The New Global Citizen

HARNESSING YOUTH LEADERSHIP TO RESHAPE CIVIL SOCIETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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THE EMERGING CATALYSTS PROJECT
The Emerging Catalysts Project brought together a network of youth leaders and a coalition of institutional partners to analyze the “global leadership gap.” By examining the experiences of current youth leaders and their relationship to global poverty and development institutions, we can better understand how to foster a generation of youth embodying a new paradigm of global citizenship, poised to lead us through today’s biggest challenges.

ABOUT RHIZE
We support emerging social movements around the world to realize their visions. Through coaching grassroots changemakers, training civil society professionals and connecting global allies, Rhize is bringing power back to the people.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Global Citizen: Harnessing Youth Leadership to Reshape Civil Society

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Responding to New Challenges

Traditional civil society institutions’ (CSIs) engagement with youth is at a crossroads. International development and human rights professionals generally acknowledge the institutional barriers to addressing pressing global challenges like growing economic inequality and catastrophic climate change, yet they struggle to make the structural changes needed to ensure ongoing impact. Civil society is more than formal organizations, yet formal CSIs largely orient their support around these non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Meanwhile, decentralized networks and social movements grow in numbers and influence, reshaping the civil society landscape and challenging global development organizations’ relevance and authority. From the Nuit Debout movement in France to Occupy Wall Street, these networks and social movements are often driven by a critical mass of youth—the most well-educated in this world’s history, with unprecedented access to information.

To the global development sector, youth seem more disengaged than ever. Yet, youth increasingly are involving themselves in civil society outside of formal CSIs and established channels. They are leading on global issues in innovative ways by launching organizations, developing new technology, using new media to surface injustice, sparking social movements and initiating community-led projects that make global connections within local contexts. In so doing, they are defining new approaches and making way for new understandings of citizenship and civic participation. In order for CSIs to effectively and proactively engage this new generation of leaders, they must reframe their understanding of youth leadership and civic participation to include the breadth of ways in which youth are participating and leading social change.

Youth Pathways of Leadership

Critical to our analysis of youth engagement was a mapping of the civil society sector. We looked at youth’s relationship to institutions in six target countries—Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Large global aid institutions make disproportionate contributions to build infrastructure for youth engagement in global development. However youth are embracing participatory citizenship and shifting their relationship to global aid.

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Our data indicates that youth leadership can be characterized as: participatory, intersectional, networked, resourceful and grassroots-based. Youth have sought out new forms of participation in response to changing contexts, which has been characterized by increased visibility of social movements, the rise of digital tools creating accessible global networks and the shortcomings of civil society infrastructure. Overall, we found that the sector still has major gaps in its “architecture of participation” for long-term youth leadership development. We conclude that there is an ongoing need to develop infrastructure and create diverse and decentralized access points for youth to begin their journey to leadership and to continue over the long-term.
Acting Translocally

Youth leaders are breaking down conventional delineations between local, national and global action thanks to greater access to networks deriving from increased globalization, changing migration patterns and the mediation of digital technologies. This translocal emergent landscape—neither explicitly national, local or global in scope but rather a hybrid of all three—blurs distinctions between geography and issues-based causes. It allows for grassroots groups and movements to build local-to-local connections and solidarity and to work together to create specific strategies driven and informed by local experiences of global issues—whether it be climate change, gender or racial justice. These offer opportunities to provide supranational and global contexts to local initiatives and for bottom-up grassroots coordination on international development and social change, in contrast to being explicitly centralized or directed from international organizations downward to local levels.

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Today’s youth leaders are reinventing themselves as collective global actors, leading from a local level of grassroots action and community-driven solutions and connected to a network of people working on similar issues around the globe. Many of these youth-led initiatives are not aptly measured by traditionally defined indicators of civic participation due to outmoded, directive, institutions-centered conceptions of citizenship. We have framed these emerging approaches as “participatory citizenship”, informed by research and literature that have variously described this emerging form of civic participation as “active”, “actualizing” or “engaged.” This type of civic engagement spans across digital and physical spaces and is informed by connected yet diverse identities. It reflects a young citizens’ practice of engagement through looser, often autonomously-built and peer-to-peer networks that enable youth to build collective identities, take civic action and build more participatory communities.

The Global Development Sector’s Barriers to Engaging Youth Leadership

Focusing specifically on the global development sector we found a clear disconnect between engagement opportunities currently available to youth and the ways in which youth leaders want to engage. Analysis of the literature, organizational map and interviews with both practitioners and youth leaders revealed prevailing tensions that present challenges to meaningful engagement between INGOs and young leaders. First we find that INGOs tend to be dominated by professionals with a particular profile—usually highly educated and from elite circumstances, as opposed to organizers who may have deep but nontraditionally obtained knowledge and experience. The latter group tends to have more difficulty accessing formal resources and networks that favor professionalization, which makes initial buy-in and sustained participation between grassroots and INGOs difficult. It also makes identifying emerging leaders from marginalized or nontraditional contexts more challenging, given that INGOs tend to select the most visible, formally educated or outspoken community leaders rather than the organizers, participatory grassroots leaders most affected by injustice.

INGOs also continue to silo issues and strategies, which means their structural capacities are also fragmented. By contrast, grassroots leaders are shaping their work around intersectionalities of issues in relation to their varied and intersecting identities and layered contexts. Finally, existing funding structures, dominated by a handful of major donors, make it difficult for organizations working in emerging spaces—especially those led by youth—to have access to resources, creating a vicious cycle in which initiatives addressing new challenges in innovative ways are punished for doing so.
Collective Civic Participation

Engaging Youth to Renew Civil Society

A new paradigm of global leadership requires new frameworks to orient structures and practice for sustainable global development. The Collective Civic Participation Framework (CCPF) is a blueprint for formal institutions to use to reorient their work towards building an effective architecture for participation that will create more onramps for civic action from everyday people. This framework should guide INGO practitioners to foster participatory global leadership in emergent generations and create the necessary architecture that enables leaders to build translocal, networked communities for sustainable development. The CCPF is based on an underlying premise that youth are primary drivers of change and that global institutions must fundamentally shift approaches to successfully leverage the untapped power and potential of collective action and participatory citizenship in the networks and movements reshaping civil society. With effective implementation, the global development sector will achieve the following outcomes:

- **A generative pipeline** for global participatory leadership, grounded in grassroots networks, that scales capacity for collective action around iterative, innovative solutions.

- **Strong, translocal architecture** for participation that enables dynamic networks and movements to build multiple pathways for diverse communities to get involved.

- **Sustainable, decentralized funding sources** that directly fund youth or fund reliable, intermediary organizations whose mission is to build strategic capacity and connective infrastructure that accelerates community-generated action.

CSIs seeking to improve their own impacts and more effectively foster youth participatory citizenship should consider the following core principles of CCPF:

1. **Develop a holistic architecture of participation** by shifting institutional structures and resources to identify participatory leaders and help them proliferate systemic solutions, rooted in the grassroots.

2. **Align across organizations to collaborate**, share resources and build collective capacity throughout the sector.

3. **Redefine impact and value** to measure participatory leadership, collective action and strong networks at all levels.

Testing Collective Civic Participation

For CSIs to actualize this framework, we must work with the campaigns, networks and movements embodying the new “global leadership”—participatory citizenship—to iteratively test the CCPF. Through this Emerging Catalysts project research, we built coalition of close to thirty organizations and donors that share a commitment to adapting their work to meet the needs of this changing landscape. To move this forward with intention, our goal is to instate a Global Citizenship Lab, a hub of learning, testing and exchange for organizations and donors to engender the CCPF’s initial blueprint.

The Global Citizenship Lab will enable INGOs to define and clarify their role in serving as effective intermediaries between high-level advocacy and grassroots initiatives and movements. Working together, members mitigate risk, coordinate resources and build shared sector knowledge and infrastructure for campaign and movement support. By testing and adapting Collective Civic Participation Framework principles into their work organizations can better root priorities for sustainable global development and shift systems to truly work for people—worldwide.

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