Red Cross Red Crescent
youth empowerment

Empowering youth

Empowering the Red Cross Red Crescent

Today, tomorrow, and into the future

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. With our 190 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we are in every community reaching 160.7 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes, as well as 110 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2020* – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to saving lives and changing minds.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development, and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

P.O. Box 303
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Telephone: +41 22 730 4222
Telefax: +41 22 730 4200
E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org
Web site: www.ifrc.org

Red Cross Red Crescent Youth Empowerment
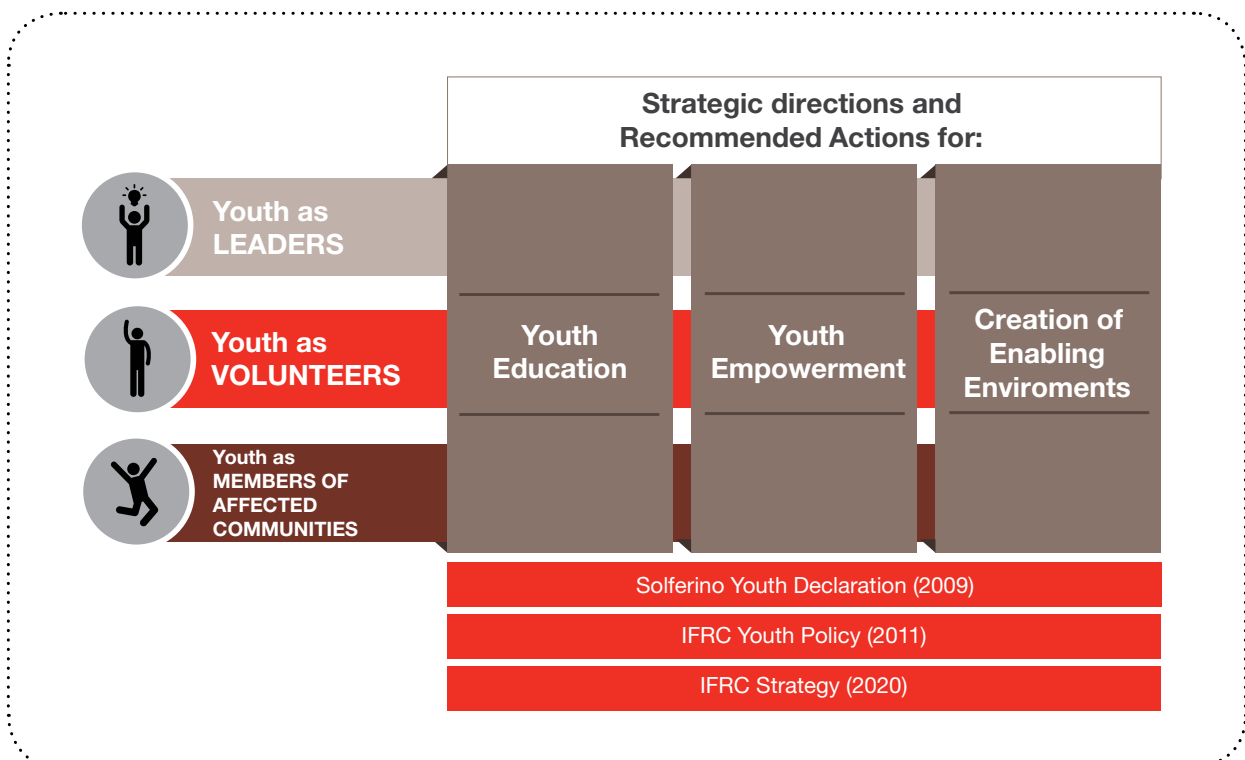**1314000 01/2017 E**

Follow us:

FOREWORD

A number of studies have shown that more than half of the Red Cross Red Crescent's 16 million volunteers, who reach an estimated 270 million people annually, are young people.

When the IFRC Youth Empowerment Strategy (YES) was endorsed in 2013, the IFRC wanted to prepare a document that would help National Societies to work with youth. The overall aim of YES is to "articulate an approach that supports young people to do more, do better, and reach further in their local communities and beyond" (YES 2013). More specifically, YES introduced the '3Es' conceptual framework, which includes the component of youth empowerment.

This paper is the key outcome of the Red Cross Red Crescent Youth Empowerment Study, which was commissioned to assist National Society leadership, youth engagement practitioners and youth leaders to understand how they can incorporate the concepts that underlie youth empowerment in the Red Cross

IFRC Youth Engagement Strategy (2013)
"Strong youth for stronger RCRC and safer and resilient communities"

Strategic directions and Recommended Actions for:

- Youth as **LEADERS**
- Youth as **VOLUNTEERS**
- Youth as **MEMBERS OF AFFECTED COMMUNITIES**

| Youth Education | Youth Empowerment | Creation of Enabling Enviroments |

Solferino Youth Declaration (2009)

IFRC Youth Policy (2011)

IFRC Strategy (2020)

Red Crescent's work. The study's objectives were: to analyse youth empowerment in the context of the 3E framework, which is central to the strategic direction of the IFRC Youth Engagement Strategy; to review existing approaches and best practice on youth empowerment; and to identify principles for strengthening the Red Cross Red Crescent's approach to youth empowerment in the various cultural and social contexts in which Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies operate and involve youth.

Resilient communities

Stronger RCRC ●

Youth as leaders ●

Youth as members of affected communities

●

Youth as volunteers

BACKGROUND OF THE RCRC YOUTH EMPOWERMENT STUDY

To map existing approaches and make best practice recommendations, the project reviewed the literature on youth empowerment, identifying six essential overarching elements. To ensure the quality of the literature review, the project team searched a range of databases, including the Educational Resources Information Center, Sociological Abstracts, PubMed, Web of Science, Academic Search Premier, ScienceDirect, Wiley-Blackwell, and Highwire. The search terms used were: voluntary, volunteer, voluntary work, NGO, non-governmental, non-profit, youth, youths, empowerment, empower. The review covered articles published after 2000. All the resources found were categorized in terms of the six key components that empower youth. The study also interviewed 12 youth leaders from different National Societies. Interviewees were asked to discuss each of the six key components, both in terms of its relevance to their daily work with the Red Cross Red Crescent and in terms of its relationship with other key components. The quotations in the paper are drawn from these interviews and from the literature review.

PILLARS OF EMPOWERMENT

A number of government and global policies recognize the importance of empowerment. For example, the empowerment of women was one of eight United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals to 2015 and remains central to the Sustainable Development Goals that succeeded them. Research on youth empowerment and volunteerism has confirmed that the roots of adult volunteering can be traced back to youth volunteering (Snyder and Omoto, 2008). A study found that two thirds of adult volunteers started volunteering when they were young and that adults who volunteered in their youth are twice as likely to do voluntary work (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). The children of parents who volunteer turn out to be the most generous volunteers of all.

According to Deanne [2005], communities as well as researchers concur that adults play an important role in youth empowerment. The presence of caring adults is one of the keys of youth development. Young adults are ambitious, flexible, energetic and optimistic, characteristics that enable them to make an indispensable contribution to civil society, *when given the chance*. Adults in positions of authority can make space for inter-generational dialogue and cooperation by investing in educational opportunities for young adults, empowering them, and creating enabling environments in which they become civic-minded citizens who want to build and give back to their communities (Verhoeven, Davids and Schulpen, 2007). Well-equipped, empowered, and enabled children, adolescents, and youth can be game changers in strengthening community resilience.

Empowerment can take many forms. It is therefore essential to understand the conditions that allow empowerment to flourish, and identify approaches that promote participatory youth-centred empowerment appropriately.

Gutierrez, Parsons and Cox (1998) argue that empowerment practices should focus on three dimensions: the intrapersonal, the interpersonal and the institutional. This view echoes the position of Solomon who proposed in 1976 that youth empowerment is best achieved by taking a holistic approach (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008).

Building on the above, the Critical Youth Empowerment model (CYE) (Jennings et al., 2006) considers that these

three key dimensions, and six categories, underpin successful youth empowerment. The six categories are:

1 **Meaningful participation in decision-making, encouraging the expression of opinion.**

2 **A welcoming, safe, enabling, and inclusive environment that values selfless contributions.**

3 **Assignment of genuine and significant individual responsibility.**

4 **Equitable power-sharing with adults at all levels.**

5 **A sense of community and friendship.**

6 **Learning opportunities that focus on capacity-building and the development of strengths.**

Sense of community	Participation in decision-making	Welcome and safe environment
Learning opportunities	**Equitable power-sharing**	**Individual responsibility**
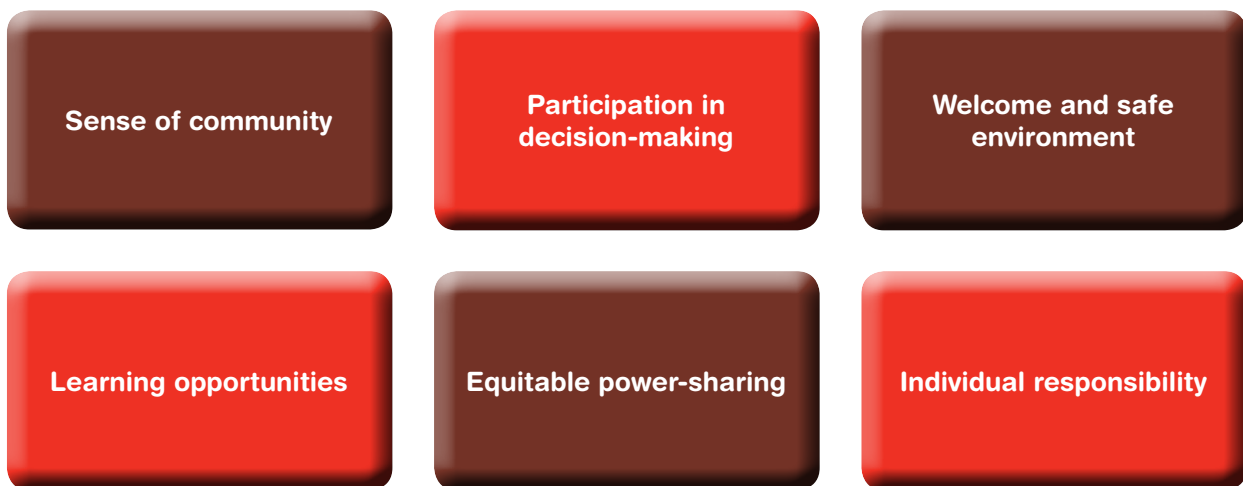
Jennings et al. (2008) add that these essential categories of youth empowerment should interrelate and be dynamic.

In order to take account of the individual, interpersonal and institutional dimensions of empowerment, the IFRC's practice of youth empowerment needs to interact with other opportunities to engage that the Red Cross Red Crescent offers youth, as leaders, volunteers and members of affected communities. Interestingly, top-down approaches are critical to youth empowerment practice and the introduction of institutional policies and systems is therefore pivotal (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008).

THE BIG SIX

This paper will now consider in turn the six categories of successful youth empowerment practice, making use of theory and empirical research findings (interviews).

1 Meaningful participation in decision-making, encouraging the expression of opinion.

In this section, we discuss the participation of youth in decision-making processes, in a context of inter-generational dialogue and partnerships. For the study, this is the first tier of youth empowerment.

Though participation in decision-making processes is fundamentally influenced and shaped by cultural norms and social structures, distinct negative youth stereotypes can be identified. Claims that young people are unskilled, immature, unable to follow through, inexperienced, etc., deny their contribution to adult-led processes and decisions and often cause youth to be excluded from decision-making processes. In many instances, young people are not even considered to have an interest or to be a constituency that should be represented in decision-making fora.

Strikingly, several authors have shown that even some youth policies fail to take account of the needs and opinions of young people; many reflect the expectations and assumptions of adults or cultural and social norms (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). Further, although young people are said to represent the future, they are often ignored by decision-making processes that plan to improve the world (Liu, Holosko & Lo, 2008).

Research has also shown that organizations which do involve youth in their decision-making processes frequently benefit, as does the wider community (Bess et al., 2011). Organizational learning theorists say that, when young people participate in decision-making processes, individual and organizational learning, knowledge development, and hence organisational continuity and growth, all improve. Jennings et al. (2006) have noted that the role of decision-making in effective youth empowerment is closely linked to learning opportunities and to equitable power-sharing between adults and youth.

While the IFRC Youth Policy rightly acknowledges that successful institutional continuity and leadership renewal depend on empowered and prepared youth (IFRC Youth Policy, 2011), as a global strategic framework YES reaffirms the relevance of youth participation in decision-making at all levels by acknowledging and emphasizing the role of young people as key stakeholders in strengthening and sustaining Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies (YES, 2013). More specifically, Strategic Direction 1 states explicitly that the objective is to ensure "youth participation in decision-making at all levels of management, governance, and service delivery".

"I felt empowered when they [the board] were developing policies and they asked the opinion of the youth around the table."

Amy (35, Canada).

With respect to empirical research findings, all the interviewees confirmed that "being taken seriously while sitting at the decision-making table" was clearly empowering. Sandy (United States of America, 32) felt empowered when the opinion of young people was explicitly requested in meetings. Sitting at governing board meetings also gave her the sense that she had influence over decisions the meetings endorsed. In both instances, adults made space for a youth representative at the decision-making table, involved him or her, and requested and asked for contributions. This confirms the crucial role of adults in tapping and strengthening the potential of youth by introducing youth empowerment measures and actions, especially at institutional level and through interpersonal empowerment.

2 Creating a welcoming, safe, enabling, and inclusive environment that recognizes selfless contributions.

How can one create a welcoming, safe, enabling, and inclusive environment that promotes meaningful and sustained youth-led action?

Head (2011) highlights *social inclusion*, the effort to ensure "that all people, including youth, participate as valued members of a society". To achieve this ideal, however, requires more than the mere removal of barriers: investment and action are also necessary. For Head (2011), social inclusion can be achieved by *active participation* and, in the case of youth, by meaningfully *engaging* with young people and *recognizing their rights and space*. Respect and recognition of differences between individuals and their backgrounds is central to participatory social inclusion. Building on this participation, the provision of *educational opportunities* and *satisfying employment* is also crucial. *Social integration* and *material wellbeing* are two further features of an inclusive community. Finally, young people have a moral right to be heard and taken seriously (Head, 2011).

Cavet and Sloper (2004) point out that services, programmes and policies that have a direct impact on young people will be more efficient and effective if young people are involved in their planning, delivery and evaluation. This notion is reflected in the strategic directions of YES, especially in the engagement pathway 'Youth as members of affected communities'.

Lastly, involving youth in socially inclusive environments enhances their personal development and by extension that of the wider community. Interestingly, Head (2011) notes that the benefits tend to be more recognized when young people actively take or create an opportunity rather than simply conform to

More specifically, the engagement pathway 'Youth as leaders' provides National Societies with guidance on how to ensure youth participate in decision-making at all levels of management, governance and service delivery.

"Developing young people's capacities is essential, because some day someone else will take up my position as a young person."

Siham (24, formerly from Syria, now in the Netherlands)

an existing framework or requirement (Head, 2011). This evidence underscores the importance of the 'Youth-led and National Society-owned' concept in YES.

Ungar, Langlois and Hum (2009) assert that empowered youth are driven by a cause and have the capacity to overcome community barriers to their participation. Through practising youth-led action and reflection, young people naturally understand that they are contributing to their communities.

Empowering young people by creating an inclusive environment brings many benefits for both the community and individuals. For the *community and organisation*, the benefits include: young people support each other; community resources are enriched; the community develops a shared vision; young people make healthy choices; youth initiate activities for the good of the community; inter-generational relationships are genuine and healthy. At the *individual level*, young people: live closer to their values; develop self-esteem; become visionaries; seek opportunities to learn; take the initiative and lead change; make healthy lifestyle choices; and act for the good of others (Heartwood, 2008).

The importance of an enabling environment conducive to youth-led action and inter-generational cooperation is embedded in the 3Es framework of YES. According to YES, enabling environments generate youth-led action, carried out by well-prepared, empowered children, adolescents and young adults, who have safe and secure spaces, access to resources, and are given support to fulfil their potential as agents of change (YES, 2013). More specifically, the engagement pathway 'Youth as leaders' provides National Societies with guidance on how to ensure youth participate in decision-making at all levels of management, governance and service delivery. This has a far-reaching impact on the engagement of vulnerable and marginalized youth too. As for recognition of selflessness, the pathway 'Youth as volunteers' recommends identifying tailored ways to recognize youth-led action.

All the interviews suggested that a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment clearly promotes empowerment leading to action. For example, Francis (25, Uganda) emphasized the importance of 'creating a sustainable environment through increasing the capacities of the younger people'. He also mentioned the significance of personal development, saying that 'developing young people's capacities is essential, because some day someone else will take up my position as a young person'. Siham (24, formerly from Syria, now in the Netherlands) said that different environments require different forms of empowerment: 'Working under danger is different than working under safe conditions. Both are very important, but different'. She underscored the importance of recognition and linked it to intrapersonal empowerment.

③ Assignment of genuine and significant individual responsibility.

By engaging in projects or activities that have an impact, young people can be and can feel empowered (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008; Jennings et al., 2006). Although the literature does not clearly define activities that have this effect, Jennings et al. (2006) suggest that meaningful activities are challenging and relevant to the lives of young people. Activities that young people consider meaningful may of course vary between individuals and age groups and from culture to culture. This is reflected in YES, which states that young people are not homogeneous and that developmentally appropriate and tailored approaches need to be adopted by initiatives that involve them.

Assigning responsibility empowers individuals in several ways. First, assuming responsibility is a vital element of efforts to fight the feeling, common among adolescents, that they lack a role. Left unaddressed, this feeling can lead to behavioural and social difficulties (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). If they are not given a meaningful role, young people engaged in the Red Cross Red Crescent as leaders, volunteers or participants in Red Cross Red Crescent programmes and services may feel left out and incapable. Feeling useful and needed, on the other hand, sparks feelings of empowerment in young people (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). Second, assuming responsibility for a specific task gives young people the opportunity to learn new skills and test their leadership capacity, and reinforces their self-esteem (Jennings et al., 2006). Finally, fulfilling a useful and specific role promotes commitment and leads to longer-term engagement (Jennings et al., 2006). Indeed, participation efficacy (which refers to actions that benefit and positively impact others rather than oneself) is a predictor of the degree to which young people are likely to remain involved in an organisation or project (Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley, 2008). Assuming personal responsibility therefore contributes to an upward spiral of empowerment and extends individual comfort zones.

Nonetheless, the question remains: how can one best give young people individual responsibilities and ensure their successful accomplishment? Astroth (1997) points out that peer groups provide a safe environment for assigning individual responsibilities. The same author underlines that groups should be of reasonable size and that every member should be assigned a role.

Since no definition of 'meaningful activity' is universally agreed, YES generally recommends programmes that offer a wide spectrum of activities and can appeal to different youth groups, in and outside the mainstream. It can also be argued that 'meaningful activities' are ones that permit young people to become

agents of change in their communities or on a higher level. Individual responsibility is not a stand-alone component of YES, but it is implied by many of the framework's strategic directions.

An interviewee from Uganda remembered that he felt empowered when he understood the impact of his tree planting activities on his local community, especially in the dry season. A Canadian woman was empowered by her work on national policy, while an American woman said she was empowered when she raised money for an international vaccination campaign. All these examples have one factor in common: the young people in question had decided themselves that their activities were meaningful and contributed to a higher purpose. Communicating about youth engagement opportunities and the impact young people can make is therefore crucial. Communications should be tailored to the youth audience and its subgroups. In any project, the impact (contribution) of youth should always be emphasized. In conclusion, giving young people responsible roles empowers them and encourages them to act to achieve positive change, and this is especially so when they believe the responsibility they exercise is of genuine value. We should cease to think of young people as simply 'doers'.

4 **Equitable power-sharing with adults at all levels.**

Power-sharing between youth and adults is the fourth tier of effective youth empowerment. Although it is clearly associated with two dimensions of YES ('Participation in decision-making' and 'Individual responsibility'), power-sharing is unique because it creates a direct *interpersonal* collaboration between youth and adults, focusing on the attribution of responsibilities and tasks. The interpersonal dimension is by definition *bidirectional*, since adults do not have unidirectional relationships with young people. Young people should positively 'adopt' their adult mentors, for instance, and should never be perceived as passive recipients of assistance who have nothing to offer themselves. It is noteworthy that the study treats individual responsibility primarily in *intrapersonal* terms, even though individual responsibility is logically an expression of actual (or perceived) authority.

When power is shared, the role of adults is pivotal. For Jennings et al. (2008), the adult must find a balance both as the dominant person in the relationship and when giving support. The authors argue further that, where there is no 'capacity to influence structures, processes, values and practices', youth empowerment cannot be fully achieved, and that power-sharing influences and is influenced by the dimensions of individual responsibility and participation in decision-making. The authors explicitly link the latter with *equitable power-sharing*. From the perspective of the Critical Theory of Youth Empowerment (developed by Jennings et al., 2008) 'youth are not truly empowered if they do not have the *capacity to address the structures, processes, social values and practices of the issues at hand*'.

"The National Society gives me the power to do what I do best."

Francis (25, Uganda).

It may still be asked: what should adult roles look like? The answer depends on cultural and societal differences that influence youth-adult relationships. In every society, hierarchical norms lie at the heart of interpersonal and intergenerational relationships. Despite wide variations in culture and the absence of one *ideal* adult role, certain conclusions may nevertheless be drawn about adult role models.

Table 1 lists several traits of adult roles in power-sharing (Hilfinger Messias et al., 2005). The authors suggest that adults set the level of expectations, and provide 'good' role models. They can also provide social and administrative support and (personal) guidance, in a mentoring role.

Table 1. **Adult roles in youth empowerment programmes**

Puts youth first	• Prioritizes youth participation and engagement. • Values, respects, and acknowledges youth. • Recognizes the learning potential of both success and failure.
Raises the bar of youth performance	• Sets and communicates high expectations. • Provides young people with opportunities to develop and practise leadership skills.
Creates space and makes things happen	• Provides administrative and logistical support and structure. • Makes it fun.
Builds relationships	• Is open and available and listens. • Is a role model. • Nurtures, protects, and defends young people.
Exerts influence, control, and authority	• Sets boundaries and monitors youth behaviour. • Focuses attention on the tasks in hand. • Exerts influence and intervenes to encourage youth interaction, enforce discipline, foster diversity, and increase youth potential.
Communicates and connects with the broader community	• Creates communication and support networks. • Mobilizes resources. • Reaches out to the wider community.

Source: Hilfinger Messias, Fore, McLoughlin and Parra-Medina, 2005.

Astroth (1997) described adult roles in a related way. Arguing that adults are leaders, and youth their respected partners, he distinguishes *equitable* from *equal* power-sharing relationships between youth and adults. More specifically, he lists the following attributes of an adult leader in an equitable power-sharing relationship with a young person: he or she is '*trusting and trusted, supportive, committed and flexible*'. In summary, adult roles can differ immensely and no ideal type can be identified, notably because the role of an adult evolves in any organic

inter-generational relationship. However, an adult who empowers young people can be identified by his or her capacity to develop and nurture equitable relationships with them.

Liu, Holosko and Lo (2008) position the adult leader as a focal point, a facilitator for youth. Adult leaders are the crucial *anchor* of an empowering environment. They argue that 'leadership and mentorship by adults facilitates integration of learning experience in the developmental processes of youth empowerment' (Liu, Holosko & Lo, 2008, p.65), and strengthen this argument by adding that adults can be role models who, as respectful mentors, can establish *transactional partnerships* with youth in the process of youth empowerment by providing both encouragement and caring support. To paraphrase and synthesize, being an adult role model implies acting as a *good example* in an *equitable partnership*, which in turn implies a clear sharing of power and provision of support.

Standing alongside youth education and youth empowerment, the third building block of the YES 3Es concept is 'the creation of Enabling Environments'. This links seamlessly with power-sharing. For the Red Cross Red Crescent, adults are the *anchors*, who establish the contextual tone (Liu, Holosko & Lo, 2008) and set the level of youth empowerment. In this role, their accountability for effective youth-led action is naturally high.

YES specifically mentions the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID) (Komives et al., 2006). Even though YES focuses on the leadership identity development of youth (notably in the youth engagement cycle), the 'youth-led and National Society-owned' concept takes the same position as Komives et al. (2006), that adults and mentors are important role models in the leadership identity development of young people and therefore have an intrinsic and irreplaceable role in youth empowerment that goes hand in hand with accountability to young people.

The interviews clearly confirmed this. In most cases, interviewees named at least one important mentor who had inspired or motivated them or been a source of support during their Red Cross Red Crescent engagement. Shiham (24, Syria), for example, spoke eloquently of "wanting to follow in his footsteps", probably the highest compliment a mentor can receive. Sharing power was less often mentioned specifically, although hardly any negative remarks were reported. Felix (Uganda, 35) said that he had enjoyed the fact that age seemed not to matter at all in his Red Cross community, even though there was a strict hierarchy. Power-sharing and hierarchy do not appear to be mutually exclusive.

5 **A sense of community and friendship**

Although almost every person is by default a member of one or more communities (our home town, a sports club, our school), the people we know and with whom we associate represent for most of us a major element of our identity. The psychological notion of 'sense of community' focuses on the *experience* of being part of a community rather than on its structure, on the assumption that the individual's perception of his or her community and his or her relationship with it may in fact be the community experience.

What is 'community' and why is it important to empowerment? In the context of empowerment, community and the sense of community are often said to motivate young people to join or remain in organisations. Empowerment in a community is an on-going process that creates conditions in which young people become confident about expressing their views and beliefs in a 'safe' community of like-minded and compassionate individuals who offer support (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). For Francis (25, Uganda), the community was not the main reason for joining the Red Cross Red Crescent but it was what kept him involved. When asked what might have made his experience better, he said: "Meeting more friends and volunteers to share various experiences – local, national, and global". This reminds us that community and, more important, the absence of community affect both the quality and the duration of youth engagement.

The sense of community is linked to unity and collective decision-making processes that promote knowledge development and improve skills and attitudes (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). Consequently, where young people enjoy strong connections in the communities to which they belong, they are more likely to fulfil their potential to advance the community's well-being and growth.

People may therefore join a group or organisation because they feel it offers them a community; and joining together around an issue or cause can also create a community. Studies show that, as a result of volunteering, many volunteers felt more connected to others and to the agency they volunteered for. After only 3 months of volunteering, over 80 per cent of volunteers claimed to have made at least one friend, and after 6 months almost a third had recruited at least one new member to their organisation (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). Other studies also confirm that, when someone feels connected to a community with shared interests and values, levels of participation and civic engagement increase.

'Strong youth for strong National Societies and safe and resilient communities: youth doing more, doing better, and reaching further' is a headline component of YES. In addition, nearly all our interviewees said that joining and creating a community was an important aspect of volunteering with the Red Cross Red Crescent. That so many felt fulfilled because of their voluntary work with the Red

"In the RCRC, you learn to look at people in another way. At the International Conference, it doesn't matter where you come from, being part of a whole makes it feel like home."

Abdulkadir (21, Turkey).

The sense of community is linked to unity and collective decision-making processes that promote knowledge development and improve skills and attitudes (Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008).

Cross Red Crescent confirmed the importance of the 'community building approaches' that are central to youth empowerment practice.

During the interviews, many youth leaders spoke about the importance of friends and their sense of community. For Sandy (32, United States of America), the people she met were the most valuable 'fruits' of her Red Cross Red Crescent experience. Many of the interviewees felt a genuine desire to give back and to remain in touch with their Red Cross Red Crescent community.

6 **Learning opportunities that focus on capacity-building and the development of strengths.**

Learning opportunities are stepping stones of development and an important tier of empowerment. Newly learned skills give young people confidence and promote the formation of positive self-identity (Head, 2011; Liu, Holosko and Lo, 2008). For optimal empowerment through education, young people should not be viewed as recipients, but as active players with different strengths and capacities. The non-formal education provided by NGOs allows people to learn by trial and error and to explore and practise a range of life skills (Madjar and Cohen-Malayev, 2013). The importance of reflecting on acquired or practised skills should not be underestimated, because reflection helps young people to incorporate skills they have learned into their identity (Lakin and Mahoney, 2006) and plays a pivotal role in intrapersonal empowerment.

The YES framework frequently stresses the importance of learning and educational opportunities. It divides educational opportunities into three categories. First, youth should have access to developmentally appropriate educational opportunities (knowledge, skills, and values), including those relevant to their health. Second, young people should be encouraged to develop their competencies by doing new and challenging tasks. For example, they can be invited to help find innovative solutions to problems associated with the programmes and operations of their National Society. Finally, formative educational opportunities should be developed and made available to young people that develop their leadership skills and help them to pass those skills on to their peers, thereby empowering others. The clusters and niches for learning outlined in YES propel youth empowerment in all three dimensions – intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional.

Many interviewees said that the development of leadership skills was the most important milestone in their Red Cross Red Crescent experience. "I learned really early on how to work in a global movement" (Amy, 32, Canada). Others mentioned the opportunities they were given to visit international conferences and meet new people. "It was a learning opportunity to enlarge my view of the world"

(Abdulkadir, 21, Turkey). Finally, many acquired life skills through the first aid and psychosocial support programmes. "We learnt to be out in the field… We invited experts to talk about life skills. First aid saves lives!" (Felix, 35, Uganda). About knowledge transfer, Francis (25, Uganda) said: "developing young people's capacities is essential, because some day someone else will take up my position as a young person".

In conclusion, learning can take different forms and can focus on different competencies. However, it should always identify and improve the strengths and capacities of young people. Investment in people-centred learning for youth is not just the final pillar of youth empowerment: it is the key to continuity, leadership renewal and growth within the Red Cross Red Crescent.

CONCLUSIONS

We have confirmed that youth empowerment in the Red Cross Red Crescent can be constructed around six specific practice pillars. Although it must be highlighted that youth programmes vary greatly in different cultures and societies, the principles of youth empowerment practice outlined in this paper are universal, culturally indifferent, and can be adapted to different contexts and situations.

The Red Cross Red Crescent youth empowerment study was designed to help National Societies to better understand the empowerment pillar of the Youth Engagement Strategy and inform the youth empowerment practice of National Societies.

The six universal principles of youth empowerment practice should guide the application of policies and practices that seek to empower youth, throughout the cycle of National Societies' work with youth and their operational and developmental strategies.

1. In youth empowerment practice everywhere, young people should be regarded as capable individuals who add value. Adults should actively involve them in **decision-making processes** and give them opportunities to **express their opinions.**

2. Youth empowerment requires a **welcoming, safe, enabling and inclusive environment that recognizes the contribution of individuals of different capabilities.** Giving young people access to youth-friendly services, developing positive relationships with them, acknowledging their roles, and offering them space, will support their growth and create empowered individuals who are motivated to give back to their communities.

3. Young people who are given **responsibilities**, in relation to meaningful projects that contribute to a higher purpose and community well-being, feel empowered to create a better world. Examples of meaningful engagement vary from community to community and should be tailored to attract different youth subgroups. A wide spectrum of children, adolescents and young adults should ideally be engaged in activities that correspond to their experiences and situation.

4. Young people should benefit and learn from **power-sharing relationships with adults.** Inter-generational relationships vary, reflecting differences of culture, but everywhere adults set examples for the next generation and can empower younger people to undertake meaningful action on their own.

5. Empowerment is enforced by **a sense of community and the possibility to make friends.** Belonging to a group stimulates young people to contribute actively to the well-being of the communities to which they belong.

6. **Learning opportunities that enhance strengths** empower young people.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Astroth, K. A. (1997). Havens of Hope: Vibrant Youth Groups in the Lives of Today's Young People. *Opinion Papers* (120).

Bess, K. D., Perkins, D. D., Cooper, D. G., Jones, D. L. (2011). A heuristic framework for understanding the role of participatory decision making in community-based non-profits. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 47 (3-4), 236–52. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9396-8.

Galindo-Kuhn, R. and Guzley, R. M. (n.d.). The Volunteer Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Social Service* (November 2014), 37–41. doi:10.1300/J079v28n01.

Gutierrez, L. M., Parsons, R. J., Cox, E. O. (1998). *Empowerment in Social Work Practice. A Sourcebook.* ERIC.

Head, B. W. (2011). Why not ask them? Mapping and promoting youth participation. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 33 (4), 541–547. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.05.015.

Hilfinger Messias, D.K., Fore, E.M., McLoughlin, K., Parra-Medina, D. (2005). Adult Roles in Community-Based Youth Empowerment Programs; Implications for Best Practices. *Family Community Health*, 28 (4), 320-337.

Jennings, L. B., Parra-Medina, D. M., Hilfinger-Messias, D. K., McLoughlin, K. (2006). Toward a Critical Social Theory of Youth Empowerment. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14 (1-2), 31–55. doi:10.1300/J125v14n01.

Komives, S. R., Longerbeam, S. D., Owen, J. E., Mainella, F. C., Osteen, L. (2006). A Leadership Identity Development Model: Applications from a Grounded Theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47 (4), 401-418.

Lakin, R., Mahoney, A. (2006). Empowering youth to change their world: Identifying key components of a community service program to promote positive development. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44 (6), 513–531. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2006.06.001.

Liu, E. S. C., Holosko, M. J., Lo, T. W. (2008). *Youth empowerment and volunteerism: Principles, policies and practices.* City University of Hong Kong Press.

Madjar, N., Cohen-Malayev, M. (2013). Youth movements as educational settings promoting personal development: Comparing motivation and identity formation in formal and non-formal education contexts. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 62, 162–174. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2013.09.002.

Snyder, M., Omoto, A. M. (2008). 'Who gets involved and why? The Psychology of Volunteerism' in *Youth Empowerment and Volunteerism: Principles, Policies and Practices*. City University of HK Press, Hong Kong.

Verhoeven, M., Davids, T., Schulpen, L. (2007). *Urban Youth: Actors of Change.* Centre for International Development Issues, Nijmegen, Radboud University Nijmegen.

Ungar, Langlois and Hum (2009)

IFRC, Youth Engagement Strategy, 2013.

IFRC, Youth Policy, 2011.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

For further information, please contact:
Inclusion, Protection, Engagement
Policy, Strategy, and Knowledge Department
IFRC Secretariat
Tel.: +41 (0) 22 730 4222

www.ifrc.org
Saving lives, changing minds.

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies