



# Youth

Capability Statement  
July 2015



# Youth

---

VSO has worked with and through youth globally for over twenty years. This work has included programmes involving international, team-based, long-term specialist and community youth volunteers as well as a broad range of programmes targeted at youth around vocational training, adolescent sexual and reproductive health and inclusive governance.

Through this rich history VSO has gained experience and expertise in effectively engaging youth in the development process which has led to greater development results.

## Who are youth?

VSO recognises that youth is a variable term used in different contexts to describe individuals based on age, gender, family and societal position. Rather than a defined age range, VSO defines youth as the time during which one transitions from child to adult. In some cultures this can be age related, in others it may be when one leaves the family home or marries or has children. VSO also recognises that youth are not homogenous. Even within the same community, youth represent a diverse group and there is no one-size fits all approach to engaging and effectively working with youth.

## Why do youth participate in our work?

Youth are critical to and for development. Development programmes must consider and involve youth because half the world's population is under 30 years old. In addition to that, youth often experience severe marginalisation, exclusion and poverty.

- Youth unemployment is rising as is underemployment with 40% of youth in Sub-Saharan Africa considered in working poverty earning less than \$1.25 per day, and rising to 60% for those earning less than \$2 per day.<sup>1</sup>
- While worldwide HIV rates have dropped, youth 15-24 years account globally for 40% of new cases.<sup>2</sup> Maternal and child health issues, such as early child birth, are prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa where 46% of girls are married by the age of 18.
- Youth are often excluded from family, community and national decision making due to age or lack of position (not having an income, not having a home and spouse or children) which can increase marginalisation and lack of power.

Youth participation adds value to programmes which contribute to greater development results. While issues of exclusion and marginalisation for youth are very real and require change, youth also represent great opportunity as they are often best positioned to create and contribute to large scale and sustainable change. As the largest demographic, positive changes in behaviour and attitudes of youth today can spread and be sustained as they grow into adulthood and into positions of greater responsibility and influence.

VSO works with youth as assets and agents for change, and believes their involvement in programme design is for

programme effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability. This includes programmes aimed at supporting change for youth themselves (reduced exclusion, increased employment, increased voice and participation in governance), and programmes which directly involve young people in creating change within their communities as volunteers.

Youth volunteers positively contribute to programme delivery through building inclusive networks and relationships which increase social capital and community cohesion, strengthen intergenerational, gender, class and local government relations, and contribute towards building a spirit of social action within communities. Youth volunteers bring energy, innovation and enthusiasm to programmes motivating others to take action and challenge the status quo. Youth volunteers also bring to VSO programmes skills and abilities essential for achieving change such as peer education, action research, and community awareness raising.

VSO also recognises that youth themselves benefit from participating in development. Youth gain increased skills for employment, leadership development, change in attitudes and knowledge, and improved perception and recognition of young people within communities as a result of contributing to development. VSO recognises that these benefits don't often come by chance, rather result from intentional programme design and support, and that youth personal development is a core part of VSO's methodology and approach to change within youth-involving programmes.

## How do youth participate in our work?

As stakeholders, VSO works with youth as primary actors, advocates, and decision-makers in research, design, development and review of programmes at community, national and international levels. VSO has experience and expertise in working in communities to engage marginalised youth, listen and respond to their input, and involve them meaningfully in processes.

As volunteers, VSO works through youth at community, national and international levels.<sup>3</sup> VSO has a strong history of supporting youth to contribute to development results through volunteering and developing as leaders through structured support on and after placement.

Organisationally, VSO integrates youth into thematic programmes, supports youth to participate effectively, and involves youth in programme design. VSO recognises that programming with youth is often distinctive, requiring specific experience and skills, design features and support mechanisms which VSO has developed and which set the standard for youth participation in development.

## What we want to evidence

Over the next year VSO will work to better understand and evidence the contribution that youth can make to development outcomes, as well as how to work with youth in ways that are most equitable, effective, efficient and economical.

1. ILO "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013: A generation at risk." 2013

2. USAID, "Youth in Development Policy: Realizing the Demographic Opportunity." 2012

3. Stakeholders and volunteers are not exclusive of one another as within a programme the same young people may be both simultaneously, or transition from one to the other.

# Nepal

Project name  
**International Citizen Service (ICS)  
Baglung Health**

Sector focus area  
**Health**



Peer educators were trained as part of a VSO project in Nepal

## Scope

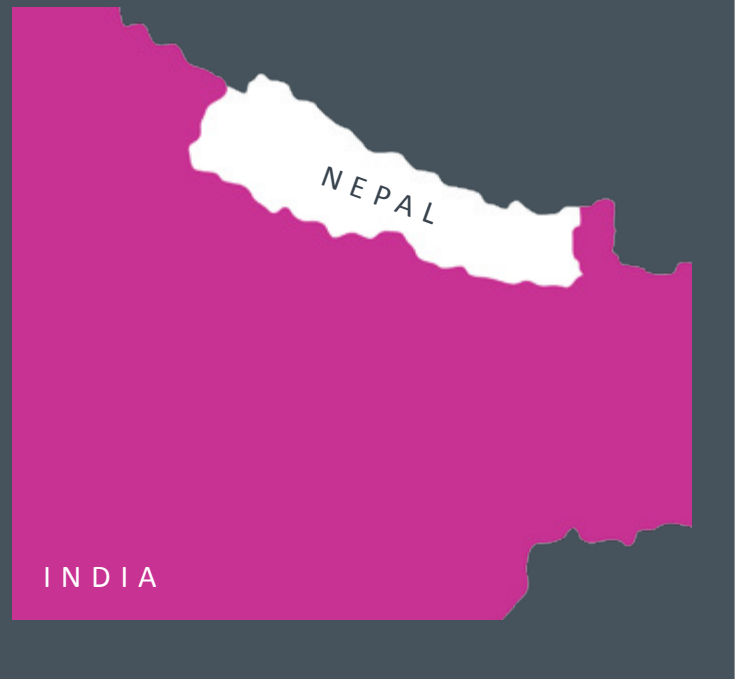
Education about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) that is especially tailored to adolescents is strongly needed in Nepal, particularly in rural districts such as Balgung. Among the serious problems young people in communities like this are experiencing are uterine prolapse, sexual hygiene maintenance and sexually transmitted infections including HIV, much of which has been attributed to cultural taboos and little or no SRH education.

The peer education and adolescent sexual reproductive health (ASRH) project aims to increase knowledge and confidence in decision making on SRH related issues whilst improving health practices amongst youth and community members.

## Youth volunteers

VSO worked together with local partner organisation, BYC, to support four teams of international and Nepalese youth volunteers. Together they built a peer education network in 6 communities in the region of Baglung. Youth volunteers recruited 39 local youths (65% female) to become peer educators in 6 schools and organised specialist training from health professionals. They also provided ongoing mentoring and training for the peer educators, which helped them to develop their leadership and communication skills. These young people then continue on to educate their peers in schools on SRH issues.

Because young people are approachable they help to create a safe learning environment. This approach is more participatory and yields a higher response from students. Given the sensitive nature of some of the topics covered, this rapport



was important for building students' confidence and take ownership of their sexual health.

Youth volunteers lived in host homes throughout the time they were in the community, which helped them to integrate and build relationships and conducted the following work:

1. **Research** - to plan and review their work and adapt the project responding to community needs.
2. **Events** - involving the whole community to raise awareness of SRH related social issues such as gender equality, discrimination and early child marriage.
3. **School libraries** - they created these from scratch as a place to store print resources and promote messages on SRH issues.

## Impact

The peer educators, students and community members have become better informed on a range of SRH topics including STIs, family planning, personal hygiene, uterine prolapse, menstruation and socio-cultural practices surrounding this. Young people have become more confident discussing SRH topics with others. One head teacher commented:

**Before, male and female students didn't speak to each other on the SRH topic but now they talk freely. Students were passive when we had health class, but now they interact and get more involved in the sessions.**

Some early signs of improved health practices have been reported like improved personal hygiene and nutrition. With ongoing SRH education and VSO's holistic programming approach long term benefits are expected, such as more people accessing SRH services and overall improved sexual reproductive health.

# Nigeria

Project name  
**Ikorodu Youth Participation in Governance**

Sector focus area  
**Governance**



Members of youth parliament, Nigeria

## Scope

70% of the people living in Ikorodu, in south west Nigeria are under 35, yet few are involved in decisions made by their local community. Unemployment among youth is a persistent problem, and cynicism or apathy about political processes is common.

The Ikorodu Youth Participation in Governance project was devised to counteract some of these barriers to young people realising their potential. It focuses on mobilising local youth to form community parliaments and getting them involved in discussing the issues that affect them and their communities. This is all facilitated through teams of UK and national youth volunteers.

VSO Nigeria works in partnership with WARDC, a local NGO to run the project with the mission of “securing a society free from discrimination and exclusion”. Neighbourhood youth parliaments offer a forum for young people to explore the issues affecting them and to identify solutions to confront these. The ultimate aim of the youth parliaments is to see to it that young people are actively involved in governance.

## Youth volunteers

Local youth are identified, trained and mentored by mixed nationality teams (Nigerian and British) of ICS youth volunteers, aged between 18-25. The youth volunteers develop activities that get local young people into their neighbourhood youth parliaments offering peer education session on understanding governance within the community context. When the youth volunteers leave, youth parliaments are better equipped to keep running as a powerful space for young people to have a voice in many of the local decisions that affect them.



## Impact

80 young people now participate regularly in neighbourhood youth parliament meetings and many fed back that their understanding of governance has improved and they can now see how they can contribute to change within their local community. The youth parliaments also continue to invest in researching the needs of communities and engage with local schools to recruit more people. One staff member from WARDC said:

**ICS volunteers in Ikorodu stimulated the minds of quite a good number of young people in the local area and... enlightened people on the need to engage youth more productively as agents of social change.**

Members of youth parliaments have become more aware of their civic rights and responsibilities and are engaging more with policy makers, community leaders and local government officials on issues that affect lives of young people in their community. There are plans to replicate this innovative pilot model in other states of Nigeria in the future.

# Bangladesh

Project name  
**ICS South West Health**

Sector focus area  
**Health**



Youth community volunteers

## Scope

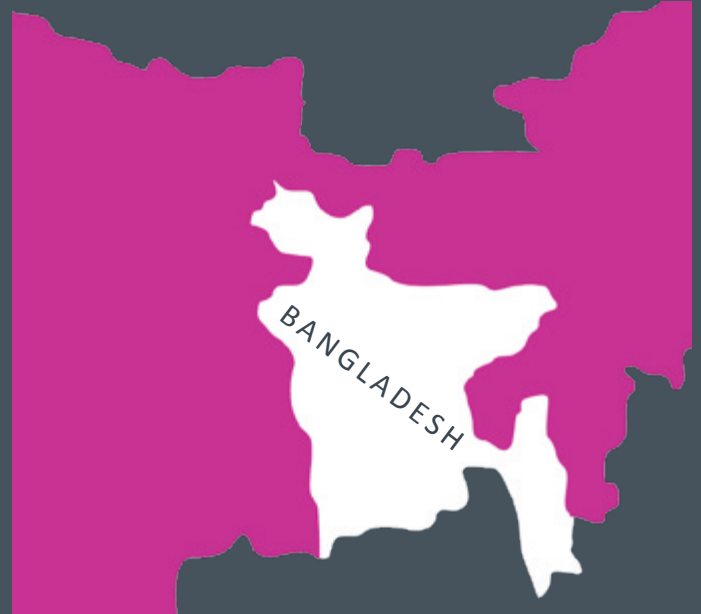
Only 37% of people had access to safe drinking water in Bagerhat, south west region of Bangladesh. A lack of access to health services information, clean water and sanitation in rural Bangladeshi communities like Bagerhat is a persistent problem. Through the ICS project, youth volunteers have focused on improving information about healthy practices, particularly with women and children.

Since 2010, VSO has been working in partnership with Renaissance to build the capacity of local youth clubs to promote these as platforms for youth-led community volunteerism that is driven by the grassroots. To get the health awareness project underway, VSO engaged 105 community youth volunteers in three villages to manage the project, together with 3 teams of national and international youth volunteers as well as technical support from a long term professional volunteer water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) adviser.

## Youth volunteers

Community youth volunteers played a key role in facilitating local involvement because of their close experience of the issues affecting their community, while also being the link between the national and international youth volunteers, community members, schools and citizens' committees.

Working together in cross-cultural teams, national, UK and community youth volunteers combined, skills, energy and motivation that enabled them to carry out a range of activities;



1. **Mapping the needs:** volunteers researched community needs and reviewed ongoing project work through mapping exercises, interviews and focus groups.
2. **Events:** they ran awareness raising events on health and social issues involving the whole community focusing on key topics like health promotion, early child marriage, traditional birth practices, environment and gender discrimination.
3. **Community infrastructure:** volunteers built and maintained latrines and water filters.

## Impact

As a result of the project, improved community health practices like the use of latrines has increased by 10% and use of soap by 31%. Access to safe drinking water has increased, with 72% of people now having water, compared to 37% before the project.

The project has improved the relationship between local community youth and the wider community, with an increase mutual trust and respect between generations reported by community members. Local youth also now have a greater influence, with a citizen's committee member saying:

**Attitudes are changing... the young people are more involved in decision making. It used to be the senior people but now the junior people are more involved.**

Membership of youth clubs has also increased, especially amongst girls, due to the increased presence of female youth volunteers as role models. This has ultimately led to a greater capacity for the youth clubs to contribute towards community development work.

# Kenya

## Project name

ICS Entrepreneur

## Sector focus area

Livelihoods



Mercy Nkatha, with the help of ICS volunteers, boosted her income through a tailoring job

### Scope

Youth unemployment persists as a substantial problem in Kenya, barring youth from income generating opportunities crucial to upward mobility and poverty alleviation. While 18-35 year olds make up 32% of the population and 60% of the total labour force, 67% of those unemployed are classed as 'youth'. In addition, only 38% of Kenyan businesses are expanding, and innovation is constrained by limited access to information, finances, skilled labourers and business development opportunities.

Working through UK and Kenyan youth volunteers, the ICS Entrepreneur (ICSE) project in Nairobi aims to both increase employment opportunities through the development of stronger sustainable enterprises that employ more people, and increase the skills and capacity of youth entrepreneurs to start businesses which provide sustainable income.

### Youth volunteers

VSO has partnered with seven socially minded small and medium enterprises (SMEs) focusing their work in areas such as agri-business, disability and the environment. These SMEs have all struggled to grow and employ more staff. VSO has also partnered with IbizAfrica, an enterprise incubation hub at Strathmore University which also supports all of the SMEs.

ICSE volunteers began by working with the SMEs to conduct business analysis which highlighted that poor marketing, poor customer service and lack of effective communication mediums were prohibiting business growth. Volunteers then developed tailored business support plans for each SME, including activities around:

- 1. Marketing:** volunteers conducted market surveys and trained employees in market research, developed a social media marketing toolkit, and supported with website design and analytics.
- 2. Customer service:** volunteers created a customer feedback guide and developed and delivered customer relationship training.



- 3. Branding and communication:** volunteers worked with SMEs on branding, supported the development of newsletters and trained employees in how to use blogs to communicate.

The activities have contributed to greater awareness of the SMEs, improved customer relationships and have generated more interest among investors. Several SMEs have already seen growth in income after a short period of time. In addition to the experience gained through their placements, the youth volunteers are supported by VSO to further improve their understanding of enterprise development through training and support. This training includes finance, business simulation activities and social inclusion mapping.

Before the volunteers came we used to use Kshs: 450,000 on print media for marketing purposes of our products. But the volunteers have been able to increase the sales through social media marketing and customer engagement. The money is now used in something else in the business.

Mr. Peter Chege, CEO and Founder Animal Mineral & Allied Ltd

### Impact

As a result of the business mentoring and support provided by ICSE volunteers, the SMEs have been able to revise their business models, adopting new technologies and ways of working. Use of social media and websites has now become common place among the SMEs, reducing marketing costs and increasing customer reach and satisfaction. The project is now working with businesses on product diversification and distribution.

The youth volunteers have improved their experience, knowledge and skills in business and enterprise. They report greater enthusiasm and confidence for employment and enterprise.

## Past performance examples

Location	Thematic Area	Funder	Project	Year	Description
Global	Health, Education, Livelihoods and Governance	DFID	International Citizen Service	2012 - Present	Across VSO-led consortium, 14,000 global youth volunteering in cross-cultural teams, living in communities and working with local partners to contribute to development outcomes. Programme also focuses on personal development and on-going social action of youth volunteers.
Tanzania	Governance	DFID (Oxfam consortium)	Elections project	2015	Increasing youth participation in the election process through youth-led representative groups.
Kenya	Governance	IREX/USAID	Young African Leaders Initiative	2014 - present	Youth leadership development through mentoring, internship, fellowship and speaking at high profile events.
Tanzania	Education and Livelihoods	MasterCard Foundation	Education for opportunities	2014 - present	Increase the relevance of secondary education for future employment opportunities through improving quality, relevance and accessibility of vocational training.
Nigeria	Governance	SGA (unrestricted)	Youth Action Nigeria	2014 - present	A campaign led by young volunteer alumni to address poverty and other social challenges in Nigeria.
India	Livelihoods	SGA (unrestricted)	Youth Citizen Service	2014 - present	National team-based volunteering programme for youth aged 18 to 25. Volunteers are oriented on community work, and work closely with local community partners through which they bring a fresh perspective in address development issues working.
Pakistan	Governance (peace building)	Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation (unrestricted)	Peace Forums in Pakistan	2013 - 2015	Engagement of local youth volunteers for promotion of peace building, interfaith harmony and social cohesion in South Punjab Pakistan. Total 203 local youth trained on peace building & conflict transformation and 1183 youth reached in targeted communities.
Bangladesh	Livelihoods and entrepreneurship	G-STAR Foundation	Volunteers Building the Capacity of Entrepreneurs in Northwest Bangladesh	2014 - 2015	Rural youth and women dwellers to increase their vocational skills and secure viable livelihoods opportunities through employment or entrepreneurship. Programme also builds the capacity of youth clubs to support the implementation of the project.
Uganda	Livelihoods (TVET and youth enterprise)	DFID, EC, HNI (Greg Dyke - Susan Howe)	Youth skills development, employability and enterprise	2013 - Present	15,400 youth from poor and marginalised backgrounds accessing training and employment. Programme has a particular focus on gender and disability and associated barriers to employment and income.
Global	Health, Education, Livelihoods and Governance	British Council	Global Exchange	2005 - 2012	2100 global youth volunteered in cross cultural teams on reciprocal exchanges in the UK and developing countries promoting global active citizenship, self development and community development.



If you are interested in volunteering with VSO or to hear more about our work, please visit [www.vsointernational.org](http://www.vsointernational.org)

**VSO**  
100 London Road  
Kingston upon Thames  
KT2 6QJ  
UK

+44 (0)20 8780 7500

[enquiry@vso.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@vso.org.uk)

[www.vsointernational.org](http://www.vsointernational.org)  
[www.youtube.com/user/vsointernational](http://www.youtube.com/user/vsointernational)  
[blog.vsointernational.org](http://blog.vsointernational.org)

Voluntary Service Overseas is registered in England (number 00703509)  
Registered charity in England and Wales (number 313757) and Scotland (number SC039117)