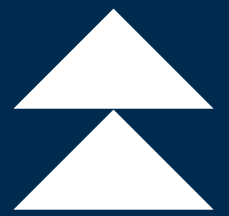
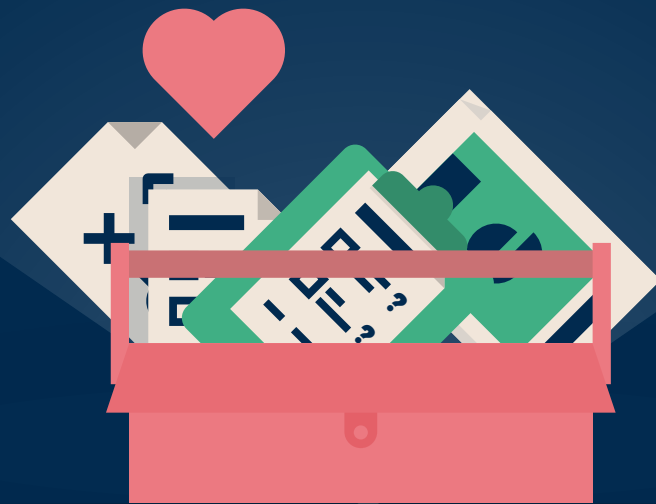


Youth Centred Research Toolkit



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<https://fundforyouthemployment.nl/>

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) is a 6-year programme funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, managed by Palladium, VSO Nederland and Randstad.

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE), managed by a consortium consisting of Palladium, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and Randstad, is a 7-year and €134 million programme funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that aims to create a prosperous future for 230,000 young women and men (15 – 35 years) in the Middle East, North Africa, Sahel & West Africa and Horn of Africa regions. The Fund supports initiatives in 11 focus countries that offer youth, in particular young women, opportunities for work that is demand-driven and productive, offering a stable income and safe working conditions, and that is contributing to their personal development and social protection.



Introduction to the toolkit

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment Youth-Centred Research Toolkit is designed to equip stakeholders with the tools and strategies needed to effectively engage young people in their research processes. This toolkit emphasises the importance of youth participation, ensuring that their voices and experiences are integral to identifying challenges and opportunities. By providing practical guidance on participatory methods, data collection, and analysis, the CFYE aims to foster collaboration and seeks to generate actionable insights that can drive meaningful solutions for enhancing youth employability. This toolkit provides information, advice, and real experiences from youth researchers. The methodology outlined in this toolkit has been developed based on Youth-Centred Research projects implemented by the CFYE.



What are Youth-Centred Research Methodologies?

Youth-centred methodologies are approaches to research, education, and programming that prioritise the voices, experiences, and needs of young people. These methodologies recognise **youth as active participants** rather than passive subjects, valuing their perspectives, creativity, and agency. They often involve collaborative and participatory processes, where youth are engaged as partners in decision-making, problem-solving, and knowledge generation. Youth-centred methodologies aim to involve young people from the beginning to

the end, foster their leadership skills, and create spaces for them to express themselves authentically, ultimately contributing to **more inclusive and effective interventions and policies tailored to their realities**.

Youth-centred research is an approach that prioritises the involvement and perspectives of young people throughout the research process. It recognizes youth as experts in their own lives and values their input in shaping research questions, methods, analysis and dissemination.

Key Elements of Youth-Centred Research

- ▶ **Youth participation:** Actively involve young people in all stages of the research, from designing the research to dissemination. Their voices and experiences guide the research agenda.
- ▶ **Enablement:** Foster a sense of ownership and agency among youth by providing spaces for them to improve their skills, knowledge, and confidence to contribute meaningfully to research.
- ▶ **Inclusivity:** Ensure diverse representation of youth, considering factors such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and ability.
- ▶ **Collaboration:** Build partnership between youth and researchers, through advisory groups, participatory action research or co-researcher models. With this collaborative approach, you ensure shared learning and mutual respect.

Guiding Principles

- ▶ **Respect and trust:** Establish respectful relationships that prioritise the well-being and dignity of the youth.
- ▶ **Transparency:** Maintain open communication about the research process, goals, and expectations to build trust and credibility.
- ▶ **Ethical considerations:** Adhere to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and safeguarding. Researchers must be sensitive to power dynamics and strive to create a safe and inclusive environment.
- ▶ **Contextual relevance:** Ground research in the real-world contexts of young people's lives, acknowledging their diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Make sure to address issues that are important to youth and produce findings that can lead to tangible improvements in their lives.
- ▶ **Flexibility:** Be adaptable in methods and approaches to respond to the needs and feedback of youth.
- ▶ **Advocacy and Action:** Youth-centred research often has a strong advocacy component, seeking to influence policies, practices, and social attitudes that affect young people. It aims to translate research findings into actions that benefit youth communities.

What are the Benefits of Youth-Centred Research?

Youth-Centred Research offers numerous benefits across different levels. For the research project itself, by centering youth in the research process, the approach not only produces more relevant and accurate data but also promotes social justice by amplifying the voices of young people in matters that impact their lives. The overall research project becomes **richer and more comprehensive**, as youth involvement can bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Understanding these diverse contexts, aspirations and challenges faced by youth through youth-centred research also allows for more targeted and effective intervention strategies.

Understanding the youth perspective ensures that initiatives align with the specific skills, preferences and entrepreneurial ambitions of the youth, **maximising the likelihood of sustainable outcomes**. For the youth researchers this approach offers benefits, as they are able to gain valuable skills, such as critical thinking, communication, project management, and research skills. Furthermore, they can expand their network and engage with different actors, which can boost their confidence and open future opportunities.

Youth-Centred Research at CFYE

As a fundamental aspect of the CFYE mission revolves around not only fostering job creation but also around creating quality employment opportunities, this necessitates a nuanced exploration of what a quality job entails for youth, delving into the multifaceted dimensions of work and life that hold significance for young individuals. Given CFYE's position at the intersection of youth engagement and private sector involvement, actively soliciting and comprehensively understanding the perspectives, aspirations, and priorities of youth, allows us to better advise and collaborate with private sector entities.

Therefore, as part of the CFYE Learning Agenda, CFYE uses the youth-centred methodology to gain more in-depth insights in, among others, what youth understand as a quality job and what aspects of a job are most important to them. Outlined below are some examples of CFYE Youth-Centred Research projects that have been done in the past. Youth-centred methodology is a methodology that is constantly in adaptation, and after each project, the methodology changes and improves. While the methodology of the projects listed below might have been different, in all these projects youth has been at the heart of these research projects.

<u>Job quality in the plastic waste recycling sector in Kenya</u>	Using different methods, such as surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, youth experts in Kenya researched what the main challenges and opportunities are of young people working in the plastic waste recycling sector. The research identified aspects that youth value in their job, but also what private businesses can do to improve the job quality for youth.
<u>Attraction and retention of youth in Agri-jobs in Ethiopia</u>	After a 3-day workshop for the co-designing the research methods, Youth Experts in Ethiopia researched the youth perspective of young farmers on how to make jobs in agriculture more attractive. They focused on whether new technologies would make the jobs more attractive, and what private businesses can do to retain youth in agriculture.
<u>Job quality in digital jobs</u>	This research was conducted to bring to understand the youth perspective on digitally enabled jobs. The research identified key themes that could improve job quality of these digital jobs.

The Methodology

Step by Step!

The CFYE Youth-Centred Research Methodology follows a 6-steps research process





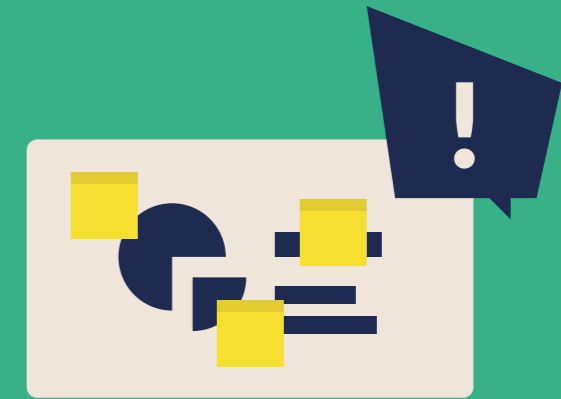
Step 1

Research Design



Step 2

Data Collection



Step 3

Analysing the Findings



Step 4

Report writing



Step 5

Validation Exercise



Step 6

Conversation for Action



Step 1. Research Design: Setting the Framework

Idea generation: Engage youth in brainstorming sessions to identify relevant topics, problems, objectives, approach, and the purpose of the research.

Outcome: Based on this brainstorm, a hypothesis or a problem statement is developed, on which we will build in the next phase of the research.

Methods and questions selection: Involve youth in designing the research questions. Answer the who, why, what and how questions. What questions need to be answered? And why? Who do we need to speak to? And how? In this phase of the research, we will also focus on the outputs: what do we want to achieve? How should it look like and what information will we need to get to that

output?

Outcome: Based on this brainstorming, a data collection plan and sampling strategy will be developed.

Tip 1: Do not skip the pilot phase, test these tools before data collection starts. Make sure that the methods are accessible and appropriate for their peers.

Tip 2: Motivate the youth to think out of the box when it comes to data collection, e.g. propose games that make them come up with non-traditional methods, like storytelling, photovoice (where youth take photos to represent their experiences), role-play, etc.

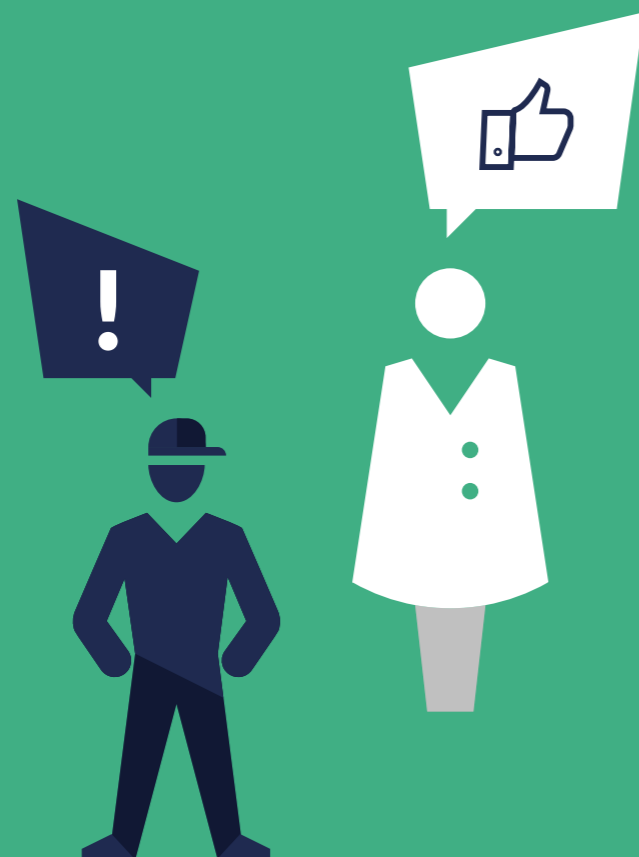


Step 2. Data Collection: Ready to go to the Field

Facilitate the means for youth to initially outreach their own contacts and to a wide sample, e.g. by using snowball methods. Ensure that the youth are equipped to conduct surveys, interviews, and/or focus group discussions. The youth are provided with support regarding logistics, such as transportation, accommodation when needed, and food and refreshments to make sure all is in place for a smooth data collection process.

Outcome: Based on their data collection, tangible results will come from gathering information.

Tip 1: During their field work, stay in touch and maintain constant communication. Allow them to feel ownership but in case of an emergency, or even small mishaps, it is important they feel supported.



Step 3. Analysing the Findings

Create workshops where youth participants co-analyse the data. Invite youth to present the data they collected in creative ways and identify key topics and insights. **Let them discuss their interpretations and perspectives. This ensures that the insights directly inform the final analysis.**

Outcome: Based on these key topics and insights, the youth can build the draft for the reporting.

Tip 1: Propose different analysis methods, e.g. thematic analysis, however, stay open to adopting perhaps methods that youth have used in the past and feel comfortable and confident with.

Tip 2: Guarantee the right conditions for youth to stay in the research, e.g. make sure that if youth have a contract or receive a commission, this covers the whole process until the end.



Step 4. Report Writing

Involve youth as co-authors: Encourage youth to actively contribute to the writing sections of the report, especially in the areas that reflect their experiences and insights. They could draft conclusions, recommendations, or personal reflections.

Youth peer review: Allow youth to review and provide feedback on the draft report. This ensures that the language, tone, and content are relatable to them.

Youth-driven content creation: Engage youth in developing alternative formats for reporting, such as videos, podcasts, blogs. These formats can be more

accessible and engaging for you. Also explore to work with youth to design infographics, illustrations, or interactive media that reflect the research findings. This adds visual appeal and ensures the report speaks to youth in their own language.

Outcome: Based on the brainstorming about outputs in the first phases of the research, the youth experts will now build the report.

Tip: In cases when it is not possible for youth to build the report for different circumstances e.g. due to lack of availability, make sure you validate the report with them before publishing it.



Step 5. Validation Exercise

Conduct **workshops for a quality check** of the findings by engaging relevant stakeholders, such as youth, the private sector, government or partners in relevant sectors, where they **can review the outcomes of the research and discuss its impact.**



Step 6. Conversation for Action

Targeted dissemination to key stakeholders: Ensure that the dissemination is focused on influential stakeholders who can support the recommended actions, such as policy actors or the private sector. In youth-centred research, it is however equally important to also engage youth in conversation and give feedback on the results to them.

Outcome: This could be as diverse as the possibilities of dissemination are.



The Methodology in Practice

– Our Learnings!

This section illustrates how the methodology outlined has been put into practice at the CFYE. To illustrate the different steps, we will provide two examples of projects where we implemented the Youth-Centred research project: 'job quality in the plastic waste recycling sector in Kenya' and 'the youth perspective of Agri-jobs and the role of technology in Ethiopia'.



Step 1. Project Design: Setting the Framework!

Goals and Objectives

To be able to guide the Youth Experts throughout the research project, it was critical to have a clear idea of the research goals and objectives. Therefore, even before engaging the Youth Experts, the CFYE learning team identified a core set of goals and objectives. However, since we wanted to involve Youth in every aspect of the research, the goals and objectives were kept broad and flexible yet defining a clear scope of work.

Tip: It helped us to think backwards to clarify the steps we needed to take to achieve meaningful youth participation and at the same time, achieve our research goal.

Partnership Building and Team Selection

In this phase of the project, local partners were selected. For these projects, VSO provided contacts active in the field. After a review of the already established network, we discussed whether we needed to involve other organisations or stakeholders (e.g. topic experts). At the same time, we also selected our project team. Selecting a diverse and capable group of youth was a crucial factor to ensure the project's success. It was important to ensure a gender balance in the team. Furthermore, we selected youth that were in the right age category, and we wanted to have a good balance in the team in terms of knowledge and research experience. The size of the research team depends on the objectives of the research (e.g. sample size, geographical focus, data collection methodology).

Orientation

The CFYE learning team and the selected Youth Experts had several online meetings to get to know each other. To build an informal and engaging environment right from the start, ice breakers have been a great way to get to know each other in a fun way. During these online sessions, we also introduced the research topic, got to know each other's experience in the field, learned about each other's research experience, and learned what each team member would like to learn during the project, as well as redefined and already identified the problem statement, purpose, and objectives of the research. During these online meetings, it is important to have an open environment, in which the Youth Experts feel safe to contribute and their opinions are heard.

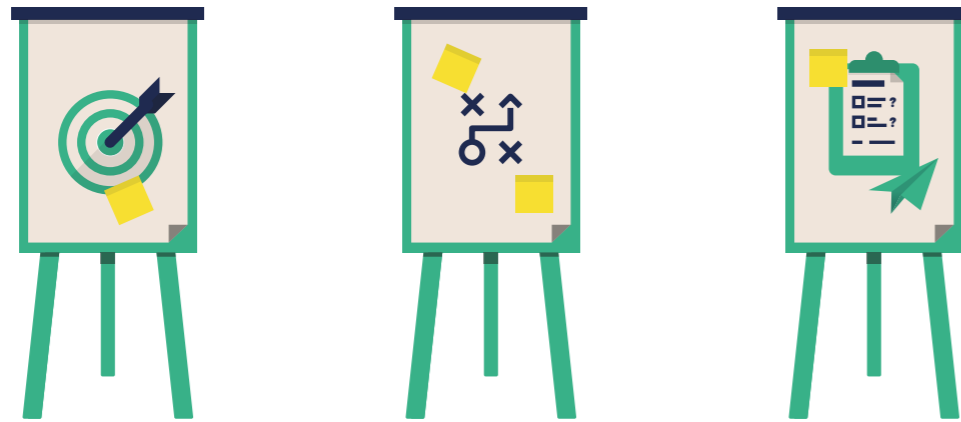
Designing the Questions & Methodology: Getting Ready!

During this phase of the Youth-Centred Research Methodology, we conducted a 3 day in-person workshop, using design thinking, making sure we started from the broad challenges and narrowed the process down to the research questions and research methods. However, before focusing on research details, we found it is essential to build a team and to ensure the creation of a safe, engaging, and interactive environment. In the text box below, some ideas and tips are given:

Tips for Creating a Safe, Engaging and Inclusive Environment:

- ◀ Icebreakers rotation: propose some ice-brakers but also allow and motivate the youth to propose theirs
- ◀ Check-in and check-out spaces: start and finish each day by asking youth how they feel and what they would like to get from the day and what they learned. You will be surprise how happy they are to engage.
- ◀ Provide snacks, time for relaxation (lunch), and breaks.
- ◀ Make fun (laugh!) and set the scene: open space to set the rules together, give everyone a task (can change per day)
- ◀ Feedback everyday: ask each of the youth to oversee preparing short feedback on the session, this allows the facilitator to reshape and adapt to the youth practical needs.





During the workshop we covered:

Understanding the Context: Once everyone knew each other and we had built a comfortable working environment and set some basic rules for our collaboration, we moved on to context setting. An expert on the topic gave relevant insights into the sector and provided the Youth Experts with additional tips and ideas. During this session, we also raised contextual awareness and discussed any cultural issues that might come up during the project.

Mapping the Challenges: Based on the context setting, we started identifying broad topics that the research should focus on and research questions that were in line with the identified topics.

Defining the Problem Statement and Brainstorming about Research Methods and Questions: Once we had a broad idea of the topics, we moved on to the methodology. We brainstormed broadly about a data collection plan, sampling strategy, data collection processes, and outputs. The research questions and methodology were developed based on the experience, insights, recommendations, and preferences of the Youth Experts.

Prototyping the Selected Methods and Questions: Youth selected interviews, surveys, and focus groups discussions as the research methods. In this phase, we finalised the methodology and tools and translated them. The Youth Experts played a crucial role in ensuring that the questions were developed in language that was culturally appropriate. We discussed the logistical planning and timeline for the implementation.

What Happened after the 3-Day Workshop?

The youth piloted the methods and questions with young people in the field. During this pilot exercise, Youth Experts made sure that the questions were clear and concise, and that the methods were interactive and allowed them to find the information they were looking for.

What Happened after the Pilot Phase?

We met again and discussed all the insights gathered during the pilot phase. This allowed the Youth Experts to reshape questions, change words, and shorten the survey. This phase was highly relevant not only because it enriched the methodology, but also because the youth brought up practical questions and perspectives about the research and their experience collecting data that did not come up before.

Interview: Getayawkal Abraham

Youth Expert | Ethiopia

How did your personal experiences or those of your peers help in shaping the research questions and research design?

The Research work experience I had really helped me to contribute to the development of research questions and the design in a way since we had a tight schedule during the project, we used our expertise to support the co-designing. It also helped us to see the dynamics in choosing the most suitable designs.

How did the team ensure that the research methodology was youth-friendly?

Since the team is constructed by youth experts, it underpins youth-centred issues in the community that crafted it to be youth-friendly.

How would you describe the collaboration process and how was this important for the continuous research process? How would you describe the environment/sphere during the workshop (and further process)

The collaboration was immensely important as it built positive energy among the team. Learning from one another is a key in co-designing, it helped the continuous

research process very well. The sphere was great except the fact it was a cold season in Ethiopia during the time and it was tough. The facilitation and our activities were engaging, and we freely expressed our thoughts, we also involved arguments to craft the outcome hence, it was great.

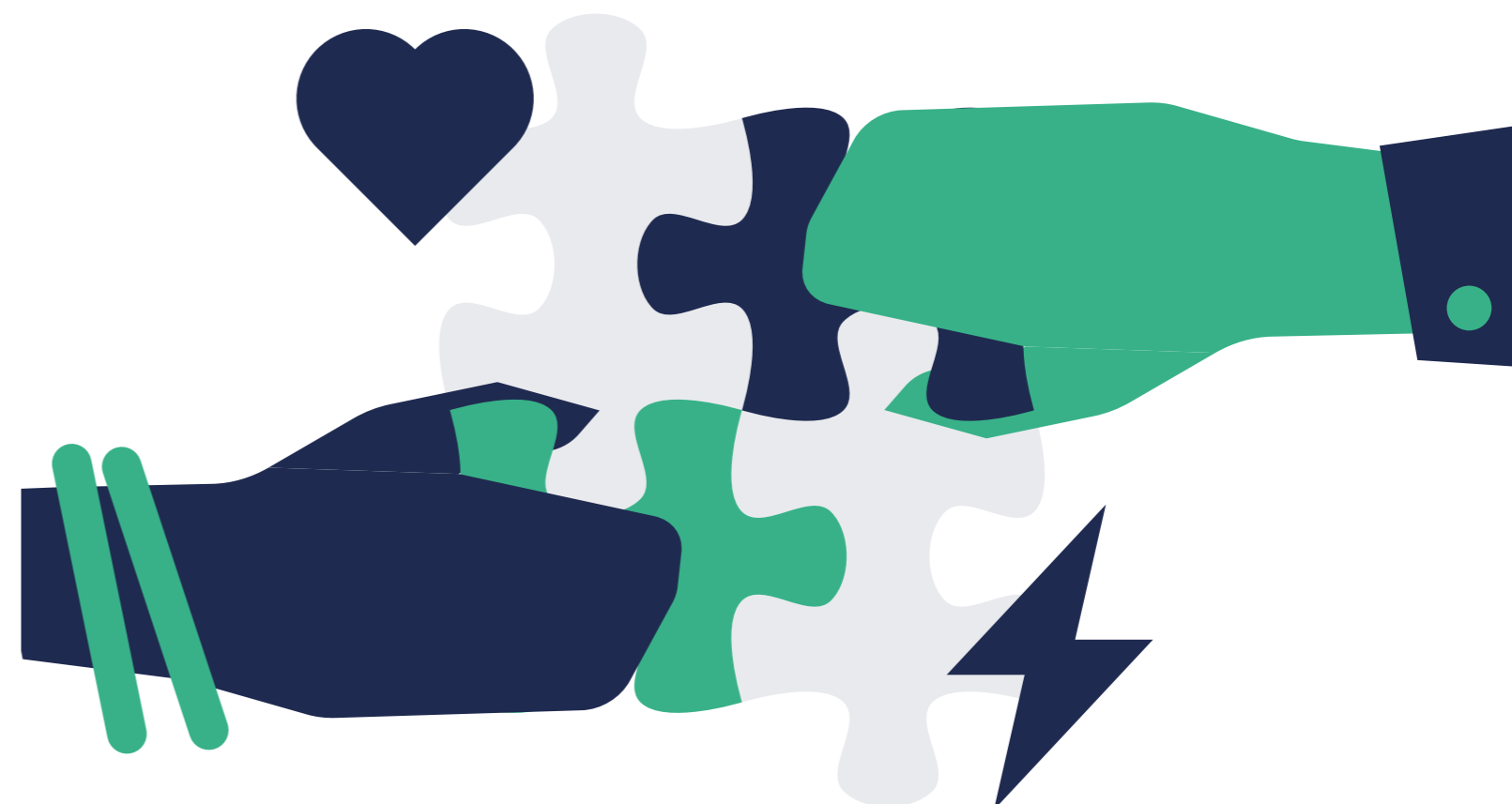
How did this phase of the research help you and prepare you for the next steps in the research process?

It helped us to know the overall goal of the research. It also paved a way to see the Agricultural job, Technology, and youth employment from different perspectives, the youth, women, and even the community. It gave us some sort of paradigm shift to look deeper into the problem

Why is it important to involve young people already from the start (compared to e.g. just involving them for data collection?)

The very first thing is that the youth experts can easily understand the issue at hand, secondly, the youth also contribute much for the design process as they understand the context. Thirdly, youth participation gives highlights of the situation for a guest facilitator from another country. Lastly, their experience of conducting research in the country helps them to analyse research challenges in those specific areas.

Please also refer to the video: each of them said what they liked the most about the workshop, also key learnings from minute 7:50: [Youth-Centred Methodologies - Ethiopia and the Agricultural Sector Potential for Youth \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



Step 2. Data collection: Ready to go to the Field

Once all the tools were finalised, it was time to go to the field for data collection. In this phase of the research, it was essential to make sure that all logistics were arranged, and the youth were clear on tasks and timelines, so they could perform their tasks independently.

Mobilisation

Through their own networks and partner organisations, Youth Experts were able to reach youth working in the sector and approach them for data collection. It is recommended that youth travel to areas where young people are working, to make sure that they engage in conversations in the spaces where they already are.

Focus Group Discussions

Youth Experts had several focus group discussions to engage in a conversation with multiple youth. This was a very useful way to get first insights into the issues in the sector and get a sense of the general feeling of young people working in the sector. To facilitate youth-to-youth engagement, it was critical to ensure that youth are the primary communications during the conversation. For the FDGs, it was ideal to have at least two youth present, so that one is responsible for taking notes, while the other focuses on engaging in the conversation.

Interviews

Youth Experts also had several interviews with key informants in the sector. These interviews were meant to further gather insights into specific topics (e.g. that were brought up during the FDGs) or from specific perspectives (e.g. different stakeholders in the sector).

Surveys

In addition to the qualitative data gathered via the methods above, youth also collected quantitative data via surveys, using tools such as Kobo or Google Forms.

Tip: Regularly check in with the youth experts to see how data collection is progressing, to address any challenges that might come up and to make sure they don't feel lost.

Interview: Hikma Mekonnen

Ethiopia | Youth expert

How did your role as a youth researcher influence the way you approached data collection compared to a traditional researcher?

Being really concerned and sensitive, the experience of owning the research from the very beginning, trying to categorise and analyse data was almost all the first and different (better) experience compared to what we have had experienced.

What was it like to engage directly with other young people during the data collection process? How did their responses reflect or differ from what you expected?

It makes it easier to communicate and understand during free talk. Also, I can say it definitely changed my perception on generalising situation on behalf of thinking that I knew I about them. (Thinking that I didn't know anything about it and try to know about everything makes it clearer to me.)

Did you find that being a youth yourself helped to create a more open and honest dialogue with the youth you were interviewing and/or surveying? How so?

Absolutely true, YES, the way we introduced ourselves and how they saw us and the way they were honest with us about the points we needed and tried to have friendly and clear conversations makes the data collection more flexible and satisfying.

Did you find youth-focused approach uncover any findings or perspectives that may have been overlooked in more traditional research approaches?

Not yet.

What lessons did you learn from speaking to youth that could improve future youth-centred research projects?

Being sensitive, generous and patient with the data they provided and being motivated for the upcoming week's experience, I'll upgrade too.

How did youth-centred research help you in your personal development/career?

A lot of their energy, challenges, the things they were motivated for made their plan, the solutions they have been using were all a big lesson for my career.

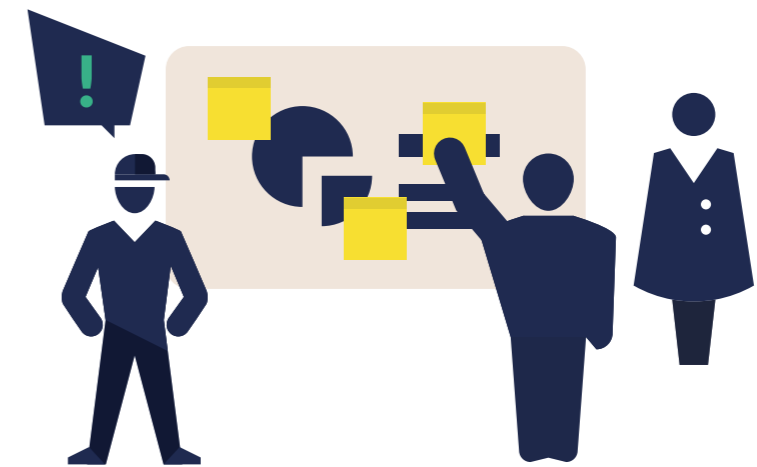
Step 3. Analysing the Findings

Once the youth had completed data collection, we had several online sessions to identify key themes and insights gathered during data collection. Furthermore, we discussed how we could use the qualitative data to support quantitative insights.

The Youth Experts prepared a first analysis, shared the field notes with the rest of the group, and presented this during the online sessions, so that the other youth could respond to this and see whether this was in line with their findings or not. During these sessions, we came to a list of topics that should be covered in the report. For one of the research projects, we used thematic analysis. During our workshop, we identified themes, then we selected the questions by theme, which was very useful during the analysis because we already knew what our main focal

points were. However, during the analysis, we merged some themes that tackle similar topics to make sure that the analysis was cohesive and avoided redundancy.

Tip: Make sure the youth experts keep engaged after fieldwork. Facilitate the workshops focused on the analysis while allowing the youth to be the leaders of those workshops and emphasising they are the owners of the project.



Step 4. Reporting

Once we had a good overview of all the data that we collected and had summarised the main insights, we brainstormed about how to shape these insights into outputs. In this brainstorm it is important that the outputs selected align with the findings, the youth voice, the audience, and the skills of the youth.

Reporting: Faatimah Clarke

CFYE | communications & marketing associate

To me, youth-centred research outputs should be creative, visually dynamic, interactive, and highly accessible. To achieve this, they can include multimedia elements like visuals, infographics, videos, and digital storytelling that resonates well with younger audiences and in general are well received across different demographics, especially when disseminating via social media platforms. Straightforward and more simple language should be used in these outputs as they allow complex concepts to be more digestible, not only for a

wider audience, but also for those operating outside the sector that the research may focus on.

By disseminating via social media, this also addresses issues of accessibility for both youth and audiences beyond. Youth-centred research outputs can also be presented more informally, for example, rather than publishing a standard report format, using formats like magazines, flipbooks, or other more 'youthful' formats helps make the research more enticing and memorable for the audience, which raises awareness and promotes positive action.

Step 5. Validation Exercise

Once the draft report was ready, we tested our findings in conversations with IPs and relevant stakeholders in the field. In these conversations, we shared the main insights of the research and discussed whether these were in line with the knowledge and experiences of relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, we discussed how different stakeholders could use this information and what dissemination strategies would fit. We also discussed opportunities for follow-up and future research.

Interview: Caren Cheluley

Kenya | Youth Expert

What do you see as the main benefits of personally presenting the findings from youth-centred research project at events?

Events are forums for the dissemination of research findings. As youths, it provides a platform to highlight our insights, experiences, and perspectives, allowing our voices to be heard by decision-makers, stakeholders, policymakers, and the broader public. This visibility can help shift perceptions, encourage collaboration and funding, and foster knowledge sharing, emphasising the importance of including youth input in program development for greater social impact.

How do you think youth-led presentations create a different impact compared to when adults or external experts present similar findings?

As young people, when we present our own experiences and findings, the message feels more genuine and relatable. Audiences are more likely to trust and engage with data presented by those who directly live the issues being discussed, as it resonates as a firsthand account rather than a secondary interpretation. It also gives us more agency over our own narratives, defying negative perceptions of youth being uninformed or passive, and building a stronger call to action by seeing the direct impact of issues on young lives.

How did this research project (and presenting it) help you in your personal development/career?

Participating in and presenting youth-centred research on green jobs has been invaluable for both my personal

development and career growth. The process taught me critical skills in research design, peer to peer data collection, and problem-solving, which have strengthened my research expertise and enhanced my analytical thinking.

It also sharpened my communication abilities, as translating complex findings into engaging presentations required me to convey ideas clearly and effectively to diverse audience during the GYEO summit. On a personal level, presenting research findings helped me overcome any hesitation around public speaking, showing me that I can communicate impactful messages with poise. The feedback I received from mentors and peers during presentations highlighted my strengths and areas for improvement, shaping my presentation style and making me a more effective communicator. Professionally, this experience strengthened my collaboration skills, as I worked closely with both peers and mentors to conduct and interpret research.

I really appreciate the support by Camee during the preparation, with the support to the final presentation. I also navigated team dynamics and taking on leadership responsibilities during the research which allowed me to hone my teamwork abilities, an asset in any field. Furthermore, presenting green jobs research taught me the importance of empathy in professional work—understanding and addressing the needs of the youths in informal sector represented in the research underscored the ethical responsibility that comes with data-driven work.

Step 6. Dissemination

In different conversations with the youth, we discussed which events were relevant for both youth and CFYE to disseminate the findings of the research. In dissemination, it is important to give youth a role and make sure they present what they find most relevant, so that youth represent the voices of youth.

Youth Experts co-organised a webinar with relevant stakeholders and presented the findings of the research themselves during this webinar. Furthermore, youth were given the stage in different events to present the research methodology and research outcomes. This not only ensures that the youth voice was represented by youth but also helped youth to build networks and boost their personal careers.

Tip: Support the dissemination process with the resources your organisation has, e.g. in case youth need it, provide communications products for them to share with their networks through different social media platforms.

