Grant Cycle 8 Youth Engagement Guideline for Youth-Led Organizations in Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Eastern Europe

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The "Grant Cycle 8 Youth Engagement Guideline for Youth-Led Organizations in Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Eastern Europe" is an engagement tool for youth-led organizations across Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Eastern Europe countries in supporting their process of submitting Global Fund funding requests for the 8th grant cycle.

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Background and Rationale

Youth-led organizations play a pivotal role in the fight against HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria across Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Eastern Europe, where young people remain disproportionately affected by these epidemics and face persistent structural barriers to accessing prevention, treatment, and care. In the Asia-Pacific region, young people aged 15–24 account for approximately one-quarter of new HIV infections in countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and others, with nearly half of new infections in 2022 occurring among youth in several settings. The region continues to record an estimated 300,000 new HIV infections and 150,000 AIDS-related deaths annually, with rising epidemics among young people in multiple countries. Africa bears the highest global burden of HIV, TB, and malaria, with adolescent girls and young women accounting for a disproportionate share of new HIV infections, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where gender inequality, gender-based violence, and limited access to youth-friendly services drive vulnerability . Young people in Africa are also heavily affected by TB, which remains a leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults, and by malaria, where children and youth account for a significant share of morbidity and mortality despite major global investments. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, HIV incidence among young people remains concentrated among young key populations, including young people who use drugs, young men who have sex with men, and young transgender people, with criminalization, stigma, and political constraints limiting access to essential services.

Across all three regions, TB continues to pose a major challenge for young people, who are frequently underdiagnosed and underserved, while malaria responses face growing threats from drug resistance, climate change, and fragile health systems. Despite these challenges, youth-led organizations across regions have demonstrated their capacity to reach marginalized peers, deliver community-based services, and advocate for rights-based, equitable health responses, underscoring the importance of institutionalizing meaningful youth engagement within Global Fund Grant Cycle 8 (GC8).

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Despite these challenges, global efforts are yielding results. Programs supported by the Global Fund have saved 65 million lives since 2002, cutting the combined death rate from HIV, TB and malaria by 61%. More people than ever are on HIV treatment (25 million globally by 2023) and receiving prevention tools, TB detection and treatment have rebounded post-COVID with innovative approaches (e.g. AI-based screening), and hundreds of millions of mosquito nets and treatments have been delivered for malaria. However, progress is uneven: inequities and human rights barriers (stigma, discrimination, punitive laws) still prevent many young key populations from accessing services. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed vulnerabilities, devastating health systems and shrinking funding for health. It also underscored the need for pandemic preparedness and resilient health systems, which the Global Fund has now integrated into its 2023–2028 Strategy.

Under the Global Fund Strategy (2023–2028), community engagement is a central pillar. The Strategy explicitly emphasizes meaningful community engagement (CE) as essential to improving health interventions and ending the three epidemics. Meaningful CE is defined as the process of involving communities most affected by HIV, TB and malaria (including youth) in decision-making processes that impact their lives. For youth, this means having a real voice in shaping national disease programs from planning funding requests to overseeing implementation. International commitments like the Global AIDS Strategy 2021–2026 also call for young people to be "fully empowered and resourced to set new directions" in the HIV response.

Background and Rationale

As we enter Grant Cycle 8 (GC8), with preparatory work that has started since 2025 and implementation spanning approximately 2026–2028, several new and ongoing developments and policies will shape youth engagement:

1. **Global Fund Replenishment and Strategy Initiatives**: The Global Fund's Eighth Replenishment (2025) is mobilizing resources for 2026–2028, with an explicit focus on sustaining progress. The Board has underscored the importance of long-term sustainability and transition, urging gradual increases in domestic health financing "while ensuring no one is left behind." This means youth advocates should be prepared to engage in discussions on co-financing and program sustainability (e.g. advocating for national budgets to fund youth-led initiatives as countries transition from donor support). The Global Fund Board also reaffirmed the central role of communities and civil society in its model, stressing that governments and communities must jointly lead efforts, and that breaking down human-rights and gender barriers remains a priority.

2. **Country Engagement Mechanisms:** Established platforms like the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) continue to be key entry points for youth. The Global Fund has been investing in CCM evolution to enhance meaningful representation of young people and key populations. Youth-led organizations should seek representation on CCMs or build alliances with CCM members to influence funding request design, grant oversight, and reprogramming decisions. Notably, during GC7 and ongoing in GC8, the Global Fund and its partners launched Community Engagement Strategic Initiatives to support youth and key population engagement throughout the grant cycle. These offer technical support and funding for youth consultations, advocacy, and capacity-building.

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Digital Transformation: The integration of digital tools in engagement, advocacy, and monitoring has been accelerated by necessity (e.g. during COVID lockdowns) and by opportunity. Youth networks are increasingly leveraging social media, messaging apps, and online platforms to expand their reach and influence. For instance, community outreach in some countries used WhatsApp, Zoom, and online forums to engage marginalized groups who might otherwise hide due to stigma. Such digital strategies allow broader youth input into country dialogues (through online surveys and virtual townhalls) and enable real-time community-led monitoring (through mobile data collection apps and crowd-sourced reporting). In GC8, youth-led organizations should incorporate digital engagement plans from disseminating information (using youth-friendly social media campaigns) to gathering feedback (using online consultations) and even monitoring services (using apps or SMS reporting systems). Digital tools can help overcome geographic and social barriers, but they also require attention to digital literacy and data privacy.

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Health and Climate Change Intersection: Climate change is now recognized as a growing threat to health and to the fight against HIV, TB, and malaria. The Global Fund has acknowledged that climate threats are pushing health systems to their breaking point, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. Through a new partnership with the Green Climate Fund, guidance has been developed on financing climate-health solutions to adapt health systems and make them more environmentally sustainable. For youth advocates, this intersection opens up new areas of engagement: integrating climate resilience into Global Fund grants. In practical terms, youth-led groups can push for proposals to include climate-informed components (for example, malaria programs that plan for changing mosquito habitats due to warming temperatures, or TB programs that address climate-driven migration and its impact on treatment continuity). Youth networks should also build alliances with environmental youth movements to highlight that investing in Global Fund programs is part of climate adaptation for communities. Addressing climate and health together will appeal to innovative funding streams and highlight youth as forward-thinking partners in sustainability.

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Sustainability and Transition: Sustainability and transition are critical considerations under Grant Cycle 8 as countries across Asia Pacific, Africa, and Eastern Europe face changing eligibility, allocations, and expectations for domestic financing. Without deliberate planning, there is a risk that gains achieved among young people, particularly in HIV prevention, treatment, and community led responses, may be reversed as external funding declines.Youth organizations and advocates must therefore ensure that GC8 proposals go beyond short term implementation and include clear sustainability strategies. This includes engaging in national Transition Readiness Assessments, advocating for domestic resource mobilization for youth led and community led programs, and promoting the integration of proven youth led interventions such as peer education and community led monitoring into public systems. Capacity strengthening for youth led organizations, including training, mentorship, and organizational development, is essential to ensure long term resilience. The Global Fund Board has emphasized advancing the transition agenda and sustaining results even amid emerging challenges such as climate related health threats and resurgent malaria risks. Youth voices are critical in these discussions to ensure that investments in young people's health and leadership are protected and that governments remain accountable for sustaining youth focused responses beyond the life of Global Fund support.

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Strategic shifts and adaptations for Grant Cycle 8 (GC8). In the context of an evolving global health ecosystem and significant constraints in external financing for health, the Global Fund partnership will need to work differently to accelerate progress, raise additional domestic financing for health and ensure a focus on sustainable approaches for delivery of health interventions. Accordingly, the Global Fund is adapting its approach for GC8 to catalyze the greatest impact based on country context, while reinforcing sustainability and effective transitions from external financing.

These strategic adaptations for GC8 include:

- Further prioritizing Global Fund allocations for the lowest income and highest burden settings, where country-level disease burden acutely affects global progress and domestic resources are highly limited;

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- Setting grant cycle-specific transition pathways, intentionally focusing on supporting sustainable approaches to program service delivery and providing transition timelines for a sub-set of countries, allowing for predictable financing;
- Optimizing the use of all available funds through rigorous programmatic prioritization, market shaping, integration, community systems financing.

To implement these adaptations, the Global Fund is taking a differentiated approach to supporting countries and communities, based on disease burden and country economic capacity. GC8 grant life cycle tools and support have been adapted to help deliver these strategic adaptations. Read more about the strategic shifts and adaptations for Grant Cycle 8 (GC8) here.

Finally, the momentum of youth engagement globally is at an all-time high going into GC8. After a historic youth-led campaign, "I Am The Impact," was launched in 2025 to drive the Global Fund's replenishment, over 1,200 youth across 65 countries was involved in this campain. This campaign puts youth at the center of advocacy and accountability, demonstrating that young people are not just beneficiaries but leaders and innovators of change. They have organized policy dialogues, mobilized champions, and held their own consultations with marginalized youth communities to inform global funding priorities. This energy and organizing capacity will feed into GC8 at country level- youth globally can leverage the global campaign's visibility and tools to strengthen their case for meaningful inclusion in every step of the grant cycle.

Key Stages
in the Grant Cycle and Youth Entry Points

The Global Fund grant cycle is typically broken into key stages, each with specific processes and opportunities for community input. For GC8, youth-led organizations should understand these stages and identify how and when to engage. Grant Cycle 8 will involve: a preparation phase (before the country funding request is developed), the funding request development and grant-making phase, and the implementation/oversight phase. Below, we outline the major steps and entry points in each phase, with a focus on where youth engagement can be maximized.

Preparation Phase for GC8

In the preparation phase, countries set the groundwork for their funding requests. Youth led groups should start early by organizing themselves, mapping stakeholders, and gathering key information. Major components of preparation include:

1. **Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM):** The CCM is the official country platform that coordinates funding request development and provides oversight of grants. Youth engagement with the CCM is critical. First, identify whether there is any youth, civil society, or key population representation on the CCM or its committees. In some countries there may be a youth representative, while in others there may be no formal youth role. Where a youth representative exists, connect early and share consolidated youth priorities and evidence. Where youth are not represented, youth-led organizations can request observer access, propose a structured youth consultation process linked to the CCM, or work through civil society CCM members to ensure youth priorities are included. Youth organizations should also understand CCM processes, including country dialogue timelines, how drafting teams are selected, and when key decisions are made. To find CCM leadership or contact details, use the relevant country page on the Global Fund Data Explorer.

2. **Eligibility and allocation:** Confirm your country's eligibility and component eligibility for GC8 using the Global Fund eligibility resources, and review your country's allocation letter once issued. The Global Fund has shared the GC8 allocation letters in March 2026, and they should be reviewed alongside planning considerations for country dialogue and funding request development.

3. **Funding request submission windows:** Funding requests for GC8 will be submitted during several windows within the 2026 to 2028 period. Youth organizations should confirm their country's planned submission window and work backward to plan engagement milestones, including consultations, evidence gathering, and participation in drafting and review. Check it here: ***https://resources.theglobalfund.org/en/grant-life-cycle/applying-for-funding/submission/***

4. **Situational analysis:** A strong situational analysis underpins the funding request. Youth networks should contribute youth specific evidence on barriers to services, legal and policy constraints, stigma and discrimination, and service gaps affecting young people, including young key populations. Youth generated data and testimonies can help ensure the funding request includes youth focused interventions and addresses rights and equity barriers. Example analysis can be found here: ***New Report: Engagement of Youth in the Country Coordinating Mechanism and Global Fund Processes in the Asia Pacific - Youth LEAD***

5. **Preparation takeaway:** By the end of preparation, youth organizations should have key CCM and partner contacts, a calendar of major milestones, a consolidated list of youth priorities, and a plan for how youth inputs will be formally submitted and followed up. GC8 resources and updates should be monitored through the Global Fund country resources pages and information sessions.

Funding Request Development and Grant-making Phase

This phase is where ideas turn into proposals and eventually signed grants. It's the most intensive period for engagement. We break it into a step-by-step Action Plan for youth engagement, modeled after the GC7 guide's plan of action but updated for GC8 realities:

Step 1: Gather Information on GC8 and National Priorities.
Before jumping into advocacy, ensure your team understands the rules and focus of GC8. Read the official Global Fund application guidelines for this cycle (when available) and any new strategic initiatives. For instance, check if there are catalytic funds in GC8 for which your country might apply (e.g. matching funds for key populations, multi-country grants for cross-border issues, etc.). Learn from GC7 experiences: what did the previous funding request include for youth? (Review the prior funding request and any funding request feedback letters). Also update yourselves on national strategies: if there's a new National HIV Strategy or TB plan, align your asks with its goals (or identify gaps where it fails to address youth).

Essentially, do your homework so that you come to the table as credible partners. This will help when advocating to be included in the funding request writing team or thematic workstreams. It's also wise to connect with other community experts: women's groups, key population networks, and people living with the diseases. Building a united front of civil society can strengthen calls for youth inclusion. Sharing information among communities (perhaps through a quick online meeting or forming a coalition) ensures everyone knows the timeline and process.

For GC8 preparation, the Global Fund's Community Engagement Strategic Initiative (2024 - 2026) supports community engagement and capacity strengthening through regional learning hubs and partner platforms across different regions.

- In Asia-Pacific, this role is fulfilled by the CE-SI Regional Platform implemented through Seven Alliance (https://sevenallianceap.com/).
- In Africa, community engagement and learning are supported through regional hubs such as EANNASO (https://eannaso.org/) in Anglophone Africa and RAME in Francophone Africa.
- In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) (https://harmreductioneurasia.org/) serves as a regional learning and coordination hub for civil society and community engagement.

These regional platforms support learning, peer exchange, and preparedness for country dialogue and funding request processes, and youth organizations are encouraged to engage with the relevant hub in their region.

Step 2: Develop a Youth Engagement & Communication Plan.
Treat your engagement in GC8 like a project that needs its own plan. Map out which youth organizations and networks in your country need to be involved (e.g. networks of YPLHIV, student unions, youth advocacy NGOs, adolescent key population groups). Establish clear communication channels among these groups, for example, create a dedicated WhatsApp or Signal group for youth advocates to share updates quickly, or schedule regular Zoom check-ins.

Next, assign roles:

- Who will attend CCM meetings (or meet CCM members) and report back?
- Who will liaise with other civil society groups?
- Who will lead on organizing any youth consultation events?

Also, prepare your messaging – what are the top 3-5 priority issues you collectively want to push for in the funding request? These might include, for instance: comprehensive sexuality education for HIV prevention, youth-friendly TB diagnostic services, community-based malaria outreach by youth volunteers, digital health information platforms, etc. Back up each priority with evidence (data or stories). In your communication plan, think about external and internal communication: Internally among youth networks (to stay coordinated) and externally towards decision-makers and media. Consider writing an open letter or a position statement on "Youth Priorities for GC8 in [Country]" to share with the CCM and Ministry of Health early on.

Additionally, plan to use social media advocacy: platforms like X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook or local media can amplify youth voices – e.g. live-tweeting key consultation points or running a campaign "Nothing for Us Without Us in GF Grants" to build public awareness. Remember to schedule regular updates in your plan so that all youth allies are informed of progress (for example, a weekly email bulletin or short video update). A good engagement plan will ensure you speak with one voice and cover all bases throughout the hectic proposal development period.

Step 3: Call for Dialogue and Consultation with Youth.
Early in the funding request development (often at the stage of country dialogue), make sure that a Youth Consultation takes place. If the CCM or government isn't already planning one specifically, organize it yourselves in collaboration with willing partners (UNAIDS or UNICEF youth focal points, for example, might help convene). The goal is to create a platform for young people from diverse backgrounds to express their needs and ideas, which can then feed into the funding request. The consultation can be a one-day workshop, a series of focus group discussions, or an online survey plus virtual forum – whatever suits the context and time available. Use creative approaches to encourage open input: informal focus group discussions, interactive activities, breakout groups by topic (HIV, TB, malaria).

The GC7 guide provides a *Sample Agenda for Youth Consultation* (Annex C) that can be adapted. Document all inputs (assign rapporteurs or use a Google form to capture ideas) and synthesize them into a short report or at least a list of key recommendations. If possible, invite some members of the official writing team or CCM to observe the consultation, so they hear directly from youth. Annex C in this guideline provides a template agenda and guiding questions for a youth consultation, which you can customize and use to structure either an in-person workshop or a virtual consultation. Don't forget to consider marginalized sub-groups in your outreach, for example, ensure participation of young key populations (young MSM, young transgender people, young people who use drugs, young sex workers), adolescent girls and young women, young people living with HIV or TB, etc., so their voices are included. After the consultation, formally submit the outcomes to the proposal drafting committee and CCM - this could be via a written memo or presentation highlighting youth-identified priorities (this creates a record that youth inputs were provided, enhancing accountability).

Step 4: Participate in the Funding Request Drafting Committee.
Most countries set up a drafting committee or proposal development team to write the funding request. This usually brings together government managers, technical partners, and civil society representatives. Youth organizations should push for direct representation on this committee. If that's not possible, aim to join one of the technical working groups (TWGs), such as those focused on prevention or on RSSH (Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health). Citing the Global Fund's own guidance on inclusive dialogue can strengthen your case.

It's also important to use the Global Fund's modular template to advocate for youth-centered interventions. For example, under HIV prevention you could push for programs on adolescent girls and young women or young key populations, while under RSSH you might propose youth-led community monitoring. Refer to Annex B for more examples of how youth can contribute across modules.

Finally, don't just focus on the proposal text. Push for the funding request to explicitly recognize youth organizations as implementation partners or sub-recipients. This both demonstrates community ownership and opens opportunities for youth-led groups to access resources when the grant is approved.

Throughout the writing process, maintain communication with the broader youth coalition. If you're at the table, circulate drafts (as confidentiality allows) or at least summaries to gather quick feedback. This keeps the process transparent and empowers you to truly represent the community's voice, not just personal opinions. If you find resistance from other drafters on a youth issue, having a unified youth network position (from Step 2's planning) will bolster your argument. As a strategy, identify allies on the drafting team – perhaps a UN advisor or a sympathetic Ministry official – who can echo and support youth asks. Finally, ensure that human-rights and gender-related interventions benefiting youth (such as legal literacy for young key populations, or GBV response services for young women) are included, since these often align with Global Fund's strategic initiative areas (and may attract additional technical support or matching funds).

Step 5: Review and Validation of the Funding Request.
Once the grant is approved and signed, the focus shifts to implementation. This is where youth engagement becomes real: ensuring commitments on paper translate into action on the ground. Youth organizations should see themselves not just as beneficiaries but as partners in delivery and accountability.
Formal oversight mechanisms are one key entry point. If youth have a seat on the CCM Oversight Committee, they can bring first-hand updates from the community. If not, they can still share findings regularly with civil society members or allies who sit on those committees.

At the same time, youth networks should lead community-led monitoring (CLM) to gather evidence from peers and report on whether services are reaching young people as intended. For example, digital tools such as mobile surveys, apps, or simple online forms can make it easier to capture feedback and highlight barriers.

Key actions for youth during implementation:

- Join or feed information into formal oversight bodies (CCM, PR monitoring committees).
- Run or participate in CLM initiatives, using both traditional scorecards and digital tools.

Beyond oversight, advocacy remains crucial. If services promised in the grant aren't delivered, say, if youth peer educator stipends are delayed or youth-friendly testing centers don't open then youth organizations should speak up. At the same time, celebrate successes publicly to keep momentum high and show the value of youth-led work.

Ways to strengthen youth advocacy in this stage:

- Share success stories and concerns through media and social platforms.
- Connect with regional or global youth networks to amplify national issues and gain support.

Finally, use this stage to think ahead. Effective youth-led interventions should be documented and positioned for sustainability beyond the life of the grant. This might include advocating for government adoption, seeking domestic funding, or linking with other donors. Implementation isn't just about delivering services – it's about securing youth engagement as a permanent feature of national responses.

Step 6: Implementation, Monitoring & Advocacy.

Once the grant is signed and implementation begins (likely 2026 onward for GC8), the focus shifts to accountability and effective execution. For youth organizations, this stage means two things: participating in formal oversight and leading community-based monitoring and advocacy.

For formal oversight, try to secure a seat on the CCM Oversight Committee or equivalent. Youth representatives can bring reports from the field on what is or isn't working. If you don't have a seat, you can still share updates, such as quarterly findings or concerns with civil society allies on the CCM.

At the same time, youth-led organizations should drive Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) initiatives. These can include training youth volunteers to collect feedback with tools like scorecards or mobile apps. In some countries, digital solutions such as the OneImpact app (by Stop TB Partnership) allow communities to report barriers anonymously and systematically. Youth can adapt such tools, for example, creating surveys for young TB patients or using online forms for youth living with HIV to report stockouts.

Examples of CLM focus areas:

- Are clinic hours accessible and youth-friendly?
- Are young TB patients receiving adequate counseling and support?
- Do malaria community health volunteers have the supplies they need?

The evidence gathered can then be used to advocate for mid-course corrections. If young people skip HIV testing events due to transport barriers, youth networks can push for travel allowances or mobile testing units to be added.

Youth engagement during implementation also means staying vocal in advocacy. Keep watch on whether promises made in the funding request are being delivered. If peer educator stipends are delayed or youth-friendly clinics don't open, speak up and ask why. At the same time, highlight successes publicly to build momentum and show the impact of youth-led work.

Strong advocacy actions include:

- Using media and social media to celebrate progress (e.g., "1,000 young people tested this quarter through our youth-led campaign!").
- Connecting with regional and global youth networks (like Youth LEAD, Y+ Global, APCASO, YODA, Uproot) to escalate issues if national commitments fall short.

Finally, think long-term. Document effective youth-led interventions and advocate for them to be absorbed into government systems or funded through domestic budgets. Implementation is not only about delivering services, it's also about securing sustainability of youth engagement well beyond the Global Fund grant.

Step 7: Finally, measure and document the impact of youth engagement itself. Engagement does not end with participation in drafting or implementation. It is equally important to measure and document the impact of youth involvement itself. This shows communities that advocacy made a difference and it builds evidence for stronger engagement in future cycles.

Use simple but meaningful indicators to track your progress. These can be both quantitative and qualitative:

- Number of youth consulted in the development of the grant
- Youth-led activities included and funded by the grant
- Shifts in decision-makers' attitudes toward youth inclusion

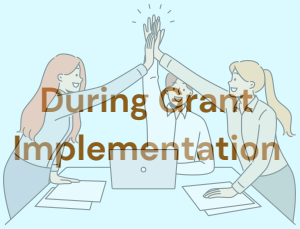
The Global Fund's new Strategy also provides Key Overarching Questions to guide performance monitoring, such as "Are communities able to engage and influence the full grant life cycle?" and "Are inequalities in HIV, TB, and malaria outcomes being reduced?" These questions can serve as benchmarks for youth-led monitoring.

Youth organizations should regularly reflect on their own role by asking:

- Is our engagement meaningful or tokenistic?
- Are young key populations seeing better access to services?
- Are domestic resources for youth programs increasing?

By combining these self-assessments with formal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, youth-led organizations ensure that GC8 investments truly deliver for young people while also contributing to national health goals and the global fight to end the epidemics.

Step-by Step
Youth Action Plan

Before Funding Request Development	1. Organize a Youth Group or coalition for GC8 engagement. 2. Research and learn from all related and supporting documents. 3. Meet with the CCM Secretariat or members. 4. Map out stakeholders and allies using a ***Stakeholder Analysis Matrix***. 5. Seek Short- Term technical assistance through the regional Learning Hub. 6. Begin community discussions to gather initial inputs from youth at grassroots.
During Funding Request Development	1. Participate in the country dialogue Participation. 2. Youth Consultation: Hold a dedicated consultation (***agenda example***) 3. Write or contribute to proposal sections, especially on prevention, key populations, human rights, gender, and RSSH. 4. Advocate for adequate allocation to community-led activities and capacity building. 5. Ensure a youth coalition statement is presented endorsing the effort if it reflects youth needs.
During Grant Implementation 	1. Secure roles for youth in implementation. 2. Roll out a Community-Led Monitoring plan. 3. Attend CCM Oversight visits or meetings. 4. Continue advocacy 5. Connect with regional and global youth networks to share lessons.
Towards Sustainability	1. Document success stories and cost-effectiveness. 2. Encourage the CCM and PR to include youth in any transition working groups 3. Develop the capacity of youth organizations throughout the process.

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