

RESOURCING YOUTH-LED GROUPS AND MOVEMENTS: LANDSCAPE AND TRENDS ANALYSIS

CONSULTATION REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2019



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1. BACKGROUND

CIVICUS has stepped into the conversation around resourcing with a clear understanding that massive power imbalances exist in civil society when it comes to accessing resources and that civil society organisations (CSOs) are weakened by division and competition for resources. Youth-led groups and movements usually have less capacity to attract funding and comply with donor requirements than well established CSOs, therefore, their resourcing challenges are more accentuated.

This report summarises the main insights and reflections of CIVICUS' "Landscape and trends analysis on resourcing youth-led groups and movements," commissioned by the CIVICUS Youth Action Team (YAT).

This document is an adaptation of the final report prepared for CIVICUS by the research consultant, Gioel Gioacchino, director of the research team at [Recrear International](#).

2. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

Guiding questions

- What is the current resourcing and funding landscape for youth groups and movements in Latin America and Africa, and what are the main challenges they face to sustain themselves?
- What are some of the resourcing models, strategies and organisational practices used by youth-led groups and movements to ensure long-term sustainability?

Defining 'resources'

This analysis considered financial and non-financial resources, such as: trainings, human resources, office space, a workstation, a PC to work from, alliances, press space, volunteer time, mentorship, access to networks, evidence and research, travel and exposure opportunities, funding and other financial resources.



Methodology

This report is the synthesis and triangulation of data gathered through:

- Desk research on youth-led resourcing and donors' mapping.
- Participatory observation and a 3-hour workshop held during a CIVICUS' youth event in Uruguay, in December 2018.
- Three days of participatory workshops with youth-networks and a day-long dialogue between donors and young leaders of groups, movements and social enterprises during CIVICUS' International Civil Society Week, in April 2019, in Serbia.
- 25 interviews with leaders from youth-led groups and movements and donors: 10 leaders from Latin America, 8 leaders from Africa, and 7 donor organisations. These interviews were conducted between December 2019 and April 2019.
- A PhD project carried out by Gioel Gioacchino at the University of Sussex, called "Plata, Cultura y Cambio," helped inform this consultation. The project studied how different streams of financial resources influence the culture of youth-led organisations in Colombia.

Interview questions for youth leaders

- How does your group or movement mobilise resources to support itself?
- Is your organisation registered? If not, why and is that a barrier to access resources?
- What is your average annual operating budget (if applicable)? Do you receive core funding?
- How do you feel about the process of obtaining funding for your organisation?
- Do you ever apply to open calls for funding and, if so, how often are you successful?
- If you manage any relationship with donors, could you describe the quality of your relationship with donors' agency?
- What has changed in the panorama for youth funding? Are there any emerging trends?
- Which are the funders you work with and/or would aspire to work with?
- Do you feel that non youth-led groups working on youth issues are in competition or playing a disabling role in any way?
- If you generate your own funds, what have you learned about offering your work and charging for it?
- What have you learned about sustaining your organisation?
- What are the main challenges you face in accessing funding for your work?
- How do you envision the long-term sustainability of your organisation?


Interview questions for donors

- Do you provide funding to youth-led organizations? Why? Why not?
- How do you understand the importance of youth-led groups and organising?
- What do you consider as needs for youth-led groups and movements?
- How have been your experiences working with youth-led groups? What challenges have you had working with them?
- What are the obstacles that youth-led groups experience, if any, that could limit them from being appropriate grantees?
- What has changed in the funding panorama for youth? Are there any emerging trends?
- If you could give a tip to youth-led groups who want to apply for funding, what would it be?
- In theory, how could you make your grant calls more accessible to youth-led groups? What are the obstacles to implementing such changes?

2. MAIN INSIGHTS FROM THE INTERVIEWS, BASED ON THE GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The resourcing landscape:

- Interviewees expressed that, in general, grants are unpredictable, unreliable and focused on short term projects, with very little core funding available.
- There are feelings of uncertainty about the future and a general lack of vision about ways to ensure sustainability.
- There is awareness about the need for cooperation between groups and movements but collaborating and building alliances is perceived as difficult, especially across sectors, due to cultural differences.
- Youths recognise a trend towards social entrepreneurship and income generating strategies. However, 'selling' social products is not easy for them, especially when working with low-income youth/people.



Main challenges faced by youth in accessing donor resources:

- Limited human resources and time to apply to open calls.
- A feeling of powerlessness and frustration when applying to open calls and not receiving feedback.
- Selection processes bring groups and movements towards competition rather than cooperation.
- If successful with grants or open calls, groups must deal with tedious paperwork and consuming reporting requirements.
- Unregistered groups cannot access resources. While they can partner with more established organisations to apply for grants, they lose funding in the process. This can create a perception that they are 'last in the chain' and being underpaid.
- Power dynamics and distance with donors can contribute to poor communication.

Main challenges faced by donors working with youth:

- Resources are limited for donors as well. They receive too many funding applications and don't have the time and resources to provide individualised responses.
- There is a language gap between donors and grassroots (code-switching). Language mapping is needed to help local activists and donors understand how each group communicates in their own environments.
- Donors often align their work priorities with global agendas (e.g. SDGs) which don't necessarily resonate with youth priorities.
- Giving resources to non-formal civil society groups is a big challenge for donors, as they must ensure grantee accountability. They fear giving money to 'a black hole' when they can't track impact.
- Reaching out to radical groups and movements is difficult. Most resources are accessed by less disruptive actors.

7 key resourcing challenge issues

1. Movements can have momentum for resourcing, but there is a risk of political co-optation
 - When social movements are given space in the media, they can more easily attract resources, especially non-financial donations. In the peak moment of action, resources 'seem to flow effortlessly.'
 - Two movements, in Paraguay and South Africa, spoke of attempts by political parties to influence their work. Political parties can use financial resources to separate the movement (e.g. by offering money to different fractions of students with the aim of shifting the movement's decisions).
 - After the initial momentum, movements can fade out. For example, in student movement it's hard to sustain the work when a specific batch of students who initially lead the momentum graduates.
 - When movements are grounded in strong ideologies, young people can organise and create spin-off social groups and/or more sustainable social enterprises inspired by those ideologies.

2. Funding for youth vs. funding by youth

- There is a wide gap (no statistic available) between the funds available to serve youth, versus funding directly managed by youth.
- Most of the resources targeting youth have complex application requirements that seem impossible to be managed by young people.
- There is a tendency towards youth-led philanthropy, stressing that young people can also provide resources and become grant makers (<https://youthgiving.org/>)

3. The future of sustainability

- There is sense of confusion about future expectations among youths consulted. Engaging more in constant experimentation and developing an ability to sense opportunities is considered necessary to ensuring sustainability.
- Youth-led groups and movements know that they need to remain flexible, but this comes along with maintaining a lean structure, no or minimal staff and precarious working contracts.

4. Individual vs. collective resourcing opportunities

- It is important to highlight that most opportunities target individual leaders within groups and movements rather than the group itself.
- Youth-led groups and movements develop rich knowledge and get energy and resources from collective work. Donors struggle to value or recognise collective work.
- Some donors prioritise opportunities for individual leaders because their theory of change recognises that leaders can transfer resources to their communities.
- For youth-led groups and movements, this link is not obvious. Sometimes, individual opportunities contribute to elitism. Access to these opportunities can be easily co-opted by privileged young people with higher education, English proficiency, opportunities to travel, and those with resources to work as volunteers.
- Working with individuals is easier for donors. They need more knowledge and methodologies to interact with and support collectively-led processes.

5. Social entrepreneurship

- This concept is being promoted by many donors as a model that stimulates independence from donors and financial sustainability.
- Young people realise that they need to avoid donor dependency but, at the same time, many reject capitalist models.
- Some youths are re-appropriating the concept of social entrepreneurship, capturing opportunities and resources while implementing different values and ways of working.

6. Mental health and self care

- Struggles with making a livelihood, social issues and competing responsibilities affect the mental health of youth activists. Mental health support is a key resource to sustaining their civic engagement.
- There is a lack of resources for self-care in general, as well as of networks and spaces that support the wellbeing of youth activists. Donors could include more psychological support.

7. Building quality relationships between youth and donors

Elements of “the best relationship we have had with donors”

What youth-led groups and movements did to improve relationships:

- “We realised that they also needed us”
- “We were transparent”
- “We asked for help”
- “We invited the donor to learn and see our work”
- “We built a relationship and had regular meeting with them”

What donors did to improve relationships:

- “They listened, they gave us freedom, they were flexible”
- “They were mindful of our context”
- “They supported us closely with implementation”
- “They have a country representative and understand the local context”
- “They are not judgmental. They were not quick to say, ‘what you are doing is wrong’”



Resourcing models, strategies or organisational practices used by grassroots youth-led groups and movements to ensure long-term sustainability

- Pooling resources with other youth-led organisations.
- Creating small businesses to generate some unrestricted funding.
- Obtaining non-financial resources from more established partners and from volunteer support. The latter works well during the first couple of years of activities but, eventually, volunteers who invest the most time in the group or movement burn out if they cannot provide for their livelihood.
- Partnering, alliances and sub-granting:
 - Developing alliances with more established organisations to gain resources, for example, by becoming a service provider.
 - Accessing resources that do not target youth directly. One option is applying for grants that focus on specific thematic areas of interest to them and partnering with a more established organisation to have more chances of being granted the funding.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- Context conditions are changing quickly. Ongoing monitoring and research on resourcing youth-led groups and movements is needed.
- The resourcing landscape and trends analysis identified the need for increasing trust between donors and youth-led organisations, which also requires providing more spaces for reflection and dialogue between them.
- Youth-led actors must learn how to work in coordination with different organisational cultures. Donors and other civil society actors working with youth should help facilitate the development of such skills.
- Emerging questions: What would it look like to learn alongside young people how to work as part of more collective processes? What would it look like for donors to encourage collaboration instead of competition? How can donors support more political change-seeking groups?

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

For donors:

- Cover overheads and provide long term funding.
- Listen. Become aware of the local and day-to-day reality of youth-led groups and movements.
- Understand and learn how to value the unique way in which youth-led groups and movements work.
- Be more flexible. Have patience.

For youth-led groups and movements:

- Date donors! And find a good date ([read more about this](#)).
- Experiment with different things.
- Try collaborative work.
- Be able to explain your decisions and experiences.
- Be yourself!
- Question what sustainability means to you.
- Stay flexible. Have patience



CONNECT WITH US

To learn more about this consultation and CIVICUS work with youth, please contact youth@civicus.org.

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civicus.org



info@civicus.org



[/CIVICUS](https://www.facebook.com/CIVICUS)



[@CIVICUSalliance](https://twitter.com/CIVICUSalliance)

HEADQUARTERS

25 Owl Street, 6th Floor
Johannesburg,
South Africa, 2092
Tel: +27 (0)11 833 5959
Fax: +27 (0)11 833 7997

UN HUB: GENEVA

11 Avenue de la Paix
Geneva, Switzerland
CH-1202
Tel: +41 (0)22 733 3435

UN HUB: NEW YORK

205 East 42nd Street, 15th Floor
New York, New York,
United States, 10017