Through the research, we were finally able to push the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Bill through in our county. That makes me very proud."

– Kenya, female researcher, 31

