MESSAGE from 
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REBECCA HOPE

Last year was a uniquely challenging year for young people globally. Youth everywhere faced major disruptions to their education, their access to health services, and to precious social relationships. Many grieved the loss of their loved ones, and youth who are traditionally disenfranchised due to their race, socioeconomic status, and sexuality have disproportionately borne the burden of COVID-19.

But despite the immense challenges and changes that 2020 brought, the world did not stop, and neither did we. We worked with traditionally disenfranchised youth in the United States to co-design a transformation of how mental health is represented in television and popular culture. Our team used participatory design with young refugees in Uganda to create safe spaces for them to manage menstrual health in the most challenging conditions. We trained youth-facing organizations in Kenya to use youth-driven design to develop and innovate programs to prevent HIV among young men who have sex with men. We supported our partners to safely launch and evaluate the innovative Girl Bozz program to reduce unsafe abortion among young women in Ghana.

Everything we do at YLabs is driven by the experience, power, and creativity of young people. The continuation of this work during such a challenging year is testament to the dedication of our team of young designers, writers, and researchers in Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, India, and the United States. Reflecting on the year, I am energized by the accomplishments of our team and partners around the world and reminded of the flexibility and determination that it took to get the job done under the circumstances. It has been a year of adaptation.

Whether you’ve been a friend of YLabs since the beginning or are just discovering our work, thank you for your partnership, your collaboration, your contributions, your provocations, and your conversations. We extend our gratitude and best wishes to you all in the new year, and we hope that you’ll be with us every step of the way in 2021 and beyond.

Warmly,

Dr. Rebecca Hope, Executive Director
Y Labs Values

- Blend expertise to solve tough problems
- Measure what we do
- Design with youth, not for youth
- Create lovable and lasting solutions
- Appreciate complexity
- Embrace bold thinking

Youth-driven design

“At the end of the day, we just need someone to stop and say ‘Hey, you are doing a good job, let me give you a small push so that you can scale to the next step.”

MICHAEL ROBERT KYSH
Youth Designer on what young people need

Understanding power and equity in the design field

“There are so many people out there who are excited about design, but not enough conversations about the importance of privilege and power in the design process, and how to consider equity when building valuable and sustainable solutions.”

DR. REBECCA HOPE

Click here to read more
Why focus on adolescents and young people?

Adolescence is a critical window of opportunity to influence behavior, growth, and development. Think about it. It’s when your body is changing, and when you’re learning how to make decisions autonomously, especially decisions that can have a life-long impact on your future health and livelihood.

Young people are a driving force for creative, sustainable, positive change in their communities. Yet too often, their voices and ideas are not included in the design of health and economic solutions meant for them. This is why YLabs uses a youth-driven design methodology to ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged in every phase of a project meant for them. We’re working towards a future where all solutions for intended for young people are designed with youth, not for youth.

“Involving and hiring youth designers from the very beginning of a project help to make it more innovative, more cherished, and more sustainable.”

MIREILLE SEKEMANA
YLabs’ first youth designer

Find out more here
YOUTH-DRIVEN DESIGN PROCESS

1. Design Research
2. Synthesis
3. Idea Generation
4. Rough Prototyping
5. Live Prototyping
5. Implementation and Evaluation
Over 1000 family planning providers participated in a program to decrease provider bias through Beyond Bias.

61 young people co-designed safe menstrual hygiene spaces in a refugee settlement with the Cocoon project.

6 menstrual hygiene curricula developed for boys, peers, and parents to learn about menstruation through Splash Menstrual Health.

72 underrepresented youth shaped the way mental health is portrayed in mass media.

928 girls attended StigFas Girl Bozz events to prevent unsafe abortion.

6,000 young people enrolled in two-year randomized controlled trial.

5 community-based organizations trained in HCD with the Almasi Challenge.
Despite the challenges of 2020, we were able to co-design with nearly 1,000 young people on six different projects.

In 2021, we expect continued growth and are projected to work with over 10,000 young people.
Projects

Cyber Rwanda
Rwanda
16-17

Almasi Challenge
Kenya
18-19

MTV Staying Alive Foundation
USA
19-20

Stigfas
Ghana
20-21

Cocoon
Uganda
21-22

Splash Menstrual Health
Ethiopia & India
22-23

Beyond Bias
Tanzania, Burkina Faso & Pakistan
23-24

Safire
Kenya & Nigeria
24-25
Using digital education to improve the health and livelihoods of urban adolescents

Around the world, young people don’t have access to accurate and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information. CyberRwanda meets this need. Designed in partnership with over 1,000 Rwandan youth, parents, teachers, providers, health experts, behavioral change specialists, and youth writers with this direct-to-consumer platform weaves together essential components for both young people and healthcare providers to deliver integrated, age-appropriate adolescent health and employment information while linking them to high-quality, youth-friendly services and products.

In 2020, COVID-19 may have delayed our project launch - but it gave us time to build our coalition in Kigali and prepare for our randomized controlled trial (RCT), which will measure the impact and cost-effectiveness of the CyberRwanda platform. In 2021, we will be ready to launch across 53 intervention sites and train a projected 100 private pharmacy staff in adolescent-focused SRH service provision in partnership with the National Pharmacy Council of Rwanda and Society for Family Health - Rwanda.

“We want to know what works and why, what doesn’t work, and how it can improve.”

SANDRA MCCOY
Epidemiologist and associate professor at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health

In early 2021, 6,000 young people were enrolled in a two-year randomized controlled trial to assess the efficacy of the platform. Over the next 3 years, CyberRwanda will reach over 25,000 Rwandan youth.

View the branding here
HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Kenya is almost four times that of the general adult population. The criminalization and persistent stigmatization of same-sex sexual activity contributes to social, community, and healthcare-related barriers that prevent this key population from accessing high-quality HIV services.

With support from our local Kenyan team members and ViiV Positive Action, YLabs trained five Kenyan organizations on the our design process to help them design, develop, and pitch innovations to improve HIV prevention and treatment access for young MSM in their community.

*HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Kenya is almost four times that of the general adult population. The criminalization and persistent stigmatization of same-sex sexual activity contributes to social, community, and healthcare-related barriers that prevent this key population from accessing high-quality HIV services.

PHASE: LIVE PROTOTYPING

ALMASI CHALLENGE

Building design capacity and increasing the innovation skills of youth-focused HIV organizations in Kenya

*Click here to know more
Developing a youth-driven content strategy to use mass media to improve mental health

Adolescence is a time of social, developmental, and economic transition. Particularly among urban youth, differences in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic level, and immigration status can lead to vastly disparate behavioral and mental health outcomes. Movies, shows, social media, and websites offer limitless content - but often fail to deliver accurate and engaging health information to young people.

Our team worked with 72 young people in the San Francisco Bay Area and Atlanta, USA, to understand how to increase representation in media and make mental health messaging more relevant and recognizable for young people. This groundbreaking program and dissemination strategy aims to model positive behaviors and meet the demand for health services.

“The media makes it seem like mental health issues are quickly fixable through therapy or medication whereas, in reality, the timeline for recovery is long-drawn.”

A 19-YEAR OLD
San Francisco Bay Area

Mental health in the media needs a reboot - here’s where young people say we should start

The youth-driven content strategy will be used to inform the character, storylines, and message development for future programming.
In 2020, YLabs continued our partnership with the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG) to test and implement the Stigma-Free Abortion Services (StigFAS) project in order to increase access to safe abortion services for young women and girls in Accra, Ghana.

Nearly 500 youth, providers, and community members were engaged in the development and testing of the intervention before the pilot, in which the PPAG team tested the pillars of a project:

- **GIRL BOZZ**: A future-focused outreach program led by female peer mentors
- **SISTER SUPPORT**: A free and confidential phone and text counseling and referral service
- **SAFE PASS**: A partnership with local pharmacists to support girls to receive safe abortion services and accurate information

The Girl Bozz and Sister Support program elements proved valuable in improving PPAG’s outreach efforts to girls and young women regarding reproductive health and safe abortion options.

In 2020, **928 girls** in Accra attended Girl Bozz events, and 200 calls from young men and women across Ghana came through the Sister Support helpline.

PPAG is planning to replicate the Girl Bozz outreach approach in 6 other program sites in Ghana to reach an estimated **15,000 youth**.

Sister Support is also being scaled as a national tele-counseling resource for all young people after 66% of calls during the pilot phase came from outside of Accra, and 44% of calls came from young men.

“If a young girl gets pregnant, people will talk about her when she walks down the street. They don’t respect her. If you have an abortion, people will use it to insult you. So either way, the girl loses.”

FEMALE PARTICIPANT, 15
Limited access to sanitary pads, washing supplies, and safe, private, accessible spaces for managing one’s menstruation is a pressing problem for women and girls, affecting an estimated 3 million women and girls living in refugee camps. Latrines and water points are among the most dangerous areas mapped by communities, and facilities in schools are inadequate and current sanitation facility design does not take into account these challenges nor meaningfully engage women. Together with young women and girls, our team in Uganda set out to design safe spaces and services for managing menstruation among displaced populations in Bidi Bidi camp, Uganda, the second-largest refugee settlement in the world.

In September 2020, the YLabs and Kuja Kuja teams conducted design research and rough prototyping sessions in the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement with 61 community members including 40 young women and girls and 20 influencers.

“When we were brought here as refugees, it was really difficult because we as women started life from scratch. Many women are getting infections because of poor hygiene, using rags, dirty clothes, no proper bathing.”

CHRISTINE WANI, JOURNALIST
Sudanese refugee, Bidi Bidi settlement
Creating a more enabling environment for menstrual practices for girls and women by engaging boys, parents, and older peers

The stigmatization of menstruation holds grave consequences for girls’ bodily autonomy, physical and mental health, and ability to pursue an education. While menstrual health initiatives, tools, and guidance for girls are gradually emerging, there is a need for initiatives that shift prevailing attitudes, behaviors, and practices of the community to create a more supportive and inclusive ecosystem for menstruating girls.

In 2020, YLabs partnered with the Splash Menstrual Health project to create materials and engaging curricula in order to foster a more enabling environment for menstrual practices for girls in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Kolkata, India by engaging boys, parents, and peers.

The program intends to reach and improve the lives of half a million girls over the next five years:

- 1,200+ government schools in Kolkata
- 450 schools in Addis Ababa
There is a global unmet need for contraception. Of the estimated 38 million sexually active adolescents in developing regions, 23 million are unable to access the contraception that they want and need. One of the barriers that stands in their way is judgment and bias from healthcare providers.

There has never been a targeted intervention that aims to address provider bias - until now. Beyond Bias set out to address the challenge of provider bias to improve the quality of SRH services for young people in three countries: Tanzania, Pakistan, and Burkina Faso. The project approach combined traditional SRH expertise, human-centered design, behavioral economics, social behavior change communication, and segmentation analysis.

After designing, prototyping, and testing with over 4,000 young people and family planning providers, the Beyond Bias consortium developed a three-pillared intervention designed to support healthcare providers at every phase of their journey—from developing awareness of their own bias to becoming advocates for improving contraceptive services for youth in their community. It is currently being implemented and evaluated in all three countries.

“We have no power to make a decision and we don’t have the right to make a decision in our community.”

BURKINA FASO
Female Youth

The Beyond Bias project will engage and equip 1,000 health facilities to reach an estimated 200,000 young people with high-quality services across three countries.
Launching new service-delivery models to reduce rates of mortality and morbidity associated with unsafe abortion among adolescent girls

Unsafe abortion remains a leading cause of maternal mortality worldwide - but it is particularly devastating in sub-Saharan Africa. This region accounts for only 29% of unsafe abortion worldwide, but 62% of all abortion-related deaths.

YLabs has worked in partnership with local community-based organizations in Kenya and Nigeria to design, test, and build a three-pillared intervention to improve awareness, access, and supportive use of reproductive health services, including services to prevent unsafe abortion. YLabs produced implementation guides, an evaluation framework, training resources for private providers and peer leaders, marketing and brand assets in three languages for a pilot rollout in Kenya and Nigeria, and engaged over 530 young people and healthcare providers in the research, design, and testing process.

In 2020, our on-the-ground partners began implementation in Kenya and Nigeria providing ongoing access to safe abortion services, despite COVID-19.
MEET OUR TEAM
PARTNERS

We work with organizations big and small to help put young people in the driver’s seat through youth-driven design. Our partners bring their brilliance, their expertise, and their passion for the work to everything that they do, and we are so lucky to have had the chance to collaborate with each and every one of them. This list feels like family.

USAID • RWANDA BIOMEDICAL CENTRE • ALIGHT • AMKENI MALINDI • AMREF • COALITION FOR CHILDREN AFFECTED BY AIDS • DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION • ELRHA • FULL CIRCLE FUND • GLASSWING INTERNATIONAL • HEALTH OPTIONS FOR YOUNG MEN ON HIV/AIDS/STI (HOYMAS) • IPAS • IPPF • IRC • KEEPING SOCIETIES HOPE ALIVE (KASH) • KUJA KUJA • MTV STAYING ALIVE FOUNDATION • MEN AGAINST AIDS YOUTH GROUP • MURAL • OPTIONS • PSI • PATHFINDER • PLANNED PARENTHOOD ASSOCIATION GHANA • RIPPLEWORKS • RWANDAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH • SOCIETY FOR FAMILY HEALTH - RWANDA • SPLASH • THE CASE FOR HER • THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION • UC BERKELEY • UNIVERSITY OF COLUMBIA • UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA • VIIV HEALTHCARE • WATU CENTER FOR HEALTH AND ADVOCACY (WACHA)

“Everyone on the YLabs team is tremendously driven and passionate about addressing global challenges to young people’s health and economic opportunity. As a Full Circle Fund member, I loved supporting YLabs’ dedicated team through our collaborative relationship, which made the work fun, interesting, and dynamic.”

NICOLINA PATIN
Full Circle Fund member
MAJOR CONFERENCES AND SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Health Innovation Exchange Annual Event
The Health Innovation Exchange (HIEx) is a community of political leaders, decision-makers, health experts, technology and science leaders, innovators, investors, accelerators, and implementers. We presented our CyberRwanda innovation on two main stages to over 2,000 attendees.

Columbia EPIC course
Our team led a five-day course in partnership with Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health to introduce senior public health practitioners to the practice of design. “We want to show people that youth-driven methodology can, and should, move into a more ‘academic’ space,” said co-facilitator and a DrPH Candidate Trena Mukherjee.

San Francisco Design Week
We often work with young people to understand and explore issues that are typically kept quiet - so conversations about porn, safe abortion, menstrual health, and sexual pleasure are nothing new. Our design team shared guiding principles that have helped us design and prototype around ‘taboo’ topics at SF Design Week. Read our tips on how to have safe, non-extractive, and respectful conversations about taboo topics with young people.

FP2020 Conference
In partnership with FP2020 and Pathfinder International, our team hosted two conversations with over 900 attendees to share findings from the Beyond Bias project which aims to tackle provider bias in Tanzania, Pakistan, and Burkina Faso.

PUBLICATIONS

WHO Framework for youth-centered digital health interventions
Involving young people at every phase of the design process helps ensure that your intervention will be valued and sustainable. To ensure authentic engagement and create a safe space for young people, we recommend emphasizing two areas: safety and fun. Find our case study in this helpful new resource.

BMC Public Health: Design and impact evaluation of a digital reproductive health intervention
If you are using human-centered design to design digital products for social impact - this paper is for you! This publication documents the iterative process of design research - from authentic youth engagement during design research to the key findings from multiple rounds of prototyping that helped turn CyberRwanda into what it is today.

AWARDS

2020 Hilary E.C. Millar Award for Innovative Approaches to Adolescent Health Care
Each year, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (SAHM) recognizes adolescent health professionals for their commitment to furthering the field and advancing the cause of adolescent health and well-being. We’re honored to have received the 2020 Millar Award for Innovative Approaches to Adolescent Health Care.
The future of sex ed
In 2021, we’re continuing this important work to demonstrate the potential for pleasure to support young people to make healthy decisions in their relationships. Watch this mini-doc to see what young people have to say!

Self-care
This young generation, **1.8 billion** strong, from Karachi to Kigali, is the generation that already uses technology to learn, grow, and shop. This trend will only grow in the coming years with the increased spread and accessibility of mobile technology. We need to think beyond the clinic as the only way to deliver sexual and reproductive health services, especially when health services are stretched thin! Self-care products and programs are a promising tool to deliver information that young people want and need, meet them where they are, and put access to essential services in the palm of their hands. Find out how digital self-care platforms are improving young people’s access to SRH information and services.

Strengthening the private healthcare sector to provide youth-friendly healthcare:
We have partnered with private pharmacists in Rwanda since 2016 to connect young people to high-quality, youth-friendly services. We believe that strengthening and connecting the public and private healthcare sectors to provide youth-friendly care can increase choice, access, and quality for young people seeking services. Meet the pharmacists that we’re working with in Rwanda to create opportunities for youth-friendly care.

What does ‘quality’ mean at the intersection of HCD and SRH?
It’s a question that we ask ourselves every day - and we are thrilled to be joining like-minded individuals and organizations in this important global conversation. We are excited to announce that we will chair the HCDExchange Quality & Standards Working Group. As a part of this work, we’ll lead a committee of members dedicated to the quality space at the intersection of HCD and AYSRH, conduct a scoping of quality and standards across the field, and produce learning products that will serve the larger design community. Find out more about the working group.
YLabs, a 501 (c) (3) public charity, has a Charity Navigator score of 100/100 and a GuideStar Gold Seal of Transparency. Nonprofits would be nothing without the (often unsung) behind-the-scenes work that goes into financial management, federal compliance, and operational controls of an organization. In 2020, we underwent and passed our first Single Audit for FY2019.

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**Administration includes $138,579.40 of COVID-related expenses.

| ASSETS | $928,046.33 |
| LIABILITY | $411,377.83 |
| EQUITY | $516,668.50 |

| GOVERNMENT GRANTS | 68.34% |
| PROGRAM SERVICES | 30.98% |
| OTHER INCOME | 0.62% |
| DONATIONS | 0.06% |
| TOTAL INCOME | 61.08% |
| PROGRAM SERVICES | 38.92% |
| ADMINISTRATION** | 58.06% |
Thank you to the young people on our team and in our communities for your collaborative spirit, your energy, and your brilliance.