One of the biggest obstacles young activists face around the world is delegitimisation, distrust and disinformation about who they are and what they do, especially in very oppressed and repressed civic spaces. As a response, the CIVICUS team offered its platform to each of the YAL participants to share their stories in an engaging and safe format on the Youth Action Lab web page and CIVICUS social media channels.

While reviewing the financial reports of the YAL participants, we confirmed the importance of visibility for young changemakers. We found that investing in communications tools, equipment, software and services was one of their biggest financial priorities, followed by stipends, per-diems and honorariums to cover their and their volunteers' time.
**APPROACH**

A. Create a public profile online

To ensure that this was a process led by the participants, each YAL activist had the opportunity to have their profile online and to draft the content they wanted to share on the CIVICUS webpage. They had the option to include only their first name, use avatars and avoid providing any sensitive data in order to remain safe. For some, this was an opportunity to increase their credibility when reaching out to potential donors or applying for fellowships without putting themselves at risk. For others, this option did not represent any added value or threat.

To create their stories, both cohorts received two group sessions on Storytelling. In 2020, it was delivered by Pang Khee Teik and in 2021 by Leonardo Parraga.

B. Diverse facilitation methods for virtual networking

2021 was not only the second time we tested the Youth Action Lab, it was also the second time the world was living in lockdown and travel remained banned due to COVID-19. This hindered the development of networks in the conventional way that we are used to networking: at in-person workshops, conferences, seminars, etc. This new reality pushed the YAL to use alternative formats and spaces to facilitate connections such as webinars, Zoom ‘coffee chats, social media, WhatsApp groups, etc.
C. Power of relationships

Time after time we confirm the power of relationships in expanding youth networks and their impact on the career of an individual and an organisation. The YAL intentionally opened spaces for the young activists to meet in informal and formal virtual settings where they learned more from each other. This encouraged some to invite others to their events, inspired them to apply for fellowships others have applied for before, receive awards they did not know existed or have their stories shared at high level forums of the United Nations or international networks like the Resource Alliance and the International Civil Society Centre.

Below are a few examples of how some of the YAL participants proactively reached out to partners recommended or introduced by the CIVICUS team, and developed long term collaborative relationships even after the end of the YAL.

From Word Smash Poetry Zambia invited Chem, another YAL participant from Citizen Impact Youth Organisation, Malawi, to speak at the Human Rights Festival she was organising in December 2021. Vanessa also participated in the Resource Alliance 2022 conference in the Netherlands as a keynote speaker and performer.

Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union from Zimbabwe was awarded the Front Line Defenders 2022 award, an award and an organisation that Takemore from ARTU would not have known existed if it wasn’t for CIVICUS’ recommendations.
Raqib is one of the **Youth Global Giving Summit Ambassadors**, thanks to the connections with Liz Ngonzi who he met at the Sustainable Leadership Course, and participated in the CIVICUS Youth Accountability Challenge online, connecting through this with other CIVICUS members.

__Carolina*, from the Red de Apoyo Popular of Colombia, spoke at the Global Perspectives conference organised by the International Civil Society Centre in Bogota in 2021. ICSC invited CIVICUS to be a partner during the conference and due to the geographical proximity, it was an easy opportunity for Ingri to attend.__
The 2021 cohort had a much better experience with networking opportunities than the 2020 cohort because:

- This was already the second year they had been working remotely. Most of them were already familiar with platforms such as Zoom or Jam Board, while for the 2020 cohort working virtually from home was totally new for some who had many emergencies to attend to at the same time.

- The Zoom meetings in 2021 were less regular and more structured. Every other Monday they attended the peer-accountability meetings to check in on each other’s progress and every other Wednesday they had a course, workshop, event, etc. with external facilitators or the CIVICUS team. These two monthly events were a significant reduction from the 8 meetings a month the 2020 cohort had programmed.

As a result, YAL participants indicated that these networking spaces expanded their understanding and vision of the world and they saw similarities across a plethora of countries they would never have imagined they had so many connections with. Efforts towards alliance building represent an avenue for growth at a personal and organisational level. They have an impact at an individual level, elevating feelings of collectiveness and togetherness that translate into motivation to sustain their activism.

“*It was an excellent experience that exposed me to a multidisciplinary learning journey and surrounded me with like minded people whom I’ve learnt and continue to learn from till this day.*”

Youth Action Lab participant
CHECKLIST

- Protecting Grassroots Activists: Balancing Visibility and Security
  When working with grassroots activists from closed and oppressed civic spaces, it is very important to analyse the risks that publication about their work can represent. Each case is different, but we found a good practice is to avoid sharing personal data in the profile and to focus mainly on the story of the movement and the actions they are leading to create change. This also helps to avoid creating a ‘celebrity culture' in activism, centering success around a personality rather than a community.

- Good Facilitation and Schedules to Reduce Zoom Fatigue
  In the first year we assumed that we were going to be able to spend the same hours on virtual conference calls that we were planning to have in the in-person orientation week. Big mistake! It takes much more energy and effort to follow a meeting in 3 languages and 11 time zones than the energy it gives back. Participants appreciated the opportunity to interact with a global community, learn from everyone else's context and work but it was too much for them to spend hours on a Zoom call every other day at very early or late hours, sometimes with poor connectivity or background noise that interrupted their concentration. If an in-person orientation week is not possible, a much staggered schedule is recommended, with fewer and shorter sessions, rotating the times of the meetings so the burden of waking up very early or connecting very late is shared.

- Multilingual Collaboration: Importance of Interpretation and Translation Services
  One of the main elements the young activists appreciated during their experience in the Lab was the support offered to communicate with each other despite the language barriers. Online interpretation services and a multilingual project team translating all the communications to English, Spanish, French and Portuguese was essential for clarity, active participation of everyone and team cohesion. Therefore, even though interpretation and translation services are an expensive investment in the project budget, it is a crucial element for its success.
Empowering Youth Voices: Importance of Mainstream Media Engagement

Due to limited capacity in the organisation, the YAL 2020, and particularly the 2021 cohort, did not enjoy any support to engage with mainstream media to raise their stories. However, they gained from the experience with a previous fellowship led and focused on accelerating youth-led initiatives - the Goalkeepers Youth Action Accelerator - which supports young people to connect with journalists from mainstream media outlets so they can share the needs of their communities. The tactics they are using to reach the media and call for solidarity is of great value.

Capturing the Stories of Youth Activists: Patience and Support

Young people are an extremely diverse demographic group and with it comes a diversity of skills and talents. The YAL participants were chosen for their exceptional leadership qualities in mobilising their communities to address shared challenges. With their empathy, compassion and passion, these 21 activists are an inspiration to people around the world. They possess bright minds and a deep commitment to creating change, but may not always have the skills to effectively communicate their vision and strategies in a format that resonates with readers, funders or allies. Therefore, as a youth ally it is very important to be patient and support each young activist individually to write their story. The Institute for Sustainable Leadership was of great value in this effort. It is also important as an ally to remind young activists to keep building on that story and updating their readers. It is not only a once-off exercise but a constant task to share their work progress and struggles to keep the international and national community updated on how they can be of support and when.
DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT OTHER PRACTICES?

The Playbook is to be read and applied according to your context and can be adapted to suit your needs. Each practice is independent of the other so the order you want to choose to explore is always the right one. Click on one of the circles below to learn more about each practice.