



INTRODUCTION

The Ghana Library Authority (GhLA) partnering with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to establish Youth Engagement Centres (YECs) is one of the many expressions of commitment to nurture and transform the lives of young people.

UNICEF works with governments, civil society organizations and other partners worldwide to advance children's rights to survival, protection, development and participation. In the framework of Generation Unlimited, the UNICEF-led global multi-sector partnership designed to meet the urgent need for expanded education, training and employment opportunities for young people, aged 10 to 24, UNICEF supports programmes and innovations on a large scale, and to help young people become productive in life with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Ghana Library Authority (GhLA) seeks to consolidate itself as a responsive organization that seeks the opportunity to inculcate a lifelong learning lifestyle among the citizens of Ghana through the provision of safe environment, appropriate technology, and learning resources at its libraries.

The GhLA and UNICEF share similar views and values in fostering literacy and providing skills development opportunities for young people and these have therefore encouraged them to collaborate to drive youth engagement and skilling in Ghana through the establishment of 10 Youth Engagement Centres in GhLA libraries.

Working together with UNICEF, the Authority seeks to strengthen institutional capacity and leverage on technological tools to achieve desirable outcomes for young people and bring its spaces and services closer to young people.

The Authority continues to equip public libraries in Ghana with computers and internet connectivity, automate the libraries' day-to-day operations and deliver electronic learning and pleasure resources through mobile and web technologies. The Authority also seeks to create community spaces for peer-to-peer learning and youth engagement which also enable stronger co-creation with young people.

OBJECTIVES OF THE

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CENTRE

01

To create a safe and inclusive environment, physically and digitally, where young people, including disadvantaged groups, can connect and benefit from learning and skilling opportunities.

To provide a sustainable platform to work together and co-create with young people.

02

03

To generate evidence and learning on the impact of the centres and create use-cases for replication at scale.

To mobilize strategic public-private sector youth partnerships for various aspects of learning and skilling.

04

HOW IS YOUTH DEFINED?

It appears there is no universally agreed international definition of a youth, especially regarding the age group. However, for statistical purposes, the United Nations without prejudice to any other definitions made by Member States defines 'youth' as "*those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years*" (United Nations, 2021). This definition dates to the year 1985 during the preparation of the International Youth Year.

In Ghana, according to the National Youth Policy (2010), youth is defined as those persons between the ages of 15 to 35.

The two definitions (*UN and Ghana National Youth Policy*) imply that the youth's age starts from 15 years but differs with regards to where it ends.

It must be noted that the target age group for the YECs are those between the ages of 14 and 24.

WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Youth engagement is when young people are involved in the planning and decision making that affect themselves and others. It puts young people's thoughts and ideas at the Centre of projects and services that support and respond to their needs.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Health Organization (WHO) have posited that meaningful youth engagement is inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and globally (WHO, 2020; USAID, 2012) .

It must be noted that an effective youth engagement recognizes and seeks to change the power structures that prevent young people from being considered experts regarding their own needs and priorities, while also building their leadership capacities. Youth includes a full spectrum of the population regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, political affiliation, or physical location.

WHY IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Evidence has shown that involving youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of activities can lead to more effective and appropriate programming by improving impact, retention, and sustainability.

A survey report by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE) in the Year 2005 has revealed that young people are effectively engaged if:

- They are respected, valued, trusted, appreciated, safe and comfortable.
- They feel they are working in a youth-friendly environment and are involved in a meaningful way.
- Their voices are being heard.
- They are given the chance to be involved and make decisions, gain leadership skills and see their ideas realized.
- There is a social aspect to their involvement.
- They see change and progress happening.
- Their imaginations are touched and they are valued.
- They are in a space where they have ownership and control.

Some of the benefits in Youth Engagements are as follows:

- Young people benefit by gaining skills, knowledge, self-esteem, and connectedness.
- Adults benefit by enhancing their own competencies, learning to better understand and value youth, and increasing their commitment and energy to their organizations.
- Organizations benefit by improving their programs, gaining community recognition, and attracting funders.
- Communities benefit by improving quality of life, coordinating youth services, and authentically embracing diversity by representing young people.
- Through meaningful engagement, youth are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities
- Youth engagement offers community leaders the expertise and partnership of young people, helping adults fully understand what it is like to grow up in a rapidly changing world.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CENTRE

A Youth Engagement Centre (YEC) is a physical space found in a strategic location where young people meet, participate, and can access a range of programmes, services, projects and activities unique to the young adults. Apart from YEC being a physical space and a place designed for young people, it helps build a community of young people where they can organize their own timetable, share ideas and hobbies, and work on projects together. YEC provides a safe place for youth to spend time, offering programming, life skills, support services and opportunities for leadership.

The primary goal of the YEC is to support the bottom-up initiatives of young people, helping young people to implement their ideas, share hobbies, and fulfil their passions. It provides the space and conditions for spending one's leisure time in interesting ways. It also aims to empower young people to demonstrate leadership skills by giving them a say in how the Centre activities can run, through the YECAB and other feedback mechanisms, essentially in areas such as:

- Skilling
- Build Community (community building)
- Share knowledge (knowledge sharing)
- Empower (empowerment).



OPENING & CLOSING

TIME OF THE
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
CENTRE

Opening: The Youth Engagement Centre opens at 9.00am

Closing: The Youth Engagement Centre closes at 4.30pm