



AEIP

AFRICA ↔ EUROPE
INNOVATION PLATFORM



YOUTH INNOVATION PLAYBOOK

YOUR 3-STEP PATH
TO TURN YOUTH INNOVATION
INTO ACTION



Funded by
the European Union



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Funding statement (Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.)

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1.

INTRODUCTION

The **African Union – European Union** Innovation Agenda, a 10-year strategic plan (2023–2033), is designed to strengthen Africa–Europe cooperation in science, technology, and innovation. It focuses on public health, green transition, innovation & technology, and research capacities, aiming to drive sustainable development, job creation, and poverty reduction. The Youth Cafe is working within the Africa-Europe Innovation Platform (AEIP) to understand how these high-level frameworks can inspire action and how young people at different levels can better access, engage with and draw value from the agenda.

The Youth Innovation Playbook is a flagship resource developed under the AEIP project to strengthen youth-led innovation ecosystems across Africa and Europe. This Playbook offers an accessible and actionable instrument to translate youth innovation ambition into practical guidance on how its principles can be applied to solve youth sector challenges like unemployment and poverty. The Youth Innovation Playbook is more than a guide for creativity—it is a practical tool that equips young people with the skills, frameworks, and confidence to transform ideas into opportunities. By combining practical tools, mindset shifts, and ecosystem connections, a Youth Innovation Playbook empowers young people not only to imagine solutions but to create livelihoods. It transforms innovation into a pathway for sustainable employment, ensuring that youth are not just job seekers but job creators.

Specifically intended for young entrepreneurs, business support organisations, and youth-led organisations, it helps users assess and expand their awareness on innovative challenges, identify opportunities for improvement in youth empowerment systems, and contributes both directly and indirectly to job creation among youth by fostering innovation. The Playbook allows for transversal assessments and interventions across civil society and is usable as an encompassing approach to organisational strategies to innovation.

Rooted in the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and sustainability, this playbook draws on insights from youth innovators, ecosystem actors, and research publications to address the systemic challenges hindering youth entrepreneurship and innovation. It aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063¹ and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024)², both of which recognise innovation as a key driver for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and accelerating socio-economic transformation on the continent. In joint action, it reflects the EU's global approach to research and innovation and the AU–EU Innovation Agenda, which emphasises equitable partnerships, mutual learning, and joint action in fostering inclusive, sustainable innovation across both continents.

Building on the evidence presented in the AEIP Needs Assessment, and the Youth Cafe's research, this Playbook responds to core challenges identified within Africa's innovation value chain: limited access to funding, fragmented ecosystems, weak cross-sector collaboration, and underdeveloped policy frameworks. These gaps often leave youth innovators, particularly women and those in rural communities, without the resources or networks required to thrive.

1. [African Union Agenda 2063](#)
2. [STISA - 2024](#)

By integrating lessons from successful youth-led initiatives across all African regions, the playbook serves as both a practical guide and strategic framework to advance youth employability, entrepreneurship, and innovation capacity. Its approach reinforces the need for tailored training, financing mechanisms, and knowledge-sharing platforms that reflect Africa's demographic dynamism and cultural diversity.

The playbook also situates youth innovation within the AU–EU Joint Innovation Agenda, whose four priority areas: Green Transition, Public Health, Capacities for Science and Innovation, and cross-cutting issues, form the backbone of its thematic pillars. Working groups established under this agenda, including those on Research and Innovation (R&I), Youth Engagement, and Innovation Ecosystem Building, provide the policy and institutional anchors for the Playbook's implementation. By linking youth innovators to these trans-continental frameworks, the playbook ensures coherence with ongoing initiatives such as Horizon Europe, ARISE, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) innovation programmes.

It seeks to empower youth not only as beneficiaries but as co-creators in shaping sustainable development pathways through science, technology, and entrepreneurship. It emphasises on working for the common good, promoting grassroots information flow, and ensuring stronger diversity and representation.

The Youth Innovation Playbook is a call to action; a roadmap that unites the aspirations of African youth with the strategic priorities of the AU and EU innovation ecosystems. It envisions a future where young African innovators are equipped to develop solutions to pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges while contributing to a globally connected, resilient, and inclusive innovation landscape.

By displaying options for action ("plays"), tools and global examples, the Playbook nurtures and supports youth sector innovation. Throughout the Playbook's journey, users are connected to existing resources and tools, including through the TYC Toolkit Navigator and TYC Case Studies Database.



2.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

1

PICK ONE CHALLENGE AT A TIME

Focus your energy on a single issue to avoid feeling overwhelmed and to make progress more manageable. This allows you to understand the problem and develop more effective solutions clearly.

3

SELECT A SMALL NUMBER OF PLAYS YOU CAN TEST QUICKLY

Choose a few practical actions that are easy to implement and do not require extensive resources. Testing quickly helps you learn what works and adjust your approach without wasting time.

2

USE THE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS TO REFLECT HONESTLY

Take time to thoughtfully answer the questions, being truthful about situation and limitations. Honest reflection helps you identify root causes and uncover realistic opportunities for improvement.

4

USE THE TOOLKITS TO STRUCTURE YOUR WORK

Leverage the provided tools to organise your ideas, plan your actions, and track your progress. A clear structure makes your work more efficient and easier to evaluate.

6

RETURN TO THE PLAYBOOK WHEN A NEW CHALLENGE APPEARS

Revisit the guide whenever you encounter a different issue or need fresh direction. This ensures continuous learning and helps you apply a consistent problem-solving approach over time.

5

DIVE DEEP INTO CASE STUDIES FOR PRACTICAL EXAMPLES AND INSPIRATION

Explore real-life examples to understand how others have approached similar challenges. These insights can spark new ideas and help you apply proven strategies in your own context.

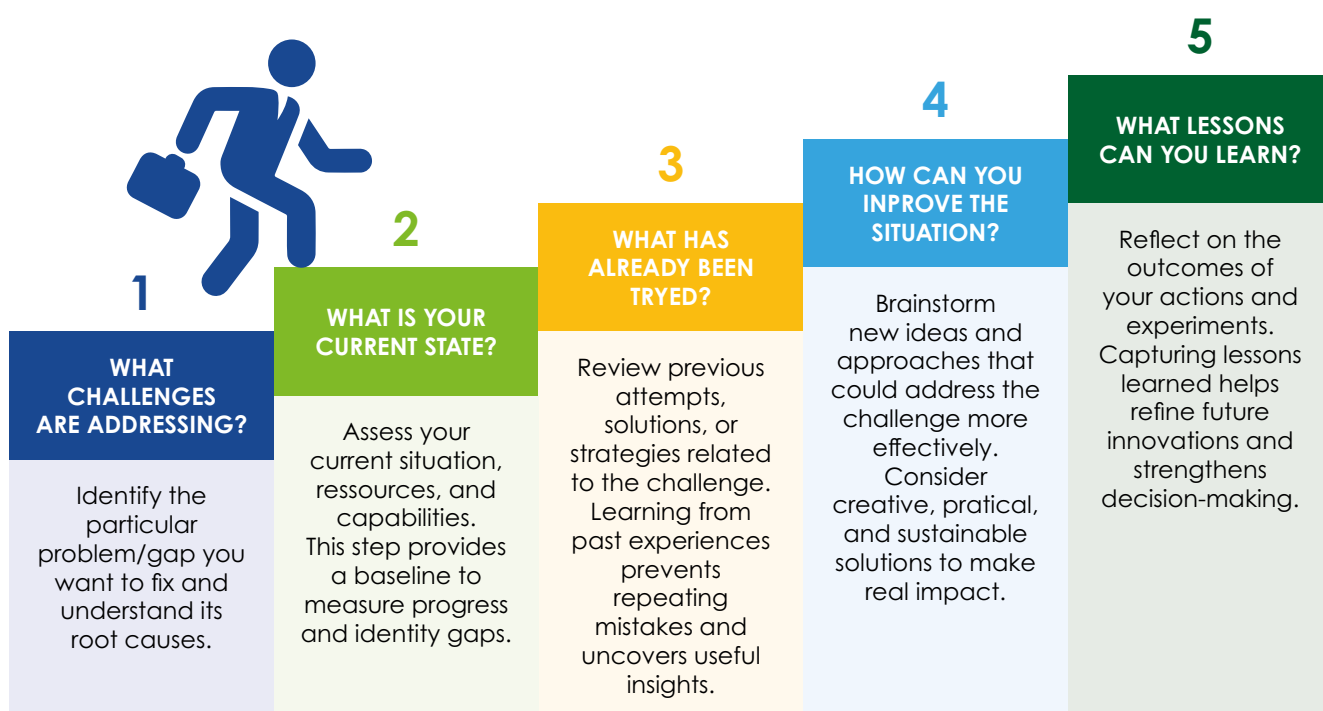
This Youth Innovation Playbook guides you through a simple three-step process. You start by identifying the challenge you want to work on. You then assess your current capacities. Finally, you choose the actions or “plays” that can help you move forward. This is not a document you read from start to finish. You pick one challenge at a time and use the steps to work through it. You can repeat the process for any new challenge you want to address.

The playbook emphasises the importance of clear goals, defined team roles, realistic timelines, measurable indicators and balancing qualitative storytelling with quantitative data for accountability and sustainability. It is designed as a practical guide that young innovators, youth-led organisations, and partners can use step by step. To get the most out of it: For Youth Innovators, this Playbook takes you step by step through Actions 1–7. Each module builds on the last, helping you grow your innovation capacity, test practical ideas, and design solutions to challenges in your community.

For Youth Business Support Organisations, use this Playbook as a facilitation guide. Each module includes ready-to-use tools and activities that can be adapted to your context. Make participant feedback a regular part of your process to continuously improve your sessions. The validation workshops confirmed the importance of community engagement and continuous feedback collection throughout the innovation process. Specifically pay special attention to Actions which provide guidance on building, managing, and sustaining innovation labs within a broader ecosystem. The other modules will support you in designing programmes and mentoring youth innovators.

For Policymakers and Funders, this Playbook offers evidence that youth innovation labs drive youth empowerment and public-sector innovation. See the playbook Actions for insights on how funders can contribute to systemic change and policy impact. It also includes impact indicators aligned with AU–EU metrics to support informed decision-making and programme investment.

3. YOUR STEPS



4.

BEFORE YOU START

You need 3 things:



A CLEAR YOUTH CHALLENGE YOU WANT TO EXPLORE

Define a specific issue affecting young people that you are passionate about solving.

A clear focus helps guide your thinking and ensures your ideas stay relevant and impactful.



A SMALL TEAM OR AT LEAST ONE PARTNER TO DISCUSS IDEAS WITH

Works with others who can share different perspectives and challenge your thinking.

Collaboration strengthens ideas and leads to more creative and well-rounded solutions.



TIME SET ASIDE TO WALK THROUGH FOUR STEPS

Dedicate focused time to go through each step of the innovation process carefully.

This ensures thorough reflection, better planning, and more effective outcomes.

5.

WHAT YOU WILL GET OUT OF THE PROCESS



A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR CHALLENGE

You will gain deeper insight into the root causes and key aspects of the issue you are addressing.

This clarity helps you focus your efforts on what truly matters.



TARGETED ACTIONS YOU CAN TRY IMMEDIATELY

You will identify practical steps that can be implemented right away to address your challenge.

These actions are designed to be simple, relevant, and impactful.



TOOLKITS YOU CAN USE DURING YOUR SESSIONS OR WORKSHOPS

You will have access to structured tools and resources to guide discussions and activities.

These toolkits make it easier to facilitate sessions and drive meaningful engagement.



REAL EXAMPLES FROM AFRICA AND EUROPE FOR CONTEXT

You will explore practical studies that show how similar challenges have been addressed in different regions.

These examples provide inspiration and help you adapt ideas to your own context.

5.1. Starting point:

what Youth Challenge are you working on?

At the beginning of each section, complete the reflection questions to connect insights to your own work. Use these prompting questions in the Playbook to see which action area connects

with your challenge. Each action area supports common youth issues such as collaboration, skills development, access to resources, protection of ideas, and policy gaps.

5.2. Framing the situation:

where are you right now?

Each section introduces the action area and provides assessment questions. These questions help you understand your current strengths, gaps, and

the barriers slowing progress. This step helps you decide which actions will be most useful.

5.3. Leveraging change:

what can you do to improve the situation?

Each action area gives you practical plays you can adapt to your context. Every play includes an example from Africa or Europe and a toolkit you can apply immediately.

Choose the plays that match your capacity and test them in small, simple steps.

6.

TEAM UP AND UNLOCK SOLUTIONS

Bring your teams together for a collaborative workshop and put the Youth Innovation Playbook into action. Use it to explore your challenges, share ideas, and co-create solutions. All the tools and resources you need are available below

at no cost. We'd love to learn from your experience—tell us how you applied the Playbook and share your feedback so we can continue improving it for everyone.



[FACILITATION GUIDE AND MIRO TEMPLATE](#)



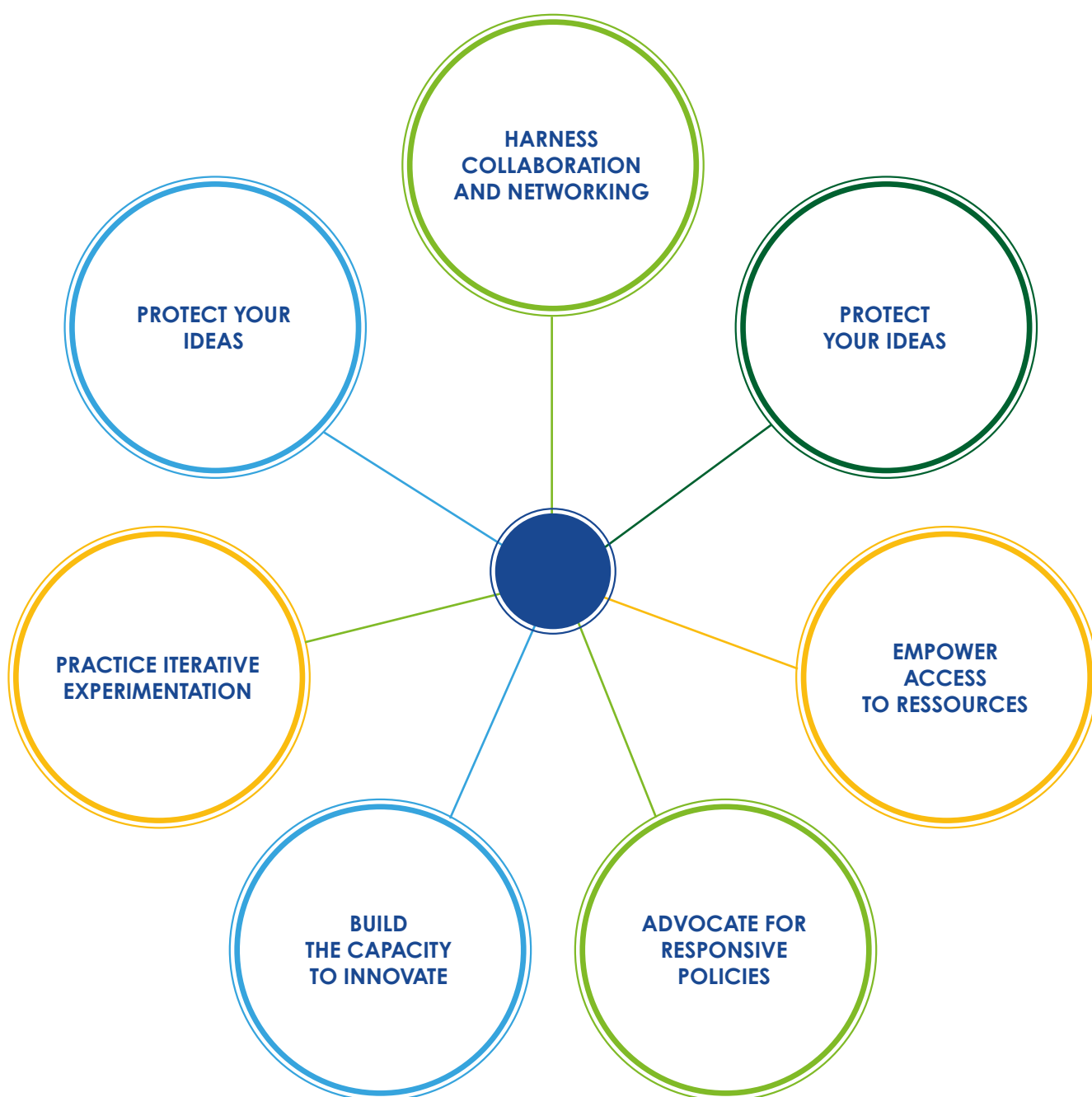
[VIDEO TUTORIAL ON HOW TO APPLY THE PLAYBOOK](#)



[SEND US FEEDBACK USING THIS FORM](#)

7.

ACTIONS FOR YOUTH-LED INNOVATION



7.1. HARNESS COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

Collaboration with youth-led innovations in Africa and Europe is increasingly recognised as a driver of sustainable development, social inclusion, and cross-continental resilience. Projects like the AU–EU Innovation Agenda, the Africa-Europe Innovation Platform, and cooperative grants demonstrate that young people are being given roles as both contributors and creators in addressing global issues, rather than simply receiving aid.

Youth-led innovation is no longer a peripheral activity; it is central to shaping the future of Africa–Europe relations. With Africa's population being the youngest globally and Europe's institutions seeking fresh approaches to sustainability and inclusion, collaboration with youth innovators offers a unique opportunity to co-create solutions that address shared challenges such as climate change, health, digital transformation, and social equity.

The Importance of Youth-Led Innovation Collaboration includes Harnessing Demographic Potential as Africa's youth population over 60% under 25 represents a vast reservoir of creativity and entrepreneurial energy. Collaboration ensures this potential is harnessed for both local and global impact. Youth-led innovations often focus on pressing issues like renewable energy, digital health, and inclusive education. By collaborating, Africa and Europe can accelerate progress toward the UN SDGs and AU Agenda 2063.

Partnerships between youth innovators, governments, and private sectors create ecosystems that are more adaptable to crises, whether pandemics or climate shocks, thereby building resilient ecosystems. Furthermore, collaboration ensures marginalised voices girls, rural youth, and differently abled are included in innovation processes, making solutions more representative and sustainable.

The AU–EU cooperation in Research and Innovation (R&I) and the AU–EU Innovation Agenda are creating important collaborative opportunities for young people by investing in skills, networks, and funding. Through initiatives such as innovation platforms, hackathons, and training programmes, youth are gaining access to entrepreneurial pathways, digital literacy, and STEM skills that prepare them for emerging job markets. The agenda also connects young innovators with mentors, inves-

tors, and policymakers across Africa and Europe, ensuring that their ideas can move from prototypes to scalable ventures. By aligning youth innovation with global frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals and AU Agenda 2063, the cooperation positions young people as central actors in building sustainable economies.

Despite these achievements, several gaps remain. Many youths, particularly those in rural areas, young women, and differently abled innovators struggle to access funding and networks. Recurring challenges noted during the pilot workshops included youth unemployment, skills mismatch, limited digital literacy, restricted access to funding, bureaucratic barriers, weak regulatory frameworks, low visibility of youth initiatives, lack of mentorship, gender gaps in technology, healthcare access challenges, and dominance of informal economies in some regions.

Awareness of opportunities under the AU–EU Innovation Agenda is still limited, and youth-led projects often remain small-scale due to insufficient long-term investment and infrastructure. Mentorship and coaching structures are not consistently available, leaving many young innovators without the guidance needed to grow their ideas. To improve, the cooperation should expand inclusivity through micro-grants and rural innovation hubs, strengthen awareness campaigns, and provide sustained support for scaling projects. Building stronger mentorship networks and engaging grassroots communities would ensure that youth are not only participants but leaders in shaping innovation-driven job creation across Africa and Europe.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the youth movement in Africa is the emphasis on collaboration and networking. Young people are forming alliances across borders, sharing ideas, and pooling resources to drive collective change. Social enterprises and youth organisations are creating platforms where young innovators can meet, collaborate, and learn from each other's experiences. Through events such as hackathons, innovation challenges, and youth forums, ideas are exchanged, and partnerships are formed. This collaborative spirit amplifies the impact that individual efforts can achieve, leading to a wave of innovation that addresses complex challenges in multiple sectors.

Questions

- How does this collaboration align with national, community, or organisational priorities?
- What risks and benefits will come from this collaboration?
- In what ways will young people be involved—will they be treated as recipients, collaborators, or leaders?
- What barriers (financial, cultural, technological) might prevent youth from engaging, and how can we remove them?
- How do we balance power between youth and adults in decision-making?
- How do we connect local youth innovators to regional and global networks?
- How will we measure success (KPIs, impact metrics)?
- How will we celebrate and highlight youth innovations?

Pathways to elevate

YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

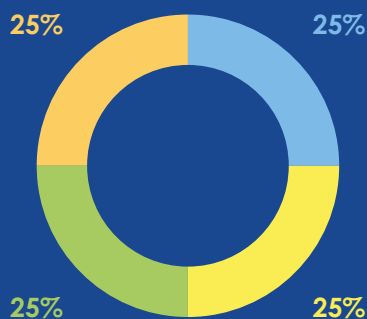
- Move beyond traditional mentorship to authentic partnerships where youth are equal decision-makers.
- Adults should act as facilitators rather than directors, allowing young people to lead projects.
- This builds agency and confidence, helping youth see themselves as capable innovators.
- Encourage joint goal setting, where youth and adults co-define objectives, success indicators, and milestones. This ensures that projects reflect youth priorities and increase ownership.
- Create structured feedback spaces where youth can discuss progress, challenges, and ideas with adults. This strengthens trust and ensures learning happens on both sides.
- Invest in training adults on youth-centred leadership and facilitation, helping them support innovation without dominating decision-making.
- Foster long-term youth-adult relationships that extend beyond individual projects, allowing youth to grow in leadership and apply lessons to multiple initiatives.
- Encourage open and safe communication creating environments where youth feel safe to express ideas without fear of dismissal, and where adults can provide constructive feedback without being perceived as controlling.

TOOLKIT

UNESCO's [Meaningful Youth Participation Toolkit](#) is a set of practical methods and activities that enable young people to actively participate in decision-making, co-create solutions, and collaborate effectively with adults. It helps ensure youth voices are genuinely included, supports the design of inclusive innovation initiatives, and strengthens youth-adult partnerships across diverse contexts.

CASE STUDY

The GPACE Malawi initiative [GPACE Youth Participation and Democratic Education in Community Development Committees – Participedia](#) empowered young people to actively participate in community governance, co-creating solutions with adults and local authorities. By providing structured spaces for youth to contribute to decision-making, reflect, and plan initiatives, the programme strengthened youth agency, fostered intergenerational collaboration, and ensured that young voices shaped community development outcomes.



- Community Governance Impact
- Decision-Making & Planning
- Intergenerational Collaboration
- Youth Agency & Participation

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION SPACES

- Establish collaborative hubs (like UNICEF's Innovation Nodes) where youth, researchers, and communities co-create solutions.
- These spaces encourage transdisciplinary collaboration, blending science, technology, arts, and social innovation.
- Ensure inclusivity by actively involving marginalised groups (girls, rural youth, differently abled).
- Design spaces where youth lead projects alongside adults as facilitators.
- Encourage cross-sector collaboration between schools, NGOs, businesses, and local governments.
- Provide mentorship and resources for youth to test and scale ideas in real-world contexts.
- Implement structured methods for reflection and feedback to integrate lessons learned into future initiatives.

TOOLKIT

Youth Participation Toolkit — SALTO-YOUTH network

A practical set of methods and activities that empower young people to actively participate in decision-making, co-create solutions, and collaborate with adults in inclusive innovation spaces. It includes techniques for mobilisation, peer-to-peer learning, workshops, and participatory planning.

CASE STUDY

UNICEF Innovation Nodes illuminate unknown domains of impact and actively uncover new practices and pathways for transformative innovation for children, serving as transdisciplinary and collaborative spaces where diverse perspectives converge to reflect, experiment, and generate novel wisdom in areas not yet explored, ultimately opening fresh opportunities and shaping groundbreaking approaches that empower children and reimagine their futures.

CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

- Encourage collaboration between schools, universities, NGOs, businesses, and governments.
- Public–private partnerships can provide resources, mentorship, and pathways to scale youth-led innovations.
- Link youth projects to national priorities (health, climate, agriculture) for greater impact.
- Facilitate joint problem-solving sessions where youth and sector stakeholders co-design solutions.
- Organise workshops and networking events to connect youth innovators with experienced professionals.
- Promote shared responsibility and decision-making in youth-led projects to ensure ownership and accountability.
- Support policies that incentivise multi-sector partnerships for youth innovation.
- Provide platforms for knowledge exchange and mentorship between sectors to strengthen skills and capacity.
- Monitor and evaluate collaborative projects to identify best practices and lessons for scaling.

TOOLKIT

[The Intersector Toolkit](#) [— Tools for Cross-Sector Collaboration](#) [\(The Intersector Project\)](#)

A practical set of activities and guidance designed to support partnerships between youth, schools, NGOs, businesses, and governments. It includes tools for stakeholder mapping, co-designing solutions, shared governance, resource mobilisation, and monitoring collaborative projects.

CASE STUDY

Young Africa Innovates (YAI) programme inclusive innovation among diverse youth in Ghana and Nigeria. The partnership between **UNDP** and the Mastercard Foundation under YAI aims to support youth-led innovations among marginalised and underrepresented youth (including rural, female, and disadvantaged youth). It links youth with funding, mentorship, prototyping support, and networks — demonstrating how youth innovation can be broadened when multiple actors (public development agency, philanthropy, private sector) collaborate.

Networking & Peer Collaboration

- Organise hackathons, bootcamps, and innovation challenges to foster teamwork.
- Support regional and international exchanges so youth can learn from diverse contexts.
- Build online platforms for knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer support.
- Facilitate mentorship circles where experienced youth innovators guide newcomers on project development and problem-solving.
- Encourage collaborative research projects between youth groups across different countries or sectors.
- Create thematic online communities (e.g., climate, health, tech) for youth to share ideas, resources, and best practices.
- Host regular virtual or in-person innovation forums to showcase ongoing projects and celebrate achievements.
- Develop peer-led feedback sessions where youth can review and improve each other's prototypes or initiatives.
- Promote cross-sector team formation, mixing skills from business, tech, social innovation, and community engagement.

Toolkit

[Peer Education Toolkit — UNFPA / Y-PEER](#)

A structured toolkit designed for peer-based programmes. It provides guidance for training peer educators, setting up peer mentoring, and organising group activities. Ideal for fostering collaboration, peer-to-peer learning, and supporting youth-led innovation networks.

Case study

[The Youth Café organises hackathons](#) as youth-led, collaborative innovation events that bring together young people, mentors, and partners to co-create solutions for social, economic, and political challenges across Africa. They emphasise inclusivity, policy relevance, and cross-sector collaboration to ensure that ideas generated can scale into real impact.

Recognition & Incentives

- Celebrate youth-led innovations through awards, media coverage, and highlights.
- Provide funding opportunities tied to collaborative projects rather than individual efforts.
- Recognition motivates sustained collaboration and builds credibility for youth innovators.
- Establish mentorship opportunities or professional development programmes for recognised youth innovators.
- Highlight success stories in newsletters, websites, or social media to inspire other youth and stakeholders.
- Create a tiered recognition system (local, regional, national) to encourage broader participation.
- Offer scholarships, incubation support, or seed funding linked to recognised projects.
- Organise networking events where recognised youth innovators can connect with potential partners, funders, and mentors.
- Include feedback mechanisms to ensure recognition reflects real impact and not just visibility.
- Collaborate with media partners to produce feature stories or documentaries on youth-led innovations.

Toolkit

[Compensating Youth Work Toolkit — YIELD Hub](#)

A resource offering method to fairly recognise the time, skills, and leadership youth contribute. Helps design incentive and reward systems (monetary & non-monetary), public recognition strategies, and sustainable engagement frameworks.

Case study

[Africa Youth SDGs Innovation Award – Africa-wide youth innovation recognition](#)

This continental award demonstrates the power of recognition and incentives in motivating youth-led innovation. By offering visibility, training, and scaling opportunities, it turns individual innovative ideas into scalable, sustainable projects aligned with national and global development goals.

Create Youth Innovation Networks

- Establish local and regional innovation hubs where young people can meet, share ideas, and prototype solutions.
- Encourage peer-to-peer learning through hackathons, bootcamps, and online communities.
- Example: AfriLabs connects over 400 innovation hubs across Africa, enabling youth collaboration.
- Facilitate mentorship circles and peer learning groups where experienced youth innovators guide newcomers.
- Support youth-led co-working or maker spaces equipped for prototyping, testing, and collaboration.
- Promote inclusive membership by reaching out to women, rural youth, and youth with disabilities.
- Host demo days or showcase events where youth present prototypes, get feedback, and meet potential partners or funders.
- Provide shared access to resources like tools, internet access, technology, and learning materials.
- Maintain a centralised directory or platform listing youth projects, skills, and interests to match collaborators.
- Encourage cross-hub or cross-region collaboration for wider learning and scaling of ideas.
- Offer regular training or capacity building workshops on design thinking, project management, pitching, and scaling.
- Add feedback and learning loop by capturing lessons after each project or event and sharing them with the network.

Toolkit

[Youth Participation Toolkit](#) — SALTO-YOUTH

A resource offering method you can use to build and run youth innovation networks. Provides practical group activities, teamwork tools, and participatory approaches that support co-creation. Useful for planning workshops, strengthening peer collaboration, and involving youth in shared decision-making across hubs and online communities.

Case study

The [UNDP–UNLEASH timbuktoo partnership](#) builds youth innovation networks across Africa by connecting University Innovation Pods (UniPods) that help young people collaborate, prototype, and scale ideas. These hubs offer mentorship, technical support, and cross-country peer learning, allowing youth to co-create solutions and grow their innovations with support from universities, private sector partners, and development agencies.

Mentorship & Intergenerational Partnerships

- Pair young innovators with experienced entrepreneurs, researchers, and policymakers.
- Promote youth–adult co-leadership models where decisions are shared, not top-down.
- Example: Youth councils advising governments on innovation strategies.
- Create structured mentorship programmes that match youth with sector experts based on project needs.
- Hold regular check-ins where mentors and youth review progress and adjust plans together.
- Use group mentoring circles so young innovators can gain input from multiple adults, not just one.
- Train adults on youth-friendly engagement so they act as collaborators, not supervisors.
- Support reverse-mentoring sessions where youth share digital, creative, or community insights with adults.
- Bring in retired professionals as technical advisors for youth-led projects.
- Encourage long-term mentor relationships that continue beyond a single project cycle.

Toolkit

Youth Mentoring Toolkit

— The Mentoring Lab Community

A set of tools, templates and guidelines to help set up and manage mentoring relationships. It supports matching mentors and mentees, tracking progress, and building youth–adult collaboration in youth-led innovation spaces.

Case study

The LEPTA Community Mentorship and Life-Skills Programme — Mathare, Nairobi.

The LEPTA Community in Mathare slum organised life-skills training, entrepreneurship training and mentorship for youth aged 15–30. The programme combined technical and soft-skills training with mentor support and internship opportunities. Researchers found that mentorship and life-skills training through LEPTA significantly contributed to youth empowerment — helping young people gain the capacity to start businesses, manage risks, and build confidence.

7.2. PROTECT YOUR IDEAS

Youth-led innovations are increasingly shaping solutions to pressing challenges in health, climate change, digital transformation, and social inclusion. With Africa's population being the youngest globally and Europe's strong institutional frameworks, collaboration between the two continents offers immense potential. However, without robust intellectual property rights (IPR), many youth innovations risk being copied, underfunded, or excluded from global markets. Protecting IPR is therefore central to empowering young innovators and ensuring equitable benefits.

An important issue raised during the validation process was the concern around idea protection and intellectual ownership. Participants noted that innovators, particularly young business founders and those working on community initiatives, often feel uneasy about their ideas being taken or utilised by others without proper recognition or credit. This problem was seen as a barrier to open teamwork, exchanging information, and feeling secure when engaging in creative settings.

In Africa, many countries face challenges with limited awareness, high registration costs, and weak enforcement. Regional bodies like ARIPO and OAPI are working to harmonise systems, while innovation hubs (e.g., AfriLabs, iHub in Kenya) increasingly integrate IPR training. On the other hand, in Europe, the EUIPO provides strong frameworks for patents, trademarks, and designs. Youth-led startups benefit from EU programmes such as Horizon Europe, which include IPR support.

Still, challenges persist such as limited awareness among youth innovators, high costs of patent and trademark registration, weak enforcement mechanisms in some African countries, and complexity of protecting innovations across borders. Intellectual property rights are a cornerstone of youth-led innovation in Africa and Europe. They empower young people to own their ideas, attract investment, and scale solutions across continents. While Africa faces challenges in awareness and enforcement, Europe offers strong institutional frameworks. Collaboration under the AU–EU Innovation Agenda provides a unique opportunity to harmonise systems, build capacity, and ensure that youth innovators are recognised as leaders in shaping a sustainable and inclusive future.

In essence: Protecting IPR is about more than legal safeguards, it is about giving young innovators the confidence, recognition, and resources to transform their ideas into lasting impact across Africa and Europe.

Questions

- Do young innovators understand what intellectual property rights are and why they matter?
- How can awareness of IPR be integrated into education, innovation hubs, and entrepreneurship programmes?
- How can young innovators protect their ideas from being stolen or copied?
- What barriers (costs, bureaucracy, lack of legal support) prevent youth from registering patents, trademarks, or copyrights?
- What policies can reduce inequalities in access to IPR systems across Africa and Europe?
- How can Africa–Europe partnerships under the AU–EU Innovation Agenda strengthen youth IPR capacity?
- How do we measure the impact of IPR protection on youth-led enterprises and innovation ecosystems?
- What mechanisms exist to help youth scale their protected innovations nationally and internationally?
- How can IPR be embedded into long-term innovation policies across Africa and Europe?

Pathways to elevate

Awareness & Education

- Integrate IPR training into entrepreneurship and innovation programmes in schools, universities, and hubs.
- Run workshops and bootcamps on patents, copyrights, trademarks, and open-source licensing.
- Use case studies of youth-led startups that successfully protected their innovations.
- Develop online modules or e-learning courses on intellectual property tailored for youth innovators.
- Provide mentorship sessions with IPR professionals to guide youth through registration processes.
- Collaborate with innovation hubs to integrate practical exercises on drafting patents, trademarks, or copyright documentation.
- Run awareness campaigns highlighting the value of IPR and the risks of unprotected innovations.
- Encourage youth-led peer learning by having innovators who have protected their ideas share experiences.
- Partner with local and regional organisations to provide affordable or subsidised registration support for youth.
- Include sessions on cross-border IP protection to prepare youth for international markets.
- Offer legal clinics or pro-bono advisory services to help young innovators navigate complex IPR regulations.
- Incorporate guidance on ethical collaboration, documentation practices, attribution, partnership agreements, and basic awareness of intellectual property rights.

Toolkit

[WIPO IP4Youth&Teachers](#)

A resource offering educational materials and modules on patents, trademarks, copyrights and inventive problem solving. Useful for workshops, bootcamps, or school/university programmes that teach youth how to protect their ideas legally.

Case study

[European IP Helpdesk](#) supports IP capacity building along the full scale of IP practices, it provides free-of-charge, first-line support to European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on IP management, protection and enforcement covering six different regions: China, Europe, India, Latin America, South-East Asia and Africa.

The European IP Helpdesk additionally assists SMEs and researchers participating in EU-funded research and innovation projects in dealing with IP issues related to these specific programmes.

Accessible Legal Support

- Establish pro bono legal clinics or partnerships with law schools to help youth navigate IPR processes.
- Provide simplified guides and toolkits explaining how to register patents or trademarks.
- Encourage governments to set up IPR help desks in innovation hubs.
- Offer online platforms for youth to submit questions and receive guidance from IP professionals.
- Organise regular webinars with IP lawyers and patent examiners to demystify legal processes.
-
- Partner with regional IP offices (e.g., ARIPO, OAPI) to provide youth-friendly application support.
- Develop multilingual resources to ensure rural and non-English-speaking youth can access guidance.
- Provide mentorship programmes linking youth innovators with experienced IP consultants.
- Promote awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of IP protection for startups and social enterprises.
- Support community-based IP “ambassadors” who guide local youth on protecting and commercialising their innovations.

Toolkit

[IP PANORAMA™ — WIPO / KIPO / KIPA](#)

It's a multimedia toolkit offering interactive modules, story-based learning, and self-learning resources about intellectual property, designed for small businesses and innovators.

Case study

[TrustLaw](#), works with leading law firms and corporate legal teams to facilitate free legal support, research and resources for civil society organisations, social enterprises and non-profit independent media around the globe. TrustLaw draws on the expertise of more than 120,000 lawyers in 190 countries. It leverages the power of the law to protect, support and empower organisations at the frontlines of social or environmental change, and to strengthen and defend independent media. From practical reforestation projects to advocacy around media freedom, targeted pro bono assistance has a vital role to play in unlocking potential and accelerating impact.

Policy & Institutional Support

- Governments should subsidise patent and trademark registration fees for youth-led enterprises.
- Create fast-track processes for youth innovators to protect their ideas.
- Align national IPR policies with AU–EU Innovation Agenda priorities to ensure cross-border recognition.
- Establish grant or voucher schemes that cover legal, registration, and maintenance fees for youth-led patents and trademarks.
- Create youth-friendly IPR offices or desks within national intellectual property authorities to provide guidance and simplified application processes.
- Offer training for officials to understand youth innovation contexts so they can support flexible, responsive IPR services.
- Introduce tax incentives or subsidies for youth-led startups that hold registered IP.
- Facilitate regional agreements to recognise patents/trademarks across neighbouring countries, easing cross-border protection.
- Encourage integration of IPR support in national youth-development or enterprise-support programmes.
- Mandate public institutions or grant programmes to prioritise funding for youth-led innovations with active IP protection.
- Promote open-data registries of youth-held patents/trademarks to improve transparency and matchmaking.
- Develop simplified, low-cost licensing frameworks for social innovations and open-source youth projects.

Toolkit

[IP for Creatives in East Africa — Hivos / ROOM Project](#)

A resource focused on creative industries, useful for youth-led innovations in arts, media, digital content, and other creative sectors. Guides copyright, registration, and IP awareness, helping young innovators understand and protect their intellectual property.

Case study

[Young Africa Innovates \(YAI\) — Institutional Support for Youth Innovation in Ghana & Nigeria](#)

Through a partnership between UNDP and the Mastercard Foundation, YAI provides funding, capacity building, mentorship, and inclusive support to youth innovators in Ghana and Nigeria. The initiative demonstrates how policy and institutional support transforms youth ideas into scalable innovations and social enterprises, ensuring young innovators can access resources, navigate regulatory frameworks, and scale their solutions effectively.

Networking & Collaboration

- Connect youth innovators with IPR experts, lawyers, and mentors.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning where young entrepreneurs share experiences of protecting their work.
- Build regional IPR networks to harmonise protection across Africa and Europe.
- Organise joint workshops and webinars with African and European IPR offices to exchange best practices.
- Encourage youth innovators to participate in regional and international IPR conferences or forums.
- Establish online communities for youth to discuss IP challenges, share tools, and access guidance.
- Promote collaboration between creative hubs, tech incubators, and legal clinics to provide comprehensive IPR support.
- Develop mentorship programmes connecting experienced IP practitioners with youth-led startups for guidance and problem-solving.

Toolkit

[Youth Participation Toolkit — SALTO-YOUTH network salto-youth.net](https://salto-youth.net)

A resource with practical methodologies for youth engagement, group work, peer collaboration, participation & decision-making — useful for building youth networks, collaboration platforms, workshops or peer-to-peer exchange spaces.

Case study

[AfriLabs Innovation Hubs](#)

AfriLabs connects over 400 innovation hubs across Africa, enabling youth to collaborate, share knowledge, and prototype solutions. The network fosters peer-to-peer learning, organises hackathons, and hosts workshops where young innovators exchange ideas and co-create solutions. AfriLabs actively supports inclusive participation, ensuring that rural youth, girls, and differently abled innovators are involved in regional and cross-continental projects. The hubs build partnerships with mentors, businesses, and government institutions to scale innovations and strengthen the African youth innovation ecosystem.

Funding & Incentives

- Offer grants and competitions that include IPR support as part of the prize package.
- Encourage investors and incubators to require and support IPR protection in youth-led startups.
- Recognise and reward youth who successfully protect and commercialise their innovations.
- Provide seed funding or microgrants specifically for patenting, trademarking, or copyright registration.
- Include IPR mentoring and training as part of accelerator or incubator programmes.
- Design competitions that prioritise innovations with strong IPR strategies.
- Offer tax incentives or fee reductions for youth-led enterprises securing intellectual property.
- Collaborate with financial institutions to develop funding mechanisms that account for IPR-protected innovations.
- Track and showcase funded youth innovations that effectively use IPR to scale impact.

Toolkit

[Africa IP SME Helpdesk](#)

Provides free advice, training materials, and guides on intellectual property for youth innovators, supporting collaboration, cross-border IP, and startup protection across Africa.

Case study

[Africa IP SME Helpdesk — Supporting youth & SMEs to protect innovations](#)

A continent-wide IP support service that offers free advice, resources, and capacity-building to help youth-led enterprises register and enforce their intellectual property, making it easier to collaborate, scale, and secure their innovations across markets.

Digital Tools & Platforms

- Promote online IPR registration systems to make processes faster and more transparent.
- Use blockchain-based solutions for protecting creative works and ensuring authenticity.
- Encourage open-source collaboration while teaching youth how to balance sharing with protection.
- Develop mobile apps that guide youth innovators step-by-step through IP registration and protection processes.
- Integrate digital dashboards to track the status of patent, trademark, or copyright applications.
- Provide virtual mentorship and expert Q&A sessions via webinars and online forums on IP protection.
- Create online communities for peer-to-peer support, sharing best practices, and discussing IP challenges.
- Use cloud-based repositories to safely store and timestamp creative works, prototypes, and designs.
- Offer e-learning modules on cross-border IP issues, licensing, and commercialization strategies.

Toolkit

Industrial IP Database — CIPIT, Kenya

A publicly accessible online platform that allows youth innovators to search registered patents, trademarks, designs, and utility models in Kenya. Supports checking prior art, avoiding duplication, and making informed IP decisions. Enhances transparency and helps youth-led ventures navigate the IP landscape effectively.

Case study

African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO) Regional IP Database

Improving Access & Transparency for Innovators. The ARIPO builds a free, online regional IP database that brings together IP records (trademarks, designs, patents) from its member states, improving access to IP information across Africa. This centralised platform makes it easier for innovators — including youth — to check existing patents, avoid duplication, and plan new inventions with clarity.

7.3. ADVOCATE FOR RESPONSIVE POLICIES

Policy support for youth innovations is vital because it provides young people with the resources, recognition, and enabling environment they need to transform ideas into impactful solutions. In Africa and Europe, responsive policies are increasingly embedding youth voices into decision-making, offering funding, training, and cross-border collaboration opportunities.

Youth-led innovations are emerging as powerful drivers of social change, economic growth, and resilience. With Africa's demographic dividend and Europe's strong institutional frameworks, policy support is essential to unlock the potential of young innovators. Effective policies must be responsive, inclusive, and collaborative, ensuring that youth are not only beneficiaries but co-creators of solutions to global challenges.

Policies that recognise youth as equal stakeholders are vital because they empower young people to take ownership of their innovations. This sense of ownership builds confidence and credibility, allowing them to compete more effectively in dynamic markets. Beyond recognition, supportive policy frameworks must also provide access to critical resources such as funding, incubation, and mentorship. These forms of support reduce

barriers that often prevent youth from scaling their ideas into sustainable enterprises. When young people are given this recognition, they gain confidence and credibility, enabling them to compete more effectively in increasingly dynamic markets. Beyond empowerment, supportive policy frameworks must also ensure access to essential resources. By providing funding, incubation, and mentorship opportunities, such policies help reduce the barriers that often prevent youth from scaling their ideas into sustainable enterprises.

Equally important is the principle of inclusivity and equity. Responsive policies should ensure that marginalised groups, including girls, rural youth, and differently abled innovators are actively included in innovation ecosystems. By doing so, innovation becomes more representative and impactful, reflecting the diverse realities of society. Finally, collaboration across continents plays a transformative role. Harmonised policies between Africa and Europe can reduce barriers to trade, strengthen intellectual property protection, and facilitate technology transfer.

Such alignment enables youth-led innovations to thrive globally, positioning young innovators as co-creators of solutions to shared challenges.

Questions

- How do policies align with broader frameworks such as the AU Agenda 2063, the EU Innovation Agenda, and the UN SDGs?
- How can policies ensure equitable access to funding, incubation, and mentorship for youth innovators?
- What safeguards ensure that youth innovation ecosystems are inclusive and representative?
- How can education systems integrate entrepreneurship, STEM, and innovation skills into curricula?
- What policies act as a barrier for youth innovation in your community?
- How can policies support lifelong learning and adaptability for young innovators?
- What platforms can connect youth innovators across Africa and Europe for knowledge exchange?
- How can enforcement mechanisms be strengthened to protect youth?

Pathways to elevate

Embed Youth Innovation in National Strategies

- Integrate youth innovation into national development plans and continental agendas (e.g., AU Agenda 2063, EU Innovation Agenda).
- Ensure youth-led innovation is recognised as a driver of economic growth and social resilience.
- Create dedicated youth innovation units or offices within ministries to coordinate and monitor youth-led initiatives.
- Establish cross-sector advisory councils including youth representatives to inform policy design and implementation.
- Develop regulatory sandboxes that allow youth-led startups to test innovative solutions without heavy compliance burdens.
- Include measurable targets for youth participation in innovation programmes, funding allocation, and entrepreneurship schemes.
- Promote inter-ministerial coordination to align youth innovation efforts across health, climate, agriculture, digital transformation, and education sectors.
- Encourage policy frameworks.

Toolkit

[The Youth Cafe's Advocacy By Design is A Comprehensive Guide To Effective Youth-led Advocacy](#)

This Advocacy Toolkit provides young people and youth-led and youth-serving organisations with the knowledge, practical skills, and resources they need to effectively advocate for their rights and participate in democratic governance processes. As part of the Ignite African Youth Project, the toolkit serves as a comprehensive resource that empowers youth to actively shape their communities and democratic governance. It empowers them to create positive change locally and beyond by offering a complete guide to advocacy.

Case study

The [New European Innovation Agenda](#), adopted on **5 July 2022**, aims to position Europe at the forefront of the new wave of deep tech innovation and start-ups. It helps Europe to develop new technologies to address the most pressing societal challenges, and to bring them on the market through innovation procurement, a pivotal demand side instrument to modernise public services with innovative solutions while boosting the growth of innovative companies in Europe.

Institutionalise Youth Participation

- Establish youth advisory boards within ministries of innovation, education, and trade.
- Mandate youth representation in policymaking processes to ensure policies reflect their realities.
- Encourage co-creation models where youth and policymakers jointly design innovation programmes.
- Establish public-private co-funding programmes that match youth-led project contributions with government or donor resources.
- Create competitive innovation challenges and awards with financial support and mentorship opportunities.
- Simplify application and reporting procedures to make funding more accessible to young innovators.
- Prioritise funding for underrepresented groups, including rural youth, women, and differently abled innovators.
- Offer milestone-based disbursement to support project progress and accountability.
- Integrate funding with capacity-building programmes to ensure youth have the skills to manage and scale their innovations.
- Encourage long-term financing options that support scaling successful youth-led initiatives.

Toolkit

[Training Toolkit on Entrepreneurship](#) — SALTO-YOUTH network

A toolkit with about 30 non-formal educational tools to support youth entrepreneurship training across cultural, social, green, digital sectors.

Case study

[Entrepreneurship training boosts youth-owned SMEs performance in Kenya](#)

In Kisumu County, Kenya, a study of youth-owned small and micro-enterprises found that after entrepreneurship training, businesses significantly improved their sales and customer numbers.

Provide Accessible Funding & Incentives

- Create youth innovation funds with micro-grants, seed capital, and incubation support.
- Offer tax incentives or subsidies for youth-led enterprises.
- Tie funding to collaborative projects to encourage teamwork and inclusivity.
- Develop challenge-based funding competitions that reward innovative solutions to pressing social, environmental, or technological problems.
- Partner with private sector actors and foundations to co-finance youth-led projects, leveraging additional resources.
- Implement transparent, simple application processes to make funding more accessible to young innovators with limited experience.
- Offer milestone-based funding, releasing resources in stages as projects achieve predefined objectives to encourage accountability and progress.
- Provide non-financial incentives such as mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to incubation spaces alongside monetary support.
- Encourage regional collaboration by providing cross-border funding programmes that allow African and European youth to work together on joint initiatives.

Toolkit

[Micro-entrepreneurship \(ME\) Toolkit — Livelihoods Centre](#)

A practical resource that helps design and manage youth-oriented micro-entrepreneurship programmes. It covers all stages: assessing opportunities, planning and budgeting, selecting beneficiaries, training, issuing micro-grants or in-kind support, business-planning, and monitoring & evaluation.

Case study

[The African Development Bank Youth Entrepreneurship & Innovation Programme](#)

[\(YEI\)](#) supports youth-led agripreneurs across Africa. It provides grants, technical support, and enterprise development assistance to help young entrepreneurs start and scale businesses, particularly in agriculture. The programme creates jobs, increases access to finance, and offers training and mentorship. It actively includes women, rural youth, and other marginalised groups, demonstrating how targeted funding and support can empower youth to turn innovative ideas into sustainable enterprises.

Strengthen Education & Capacity-Building

- Integrate entrepreneurship, STEM, and intellectual property rights (IPR) into school and university curricula.
- Support innovation hubs and maker spaces with policy-backed resources.
- Promote lifelong learning programmes to keep youth adaptable to emerging technologies.
- Offer specialised workshops and bootcamps on digital skills, creative problem-solving, and design thinking.
- Facilitate mentorship programmes connecting students with experienced innovators, researchers, and industry professionals.
- Encourage cross-border exchange programmes for youth to learn from different innovation ecosystems in Africa and Europe.
- Provide scholarships, fellowships, or stipends for youth pursuing innovation-focused education or research projects.
- Develop online learning platforms and toolkits to allow remote access to entrepreneurship and STEM training.
- Partner with the private sector and NGOs to deliver applied training that aligns with labour market needs.

Toolkit

[STEM Toolkit for Basic Education in Africa](#) — by Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA / ICQN-MSE)

A flexible, Africa-tailored resource to integrate STEM education, inquiry-based learning, and teacher training at basic education levels. It helps embed entrepreneurship, science, technology and innovation readiness into school curricula and supports capacity building for educators and students.

Case study

[In East Africa, the non-formal STEM education centre, STEM Center Africa](#), provides students with practical skills in programming, electronics, and robotics. Through hands-on workshops, design-thinking exercises, and project-based learning, youth gain real-world experience in STEM. A significant portion of participants are girls, promoting inclusivity and gender balance in technology and innovation fields.

Simplify Legal & Institutional Frameworks

- Reduce bureaucracy and streamline patent/trademark registration for youth innovators.
- Establish legal clinics and advisory to guide youth through IPR processes.
- Harmonise IPR frameworks across Africa and Europe to ease cross-border protection.
- Provide clear, simplified guides and templates for IPR applications, reducing technical barriers for youth innovators.
- Implement fast-track approval processes for youth-led startups to encourage timely protection of innovations.
- Offer training sessions for government officials and hub staff to standardise support for youth IPR processes.
- Promote regional collaboration among patent offices to create a shared understanding of youth innovation needs.
- Integrate IPR support into existing innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators for seamless access.

Toolkit

[The IP Management Toolkit, developed by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology](#) (UNCST) and the IDRC, is a comprehensive, practical resource to guide researchers and innovators on IP creation, management, protection, and commercialisation. It provides a clear framework for simplifying legal frameworks by detailing national IP laws and international treaties, and offers practical guidance on securing IP rights, forming spin-off companies, and executing licensing agreements to help innovators monetize their assets and build capacity.

Case study

[Intersectoral Collaboration Toolkit — European Youth Forum](#)

A resource providing guidance, methods, and templates to set up, manage, and sustain partnerships across government, private sector, NGOs, and academia. Includes tools for joint planning, co-creation, communication, and evaluation of cross-sector youth innovation initiatives.

Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Encourage partnerships between government, private sector, NGOs, and academia.
- Support regional innovation networks.
- Promote exchange programmes to connect youth innovators across continents.
- Create joint innovation challenges or hackathons that bring youth, industry, and government together.
- Develop mentorship programmes linking youth with experts from multiple sectors.
- Establish shared platforms for knowledge exchange, data sharing, and co-creation of solutions.
- Encourage co-investment from public and private actors to scale youth-led innovations.
- Promote policy dialogues that involve youth representatives alongside sector stakeholders.
- Recognise and reward multi-sector partnerships that deliver measurable social or economic impact.

Toolkit

[Intersectoral Collaboration Toolkit — European Youth Forum](#)

A resource providing guidance, methods, and templates to set up, manage, and sustain partnerships across government, private sector, NGOs, and academia.

Includes tools for joint planning, co-creation, communication, and evaluation of cross-sector youth innovation initiatives.

Case study

[Afrilabs supports Africa's startup ecosystem, unites 500+ innovation hubs across 53 African countries](#)

to empower entrepreneurs with the skills, funding, and networks they need to scale. Through programmes and initiatives with their global partners, they provide critical resources that turn groundbreaking ideas into market-ready solutions. It fosters policy advocacy, cross-border collaboration, and investor engagement, AfriLabs is unlocking Africa's innovation potential and shaping the next generation of tech-driven businesses.

Monitor, Evaluate & Adapt

- Develop impact metrics to measure the effectiveness of youth innovation policies.
- Develop a clear results framework and conduct regular progress reviews.
- Ensure policies remain responsive and adaptable to emerging challenges (digital transformation, climate change).
- Use youth feedback loops to continuously improve policy frameworks.
- Conduct regular reviews of youth innovation programmes to track progress and identify gaps.
- Benchmark youth innovation initiatives against regional and international best practices.
- Integrate data-driven decision-making to refine funding allocation and resource support.
- Establish reporting mechanisms that capture both quantitative outcomes (e.g., number of innovations scaled) and qualitative impacts (e.g., skills developed, youth empowerment).
- Foster collaboration with research institutions to assess long-term social and economic impacts of youth-led innovations.
- Encourage adaptive policies that can evolve based on emerging trends, technology shifts, and changing youth needs.
- Promote transparency by publishing evaluation results and lessons learned for public accountability and stakeholder engagement.

Toolkit

[EU Youth Policy Labs \(YPL\) Toolkit — European Union](#)

A resource offering a structured methodology for adaptive policy development. It uses a multi-stakeholder, co-creation approach based on the design thinking cycle (Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver). Young people are actively involved in all phases—from defining problems to generating, testing, and refining solutions through small-scale experiments and pilot projects. The toolkit promotes dynamic governance by establishing robust youth feedback loops, ensuring policy recommendations are innovative, feasible, impactful, and sustainable.

Case study

[The Framework for Transformative Innovation Policy Evaluation \(TIPC\)](#) guides adaptive policymaking by treating policies as testable hypotheses.

It integrates learning and flexibility into policy design, using a specialised Theory of Change (ToC) to capture both quantitative outcomes and qualitative systemic transformation. TIPC ensures data-driven decision-making by linking policy interventions with collaborative, rigorous assessments, enabling continuous improvement of youth innovation policies and responsiveness to emerging challenges.

7.4. EMPOWER YOUTH ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Access to resources is one of the most critical enablers for youth-led innovations. Young innovators in Africa and Europe need funding, mentorship, infrastructure, and networks to transform ideas into sustainable solutions.

Youth-led innovations are increasingly shaping responses to global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and social inclusion. However, the success of these innovations depends heavily on access to resources. Without adequate funding, mentorship, and infrastructure, many promising ideas remain unscaled. Responsive policies and cross-continental initiatives are beginning to address these gaps, positioning youth as co-creators of sustainable futures.

Youth-led innovations face several challenges that limit their potential for growth and impact. High costs remain a significant barrier, as many young innovators cannot afford the expenses associated with patent registration or the startup capital required to launch their ideas. Access to resources is also unevenly distributed, with rural and marginalised youth often excluded from innovation hubs and funding opportunities that are more readily available in urban centres.

In addition, limited awareness prevents many young innovators from taking advantage of existing grants and support programmes, leaving valuable opportunities untapped. Even when projects receive funding, scaling them beyond local contexts proves difficult without sustained support, mentorship, and infrastructure. Together, these challenges highlight the need for responsive policies and inclusive ecosystems that can empower youth to transform their ideas into sustainable solutions.

Hence, the importance of resource access for youth-led innovations cannot be overstated. Funding provides the financial support that enables young innovators to prototype, test, and eventually scale their solutions, turning ideas into tangible impact. Equally vital is mentorship, where guidance from experienced professionals helps youth navigate complex ecosystems and avoid common pitfalls, ensuring their innovations are both sustainable and strategic. Access to infrastructure such as laboratories, co-working spaces, and digital tools creates the environment for practical experimentation and creativity to flourish. Finally, networks play a crucial role by connecting youth innovators with peers, policymakers, and investors, amplifying their reach and influence. Together, these resources form the backbone of thriving youth innovation ecosystems, empowering young people to transform their ideas into solutions that drive meaningful change.

Access to resources is the backbone of youth-led innovation. By providing funding, mentorship, infrastructure, and networks, Africa and Europe can empower young innovators to scale their solutions and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. It is essential to promote inclusivity and increase awareness so that every young person, no matter their background, has access to the resources necessary for success.

Questions

- What types of financial support (grants, microloans, seed capital) are available to youth innovators?
- How can youth innovators be connected with experienced mentors across sectors?
- How can young people maximise and effectively leverage available resources?
- Do youth have access to innovation hubs, labs, and co-working spaces in both urban and rural areas?
- What platforms exist to connect youth innovators with peers, policymakers, and investors?
- How do current policies ensure equitable distribution of resources across regions and demographics?
- What mechanisms are in place to monitor whether youth are actually benefiting from resource access?

Pathways to elevate

Expand Funding Opportunities

- Establish dedicated youth innovation funds. These specialised funds would provide micro-grants, seed capital, and venture support tailored to the unique needs of youth enterprises, helping young innovators move their ideas from concept to implementation.
- Funds must be designed to be accessible and flexible, minimising bureaucratic hurdles that often discourage young applicants.
- Provide subsidies or tax incentives for youth-led enterprises.
- Provide low-interest loans or credit guarantees to youth-led enterprises. Access to affordable financing is often one of the biggest barriers for young innovators. By offering low-interest loans or credit guarantees, governments and financial institutions can reduce the risks associated with borrowing and make it easier for youth-led enterprises to secure the capital they need.
- Promote blended financing models as a powerful way to expand support for youth-led innovations. By combining public funding, private investment, and philanthropic contributions, sustainable financing streams can be created that ensure long-term impact.
- Encourage impact investors and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes to prioritise youth innovation, channelling resources toward initiatives that drive social and economic change.
- Developing matching grant schemes where private sector contributions are matched by government or donor funding provides an incentive for collaboration and amplifies the resources available to young innovators.
- Encourage collaborative funding as a powerful way to strengthen youth-led innovations. By supporting consortia of youth-led organisations that apply jointly for larger grants, young innovators can pool their expertise and resources to increase their chances of success.
- Promote cross-sector partnerships that bring together government, NGOs, and the private sector further enhance this approach, creating a shared commitment to invest in youth innovation.
- Expand regional innovation competitions that reward collaborative projects with financial support to provide an incentive for youth to work together, fostering creativity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Toolkit

[Framing \(UNIDO Blended Finance Toolkit Principles\)](#)

A resource guiding policymakers and practitioners on financing youth-led innovation through blended finance. Focuses on mobilising capital beyond traditional aid, creating enabling ecosystems, and leveraging instruments such as guarantees, technical assistance, and investment promotion. Supports sustainable investment in renewable energy, circular economy, and local value addition while fostering youth-inclusive innovation and industrial growth.

Case study

The [AU-EU Youth Action Lab](#) provides opportunities for youth initiatives in Africa and Europe to submit proposals and apply for funding to implement their own ideas and solutions linked to global challenges. Its ambition is to support young people as they connect across and between the African and European continents, linking initiatives to their peers to share, learn, and collaborate, while bringing their voices and solutions directly to policy makers at different levels, including within the European Union and African Union.

Strengthen Mentorship and Guidance

- Build structured mentorship programmes linking youth with experienced innovators, policymakers, and entrepreneurs.
- Train mentors to understand youth-specific challenges and contexts.
- Promote peer-to-peer mentoring within youth networks.
- Use digital platforms to maintain regular contact, feedback loops, and progress tracking.
- Avoid one-off mentorship sessions; instead, create ongoing relationships that evolve with the youth's needs.
- Governments and organisations should institutionalise mentorship within innovation hubs, schools, and youth programmes.
- Policies can mandate mentorship as part of funded innovation projects, ensuring sustainability.

Toolkit

[Youth Mentoring Toolkit — The Mentoring Lab Community](#)

A resource providing tools, templates, and guidance to set up and manage mentorship and intergenerational collaboration. Includes methods for matching mentors and mentees, planning mentorship sessions, tracking outcomes, and supporting ongoing youth development. Designed to help organisations create structured, sustainable mentorship programmes that evolve with the needs of young innovators.

Case study

The [GIZ Agri-Jobs 4 Youth project](#) in Western Kenya serves as a powerful case study for strengthening mentorship and guidance by institutionalising support for youth enterprises. The programme utilizes a structured tripartite mentorship model, blending guidance from experienced business experts, industry professionals, and peer-to-peer support, moving beyond one-off sessions to foster long-term relationships that evolve with the entrepreneur's needs. By providing formal training and integrating youth organisations into county-level agribusiness strategies, the project successfully demonstrated how institutionalising mentorship leads to tangible outcomes, such as business expansion, job creation, and increased youth engagement in high-potential sectors.

Invest in Infrastructure

- Create innovation hubs, labs, and co-working spaces accessible to both urban and rural youth.
- Support digital platforms that provide tools for prototyping, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.
- Ensure affordable access to the internet and emerging technologies (AI, blockchain, green tech).
- Provide shared equipment (3D printers, computers, design software) to lower entry costs for youth innovators.
- Invest in affordable, high-speed internet to enable youth participation in global innovation ecosystems.
- Encourage partnerships between educational institutions and industry to provide real-world exposure.
- Leverage mobile technology to deliver training, mentorship, and funding information.
- Provide transport subsidies or digital access grants to ensure equitable participation.

Toolkit

[Infrastructure & Equitable Access — African Innovation Hub Handbook](#) is a resource providing guidance on establishing physical hubs, labs, and co-working spaces for youth innovators. Offers frameworks for nurturing entrepreneurs, supporting startups, and evaluating best practices to ensure equitable access to innovation infrastructure.

Case study

The [Enabel Innovation Hub](#) supports its partners in scaling their innovations through a unique threefold approach that combines financial support, needs-based learning, and knowledge exchange. It provides financial contributions to strengthen the learning and scaling pathways of its partners, backed by solid financial monitoring. It offers tailored support and capacity building to help partners understand and accelerate their pathways to scale. It also fosters a knowledge exchange network that connects peers, including alumni and current project partners, enabling them to share experiences and insights gained along the journey.

Enhance Awareness and Visibility

- Launch campaigns to inform youth about available grants, competitions, and support programmes.
- Develop digital portals or apps that consolidate grants, competitions, mentorship programmes, and funding opportunities.
- Ensure platforms are user-friendly and multilingual, accessible to both urban and rural youth.
- Use schools, universities, and youth organisations as dissemination channels.
- Celebrate youth innovation success stories to inspire wider participation.
- Use social media channels (TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn) to reach diverse youth audiences.
- Organise training sessions and webinars to teach youth how to access and apply for resources.
- Provide toolkits on grant writing, pitching, and intellectual property rights.
- Create annual innovation fairs where funders, mentors, and innovators meet.
- Establish feedback loops where youth can share whether they are aware of and accessing resources.
- Establish low income, high value projects that are easy to replicate in other communities to increase visibility.

Toolkit

[IREX Youth Project Toolkit — Positive Youth Development \(PYD\) Approach](#)

A resource offering structured guidance to enhance awareness and visibility of youth innovations. Provides methods for designing campaigns, recruiting participants via schools, universities, and community partners, and celebrating successes through exhibitions, highlights, and digital outreach. Emphasises active youth involvement, treating youth as a resource to be developed, and attracting new partners, funders, and collaborators.

Case study

[Innovate UK Young Innovators Awards](#)

The Innovate UK Young Innovators Awards demonstrates effective integration of awareness and visibility campaigns with tangible funding and institutional support. Operated under the #IdeasMeanBusiness brand by the UK's national innovation agency, the initiative publicly highlights winners who receive a grant (£5,000) and tailored business coaching. By leveraging social media and national media, it celebrates youth innovation success stories, highlights role models, and links recognition with funding and mentorship opportunities, driving wider participation and confidence among young innovators.

Foster Inclusive Access

- Design policies that prioritise girls, rural youth, and differently abled innovators.
- Provide targeted scholarships and tailored support for marginalised groups.
- Provide scholarships, tailored grants, and mentorship to address systemic barriers.
- Provide low-cost or free digital tools to youth innovators.
- Translate resource materials into local languages to ensure understanding.
- Ensure equitable distribution of resources across regions.
- Monitor inclusivity through data collection and evaluation to ensure marginalised groups benefit.

Toolkit

Council of Europe Inclusion Toolbox

The Council of Europe Inclusion Toolbox provides structured guidance for fostering inclusive access by embedding equity into programme design and policy. It addresses systemic barriers through Inclusion Checklists covering logistics, finances, and content, ensuring that resource materials and facilities are accessible to marginalised groups, including differently abled and rural youth. The toolkit emphasises monitoring and evaluation, requiring data collection and feedback loops to verify that targeted support, scholarships, and translated materials actively benefit all prioritised groups.

Case study

The Ibuka Girls in STEM Initiative in Kenya demonstrates effective implementation of Foster Inclusive Access policies. The project provides tailored support to girls with disabilities, addresses systemic barriers by adapting infrastructure specialised laptops, accessible robotics kits, and inclusive furniture and delivers targeted training and mentorship. Its success shows a practical model for equitable participation, ensuring marginalised youth engage fully not only through grants or scholarships but also through proactive adaptation of resources.

Strengthen Networks and Collaboration

- Support platforms that connect youth innovators with investors, policymakers, and peers.
- Encourage cross-continental collaboration through initiatives.
- Facilitate exchange programmes and innovation competitions to build global exposure.
- Encourage public-private partnerships (PPPs) to pool resources and expertise.
- Establish online and offline communities for continuous knowledge sharing and peer support.
- Promote mentorship networks linking experienced innovators with early-stage youth entrepreneurs.
- Support regional and national innovation hubs to act as convergence points for collaboration.
- Organise sector-specific forums (tech, agribusiness, creative industries) to foster targeted partnerships.
- Encourage joint projects between youth-led organisations and research institutions to co-create solutions.
- Develop platforms for showcasing youth innovations to potential funders and partners.
- Incentivise collaborative research and innovation challenges across borders to strengthen global networks.

Toolkit

[Open Government Partnership \(OGP\) Youth Toolkit](#)

A resource offering strategies and tools for youth to meaningfully engage with policymakers in co-creation processes. Helps youth innovators build global and regional networks, develop coalitions, and leverage policy commitments to drive local change. Provides guidance on bridging the gap between innovation and governance, facilitating cross-sector collaboration, and monitoring youth participation in policy initiatives.

Case study

The [Africa-Europe Innovation Platform \(AEIP\)](#) connects stakeholders of the innovation value chain across Africa and Europe.

The AEIP creates a “network of networks”, aligning with the priorities of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda to strengthen cooperation and maximise the impact of innovation initiatives.

Ensure Sustainability

- Embed youth innovation into national development strategies and continental agendas (AU Agenda 2063, EU Innovation Agenda).
- Monitor and evaluate resource distribution to ensure accountability.
- Adapt policies to remain responsive to emerging challenges like climate change and digital transformation.
- Move beyond one-off grants by establishing revolving funds, endowments, and impact investment pools.
- Provide multi-year funding cycles to allow youth projects to scale sustainably.
- Encourage blended financing models that combine public, private, and philanthropic contributions.

Toolkit

AU-EU Innovation Agenda

A strategic policy framework guiding research and innovation across Africa and Europe. Supports embedding youth-led innovation into continental development agendas, fostering co-creation, sustainability, and ecosystem building. Provides guidance on aligning youth projects with digital and green transitions, enhancing socio-economic impact, and promoting cross-continental collaboration.

Case study

AGENDA 2063 is Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. It serves as the continent's strategic framework that seeks to deliver on its goal of inclusive and sustainable development.

It stands as a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity, pursued under Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.

7.5. BUILD CAPACITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO INNOVATE

Young people are at the forefront of shaping solutions to global challenges, from climate change and digital transformation to social inclusion and entrepreneurship. Yet their ability to innovate depends not only on creativity but also on the systems that nurture their skills, confidence, and access to resources. It equips youth with the knowledge, tools, and networks they need to transform ideas into impactful innovations.

Despite progress, young innovators face barriers such as unequal access to resources, limited awareness of opportunities, and inflated costs of scaling ideas. Rural youth, girls, and marginalised groups often remain excluded from innovation ecosystems. Addressing these challenges requires intentional inclusivity and equity-focused strategies.

Capacity building goes beyond training; it is about creating an enabling environment where young innovators can thrive. It involves strengthening technical skills, fostering entrepreneurial mindsets, and building resilience to navigate complex ecosystems. By investing in capacity building, societies empower youth to become problem-solvers, leaders, and co-creators of sustainable futures.

Education and skills development form the foundation of youth innovation. This involves integrating innovation, design thinking, and entrepreneurship into school and university curricula, while also providing hands-on training in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics alongside digital literacy. By encouraging creativity and critical thinking through project-based learning, young people gain the confidence and practical skills needed to turn ideas into solutions. Mentorship and guidance are equally vital. Young innovators benefit from being connected with experienced mentors who can offer advice, networks, and encouragement. Peer-to-peer mentorship systems allow youth to learn from one another's experiences, while continuous and inclusive mentorship ensures that support is not limited to one-off engagements but becomes a sustained relationship.

Access to infrastructure and resources is another critical dimension. Innovation hubs, maker spaces, and co-working centres provide the tools and facilities necessary for experimentation and growth. Expanding digital infrastructure ensures affordable internet and access to emerging technologies, while mobile labs and localised innovation centres extend opportunities to rural and marginalised communities.

Training in financial management, fundraising, and investment readiness equips youth with the skills to sustain their ventures, while blended financing models that combine public, private, and philanthropic contributions create more resilient funding streams.

Finally, networks and collaboration strengthen the innovation ecosystem. Platforms that connect youth with policymakers, investors, and peers expand opportunities and visibility. Cross-sector partnerships between government, NGOs, academia, and the private sector foster resource sharing and collective impact. Strengthening Africa–Europe collaborations further enhance knowledge exchange and opens pathways for young innovators to scale their ideas globally.

Capacity building for young people in innovation is not a one-time intervention but a long-term investment in human potential. By strengthening education, mentorship, infrastructure, funding, and networks, societies can empower youth to transform ideas into solutions that drive sustainable development. Africa and Europe, through collaborative initiatives, have a unique opportunity to build resilient ecosystems where young innovators thrive and contribute meaningfully to global progress.

Questions

- How are innovation, design thinking, and entrepreneurship integrated into school and university curricula?
- How can peer-to-peer mentorship be strengthened to ensure knowledge transfer among youth?
- How can digital infrastructure be expanded to ensure affordable internet and access to emerging technologies?
- How are young people trained in economic management, fundraising, and investment readiness?
- Are there regional or cross-continental collaborations (e.g., Africa–Europe) that expand opportunities for youth?
- How can youth themselves be involved in designing inclusive capacity-building initiatives?
- How can youth feedback be incorporated to adapt and sustain capacity-building efforts over time?

Pathways to elevate

Skills Development & Education

- Provide training in problem-solving, design thinking, and entrepreneurship to equip youth with practical innovation skills.
- Integrate digital literacy, STEM education, and creative arts into curricula to foster diverse innovation pathways.
- Encourage experiential learning through hackathons, innovation labs, and project-based challenges.
- Establish mentorship programmes linking youth with innovators and experts.
- Provide access to labs, maker spaces, and digital tools for hands-on learning.
- Integrate communication, teamwork, and leadership training.
- Offer guidance on emerging careers and personal skill mapping.
- Promote inclusive programmes for girls and marginalised youth.
- Recognise achievements through competitions, awards, and certifications.
- Facilitate youth networking, workshops, and collaboration with startups.

Toolkit

The [“Skill IT for Youth” Training Toolkit](#) provides structured, youth-centred workshops that equip young people with essential digital and soft skills. It brings together youth, educators, and mentors in interactive sessions focused on communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and media literacy. The toolkit emphasises experiential learning, inclusivity, and practical application, ensuring that participants can translate newly acquired skills into real-world projects and innovation initiatives.

Case study

The [Skill IT for Youth project](#) empowers young people through interactive workshops on digital literacy, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication. Using the toolkit, participants engage in hands-on learning, develop real-world projects, and apply new skills to drive innovation and community impact.

Mentorship & Role Models

- Connect youth with mentors, innovators, and entrepreneurs who can guide them through real-world challenges.
- Establish peer-to-peer learning networks where young people share experiences and solutions.
- Organise regular mentor-mentee sessions to provide guidance and feedback.
- Highlight success stories of youth innovators to inspire and motivate participants.
- Facilitate shadowing or internship opportunities with professionals.
- Encourage cross-sector mentoring between youth, startups, and community leaders.
- Provide platforms for alumni to support and coach new participants.
- Foster collaborative projects where mentors and youth co-create solutions.

Toolkit

[The Mentor's Guide to Youth Purpose](#)

This practical guide empowers mentors to support young people in discovering their purpose, setting goals, and reflecting on personal growth. It provides structured activities and guidance to help youth build confidence, develop leadership, and apply their skills to real-world challenges.

Case study

[Mentor Case Study – Engaging Youth Purpose](#)

The guide includes a case study showing how mentors support young people in discovering purpose and applying their skills to real-world challenges. Through guidance, reflection, and goal setting, youth transform experiences into meaningful projects, develop leadership, and create positive community impact. expansion, job creation, and increased youth engagement in high-potential sectors.

Enabling Environments

- Create inclusive policies that recognise youth as key stakeholders in innovation ecosystems.
- Reduce barriers such as lack of recognition, limited access to decision-making, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Encourage governments and organisations to embed youth voices in policy making.
- Promote safe spaces where youth can experiment, collaborate, and innovate.
- Provide funding, resources, and infrastructure to support youth-led initiatives.
- Facilitate partnerships between youth, private sector, academia, and government.
- Recognise and celebrate youth achievements to motivate participation.
- Integrate mentorship and guidance within innovation ecosystems.
- Encourage transparency and accountability in programmes that involve youth.
- Support capacity-building for youth to navigate legal, financial, and technical systems.

Toolkit

[Meaningful Youth Participation Practical Toolkit](#)

This UNESCO toolkit provides practical tools and methods to ensure youth voices are heard and included in decision-making. It helps organisations design inclusive environments and participation spaces where young people can actively contribute, influence outcomes, and drive innovation in their communities.

Case study

[Africa's Voices Foundation & Mastercard Foundation \(Kenya\)](#)

An SMS-based platform empowers youth to actively shape employment programmes, giving them a direct voice in decision-making and turning them into partners in designing solutions that affect their communities.

Civic Engagement & Social Innovation

- Empower youth to address social challenges (climate, health, education) through innovation.
- Promote social entrepreneurship models that combine impact with sustainability.
- Support youth-led community projects that tackle local issues with creative solutions.
- Provide platforms for youth to co-design policies and programmes with local authorities.
- Encourage collaboration between youth, NGOs, and the private sector for social impact initiatives.
- Integrate mentorship and guidance to help youth scale social innovations.
- Recognise and highlight successful youth-led initiatives to inspire wider participation.
- Facilitate access to funding, tools, and networks to implement social innovation projects.
- Foster peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange on civic engagement strategies.

Toolkit

Civic Education for Youth (UNDP, South Africa)

This toolkit equips youth and community groups to understand local government,

democracy, and citizen rights. It provides practical methods to foster civic literacy, active citizenship, and community-based engagement, helping young people become informed, empowered, and active participants in governance and societal decision-making.

Case study

Makerere University Research and Innovation Fund (Mak-RIF)

The Makerere University Research and Innovation Fund (Mak-RIF) in Uganda serves as an effective institutional case study for driving Civic Engagement and Social Innovation by aligning academic research funding directly with pressing national development challenges. Mak-RIF provides targeted, government-funded seed capital to student- and faculty-led teams, fostering solutions in priority areas such as agriculture, health, and local manufacturing. By mandating that research projects address specific societal needs and demonstrate tangible impact on the community, the fund successfully mobilises young innovators to engage civically and strategically, ensuring that academic innovation is not isolated but directly feeds into high-impact social and economic transformation.

7.6. PRACTICE ITERATIVE EXPERIMENTATION

Innovation is rarely a straight path, it thrives on cycles of trial, reflection, and adaptation. In youth-centred innovations, iterative experimentation becomes a powerful approach that not only strengthens ideas but also empowers young people to lead transformative change.

At its core, iterative experimentation is about testing ideas in small, manageable steps, learning from outcomes, and refining solutions continuously. For young innovators, this process reduces the fear of failure by reframing setbacks as opportunities for growth. Each iteration provides new insights into what works, what doesn't, and how solutions can be adapted to better meet the needs of communities.

Youth-centred innovation benefits uniquely from this approach because young people often operate in dynamic environments where challenges shift rapidly—whether in education, employment, climate, or civic engagement. Iterative cycles allow them to remain agile, responsive, and creative. For example, a youth-led project addressing digital literacy may begin with a pilot workshop, gather feedback from participants, and then redesign the curriculum to be more inclusive and practical. Over time, the initiative evolves into a scalable model that reflects real-world needs.

Equally important is the collaborative nature of iteration. When young innovators engage peers, mentors, and community stakeholders in the pro-

cess, they build collective ownership of solutions. This participatory experimentation ensures that innovations are not imposed but co-created, strengthening both relevance and sustainability.

Moreover, iterative experimentation cultivates a mindset of resilience and adaptability. It teaches young people to embrace uncertainty, to value evidence over assumptions, and to see innovation as a journey rather than a destination. This mindset is critical for tackling complex global challenges, where no single solution is final and every breakthrough is a stepping stone toward deeper impact.

In practice, youth-centred iterative experimentation requires supportive ecosystems: access to safe spaces for testing, resources for prototyping, and policies that encourage risk-taking and learning. When governments, NGOs, and institutions invest in such environments, they enable young innovators to experiment boldly and responsibly.

Iterative experimentation transforms youth innovation into a living process of discovery. It empowers young people to refine their ideas, amplify their voices, and create solutions that are not only innovative but deeply rooted in the realities of their communities. By embracing iteration, youth-centred innovations become more than projects they become evolving pathways to social change.

Questions

- What challenge or opportunity are we trying to address, and why does it matter to young people?
- What are the root causes of this challenge?
- How do we know this challenge is relevant to our community or peers?
- What is the simplest version of our idea (prototype, pilot, or experiment) we can assess quickly?
- What is the simplest version of our idea (prototype, pilot, or experiment) we can assess quickly?
- Who should be involved in co-creating or evaluating this first version?
- What risks and challenges come with addressing this challenge?
- What is the set timeline for the testing phase?
- What indicators will show us whether the experiment is working or needs adjustment?
- What worked well, and what did not go as planned?
- When is the right time to move from small-scale experimentation to broader implementation?
- How do we balance experimentation with accountability to the communities we serve?

Pathways to elevate

Start Small & Scale Gradually

- Encourage youth to begin with low-cost prototypes or pilots rather than large-scale projects.
- Understand the root causes of the challenge and use problem trees to breakdown big plays and make them easier to handle.
- Include small, achievable plays, short implementation cycles, multimedia documentation and track measurable outcomes.
- Allow for faster learning cycles before scaling solutions.
- Promote iterative testing and refinement of ideas before full implementation.
- Encourage youth to document lessons learned and best practices from small initiatives.
- Provide mentorship and feedback loops during the pilot phase to guide improvement.
- Use pilot results to attract resources, partners, or funding for scaling.
- Support collaboration between small teams to share insights and replicate successes.
- Celebrate small wins to build confidence and motivation for larger-scale impact.
- Encourage youth to experiment with diverse approaches to find the most effective solutions.

Toolkit

DIY Toolkit (Nesta)

This toolkit provides around 30 practical social-innovation tools for ideation, prototyping, user testing, iteration, and scaling. It helps youth experiment with early-stage ideas, test and refine solutions, and gradually develop projects before full launch translate newly acquired skills into real-world projects and innovation initiatives.

Case study

Case Study — Code Club: From Pilot to Movement

Code Club begins as a small, volunteer-led after-school coding club. Youth learn digital skills, collaborate and build small projects. As the idea proves successful, with positive feedback and demonstrated demand, Code Club receives funding and support to scale — growing into a broad network reaching hundreds of schools. This trajectory shows how starting small, testing, learning, and scaling gradually can build a sustainable youth-innovation ecosystem that empowers many young people with digital, collaborative, and problem-solving skills.

Embed Feedback Loops

- Build mechanisms for continuous feedback from peers, mentors, and communities.
- Use surveys, focus groups, or digital tools to capture real-time insights and adapt accordingly.
- Encourage iterative improvement by reviewing and acting on feedback regularly.
- Include youth in designing the feedback process to ensure its relevant and meaningful.
- Track progress and impact metrics to inform decision-making and scaling strategies.
- Encourage an environment in which constructive feedback is appreciated and applied to improve concepts.
- Use both qualitative and quantitative feedback to get a holistic view of project performance.
- Create peer-review sessions to promote collaborative learning and shared accountability.
- Integrate digital platforms or apps for real-time feedback and transparent communication.
- Encourage systematic review of both qualitative and quantitative feedback throughout the process.

Toolkit

[Youth Engagement Toolkit: Evaluation Tool \(Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange / government youth services\)](#)

This toolkit provides a simple, practical framework to evaluate youth-engagement practices. It helps assess organisational readiness, the quality of youth decision-making, inclusivity and diversity, and youth-adult partnership effectiveness. By guiding structured reflection and feedback, it supports continuous improvement in youth-led and youth-focused initiatives.

Case study

[Youth Participation in Community Development: Kaiti CDF, Kenya](#)

A structured evaluation of youth participation in community-development projects funded by the CDF reveals that, despite investment, youth involvement remains low, and youth are assigned only manual-labour tasks rather than decision-making or benefit-oriented projects. Using evaluation tools, involving youth interviews, focus-group discussions, and analysing participation levels, the study identifies major gaps: poor awareness among youth, lack of youth-centred projects, and limited decision-making roles. The findings highlight the importance of applying participatory evaluation frameworks (as in the Youth Engagement Toolkit), to ensure youth are meaningfully involved, and programmes are responsive to youth needs and aspirations.

Foster Collaborative Spaces

- Create innovation nodes, labs, and makerspaces where youth can co-create and test ideas together.
- Collaborate across disciplines to ensure diverse perspectives and strengthen solutions.
- Encourage mentorship within collaborative spaces to guide idea development.
- Provide access to tools, technology, and resources to enable direct experimentation.
- Facilitate networking events to connect youth with experts, peers, and potential partners.
- Promote open knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning among participants.
- Organise workshops, hackathons, or themed sprints to stimulate creative problem-solving.
- Recognise and highlight projects developed within these spaces to inspire others.
- Support interdisciplinary teams to address complex social, economic, or environmental challenges.

Toolkit

Youth Innovation Lab (YIL) Toolkit — Save the Children

This toolkit provides guidance for setting up structured lab-style environments where young innovators can collaborate, develop projects, and lead solutions. It includes practical advice on facilitation, team collaboration, project planning, and nurturing youth-led innovation, helping create vibrant spaces where ideas can be assessed, refined, and scaled.

Case study

The Africa Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation Project (AfrIPI)

The The Africa Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation Project (AfrIPI) is a powerful toolkit and case study for Harmonization and Cross-Continental Collaboration, funded by the European Union and implemented by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO).

The project's core purpose is to standardise and strengthen the protection, administration, and enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) across Africa, including within regional bodies like the African Intellectual Property Organisation (OAPI) and the African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO). By facilitating knowledge exchange and training between African and European IP offices, AfrIPI provides the strategic blueprint for creating a predictable, efficient, and harmonised IPR environment essential for youth innovators to scale across borders and attract international investment.

Normalize Failure as Learning

- Promote a culture where failure is reframed as discovery.
- Document lessons learned from each iteration to guide future cycles.
- Encourage reflection sessions after each project or prototype to extract key insights.
- Celebrate experimentation, even when ideas do not succeed, to build resilience and creativity.
- Share case studies of past failures and the lessons they provided to inspire continuous improvement.
- Foster peer-to-peer learning where youth can discuss what worked, what did not, and why.
- Integrate failure analysis into project planning to anticipate challenges and adapt faster.
- Reward iterative improvement and evidence-based problem solving, not just final outcomes.
- Use visual tools (diagrams, storyboards, retrospectives) to capture failures and insights clearly.

Toolkit

Reflective Failure Analysis

Provides structured activities that help teams review what went wrong, analyse mistakes without assigning blame, and explore different perspectives on success and failure. This approach encourages open discussion, learning from experience, and continuous improvement.

Case study

BRAC Social Innovation Lab

BRAC, a leading development organisation, operates a “Social Innovation Lab” that publishes periodic Failure Reports. These reports document projects that did not meet expectations, highlighting challenges, missteps, and lessons learned. The lab shows that by carefully analysing failures, valuable lessons can be learned and applied to enhance future innovation efforts.

Leverage Technology & Data

- Use digital platforms, AI tools, and open-source resources to simulate, assess, and refine ideas quickly.
- Data-driven experimentation helps youth validate assumptions and measure impact.
- Encourage mobile-first solutions to increase access and engagement for youth in low-resource settings.
- Integrate analytics dashboards to track project progress and visualize outcomes in real time.
- Use collaborative online tools for team ideation, prototyping, and remote co-creation.
- Employ open-data sources to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities for social innovation.
- Promote digital storytelling and social media platforms to share insights, gather feedback, and increase impact visibility.
- Combine AI-powered simulations with participatory feedback loops to iteratively refine solutions.
- Use digital platforms to extend reach and increase visibility.

Toolkit

[Youth4Data Lab Toolkit \(The Datasphere Initiative\)](#)

This toolkit provides guidance for setting up structured lab-style environments where young innovators can collaborate, develop projects, and lead solutions. It includes practical advice on facilitation, team collaboration, project planning, and nurturing youth-led innovation, helping create vibrant spaces where ideas can be assessed, refined, and scaled.

Case study

[Data-Driven Opportunity Matching for Youth \(Mombasa, Kenya\)](#)

In Mombasa, young job-seekers struggling with unemployment benefit from a data-driven solution: a digital platform developed by DataKind and Swahilipot Hub Foundation automatically matches youth with training, mentorship, and employment opportunities based on their skills and profiles. By replacing manual matching with a machine-learning algorithm and robust data systems, the initiative dramatically speeds up access to opportunities, reduces bias and errors, and expands reach — showing how leveraging technology and data empowers youth to navigate job markets more effectively.

Ensure Inclusivity & Representation

- Involve diverse youth voices across gender, geography, and socio-economic backgrounds in every iteration.
- Ensure innovations are equitable and contextually relevant.
- Adopt formats that are adaptable and use straightforward language so people can understand them easily in various innovative settings and situations.
- Provide access to online collaboration tools for remote teamwork and idea sharing.
- Encourage the use of low-cost digital prototyping tools and simulations.
- Integrate mobile apps and digital surveys to gather user feedback in real time.
- Teach basic data analysis skills so youth can interpret results and make evidence-based decisions.
- Use visualization tools (dashboards, charts) to track progress and highlight impact.
- Introduce open data and datasets for research and ideation purposes.
- Promote technology as an enabler for inclusion, connecting youth in remote or underserved areas.

Toolkit

[Everybody In: An Inclusive Youth Participation Toolkit \(Rutgers International\)](#)

This toolkit is designed to support the inclusion of marginalised youth groups in youth-led programmes and initiatives, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming. It provides practical methods and guidance for ensuring equitable participation, amplifying underrepresented voices, and creating safe, inclusive spaces where all youth can contribute meaningfully to decision-making and innovation processes.

Case study

[Everybody In: Inclusive Youth Participation toolkit \(Rutgers International\)](#)

The “Everybody In” toolkit is deployed in SRHR-programmes to ensure that marginalised youth — including those with disabilities, from remote or minority backgrounds, or with less social privilege — are actively involved as partners: as peer researchers, advocates, decision-makers, and programme planners. Through structured steps (context analysis, inclusive partnership formation, youth-adult collaboration, capacity-building) the toolkit enables inclusive participation. The result: more equitable programmes, better representation of youth voices, and services/advocacy that reflect the needs of all youth, not just a select few.

Link to Policy & Ecosystems

- Connect iterative experiments to policy dialogues and institutional support so that successful ideas can influence governance.
- Partnerships with NGOs, governments, and private sector actors to provide resources and legitimacy.
- Map relevant policy frameworks and stakeholders to align youth projects with existing priorities.
- Encourage youth participation in advisory committees, consultations, or public hearings.
- Facilitate partnerships with accelerators, incubators, or innovation hubs to support scaling.
- Use evidence from pilots to inform policy briefs, reports, or advocacy campaigns.
- Promote multi-sector collaboration to increase reach, impact, and sustainability.
- Connect successful youth initiatives to funding mechanisms, awards, or recognition programmes.
- Build networks that allow lessons learned to feed into national or local innovation strategies.
- Incorporate partnership trackers to monitor, manage, and strengthen collaborations.

Toolkit

Participatory Youth Policy

This toolkit offers a conceptual and practical framework for participatory youth policy-making. It provides activities and guidance to actively involve young people in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating youth policies at both national and local levels. By embedding youth voices in all stages, the toolkit helps create more inclusive, responsive, and effective policy frameworks.

Case study

Young Cities: Embedding Youth in Urban Policy

Through collaboration between municipal governments and youth-led organisations under the Young Cities initiative, youth participation and innovation are integrated into urban governance and city planning. Young people help shape policy design, public programmes, and resource allocation demonstrating how youth-driven innovation can influence real governance structures when institutional support and participatory mechanisms exist.

Risk Assessment

- Conduct a visual exercise to prioritise which challenges could stop your innovation in its tracks.
- Plot potential problems on a grid to see which ones need your immediate attention.
- List the project's Threats (external) and Weaknesses (internal), for every Weakness, identify a Resilience Action(solution).
- Conduct a safety check to make sure your innovation does not accidentally hurt the community or exclude the very people you want to help.
- Invite the team to retrospectively analyse a hypothetical failure, identify potential vulnerabilities that could lead to such an outcome, and propose appropriate preventative measures.

Toolkit

ITC SheTrades Initiative

This is a highly structured, “dropdown” and “manual” toolkit designed for innovators to move from identifying risks to allocating responsibilities. It uses the 5x5 Risk Matrix as a key tool which assesses risks based on Likelihood (Rare to Almost Certain) and Impact (Minor to Severe). It includes a Risk Taxonomy to help youth categorise risks (e.g., Financial, Operational, or Legal) and a section for selecting Mitigation Measures.

Case study

The Mars Pathfinder Project Case Study (PMI)

During the 1990s, NASA encountered a significant challenge familiar to most contemporary innovators: accomplishing greater outcomes with limited resources. They adopted a mantra called ‘Faster, Better, Cheaper.’ By using an initiative-taking Risk Management Play, they successfully landed the Sojourner rover on Mars for a fraction of the cost of previous missions.

They did not ignore risks; they identified which ones were ‘worth taking’ to allow for experimental technology. This approach proved that with the right risk assessment, you don't have to choose between safety and innovation—you can have both.”

7.7. CULTIVATE SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

Youth innovations represent one of the most powerful forces shaping sustainable development and social transformation in the twenty-first century. They embody creativity, resilience, and a deep sense of responsibility toward communities and the planet. The sustainability of youth innovations lies not only in their ability to generate immediate solutions but also in their capacity to endure, adapt, and scale across diverse contexts.

With access to resources, guidance from mentors, and supportive policies, young innovators are able to transform their ideas into sustainable solutions that tackle urgent issues like climate change, joblessness, and inequality. Sustainability in this context means embedding youth-led initiatives into institutional frameworks, ensuring that they are not dependent on short-term funding cycles or isolated projects, but rather integrated into national and continental development agendas. It also requires building resilient infrastructure, fostering inclusive access, and cultivating partnerships that bridge governments, civil society, and the private sector.

The impact of youth innovations extends far beyond the immediate communities they serve. At the local level, they empower marginalised groups, create employment opportunities, and inspire civic engagement. At the continental and

global levels, they contribute to policy advocacy, technological advancement, and cross-border collaboration. Youth-led enterprises often introduce fresh perspectives on sustainability, prioritising eco-friendly practices, digital inclusion, and equity. Their innovations challenge traditional systems by offering agile, community-driven solutions that are responsive to emerging needs.

Moreover, the ripple effects of youth innovations are profound: they inspire peers, shift cultural attitudes toward entrepreneurship and problem-solving, and strengthen trust in youth as agents of change. When scaled, these innovations influence policy, reshape funding ecosystems, and contribute to achieving global goals such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The sustainability and impact of youth innovations are inseparable. Sustainable structures ensure that youth innovations endure, while impactful outcomes validate their relevance and necessity. Together, they form a cycle of empowerment where young people not only address today's challenges but also lay the foundation for future generations to thrive. In this way, youth innovations become more than projects or enterprises; they evolve into movements that redefine development, equity, and resilience across societies.

Questions

- How can youth-led innovations be embedded into national and continental development agendas, so they are not dependent on short-term projects but part of long-term systems?
- What mechanisms can ensure that funding for youth innovations is sustainable, flexible, and accessible, while avoiding bureaucratic barriers that discourage participation?
- How can organisations formally embed mentorship and the sharing of knowledge between generations to ensure that youth-driven innovation ecosystems remain sustainable and adaptable over time?
- How can infrastructure — both physical and digital — be designed to remain eco-friendly, inclusive, and adaptable to the evolving needs of young innovators?
- What strategies can ensure equitable access to resources, particularly for marginalised youth, so that innovation ecosystems are diverse and representative?
- What are some ways to organise partnerships among government, civil society, academia, and private companies so that they can jointly support and maintain youth-driven innovations?
- What accountability and monitoring systems can be established to track the long-term impact of youth innovations and ensure transparency in resource distribution?
- What approaches can ensure that young people's innovations grow in a way that maximises community benefits, while also supporting sustainability and promoting inclusivity?
- In what ways can youth-led enterprises contribute to global agendas such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063, while remaining locally relevant?
- What strategies can help transform cultural perceptions of youth entrepreneurship and innovation so that young people are viewed as lasting drivers of change instead of short-term recipients?

Pathways to elevate

Embed Youth Innovation in Policy Frameworks

- Align programmes with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), AU Agenda 2063, and EU Innovation Agenda to ensure relevance and accountability.
- Advocate for governments to integrate youth innovation into national development plans, securing long-term funding and institutional support.
- Promote youth representation in policy-making committees and innovation councils.
- Ensure monitoring and reporting mechanisms track youth-led innovation contributions to national priorities.
- Encourage partnerships between youth-led initiatives and government agencies to co-design programmes.
- Use evidence from pilots and experiments to inform policy recommendations.
- Advocate for inclusion of youth innovation metrics in national development indicators.
- Support regional collaboration to share best practices in youth innovation policies.
- Build awareness campaigns targeting policymakers on the value of youth-led innovation for social and economic development.

Toolkit

[Evaluate National Youth Policy \(UN Programme on Youth / UN\)](#)

Provides youth organisations and stakeholders with a structured approach to assess existing youth policies, identify gaps related to youth needs and innovation, and advocate for improvements. It is particularly useful for reviewing and influencing policy frameworks to embed youth innovation effectively.

Case study

[Kenya National Innovation Agency \(KeNIA\)](#)

Kenya National Innovation Agency (KeNIA) strengthens interrelationships between actors so as to promote innovation and enterprise development out of research and ideas.

From supporting the identification, recording and protection of innovative ideas to coordinating the establishment and implementation of appropriate policies, standards, processes, infrastructure, and partnerships to nurture the innovative ideas. The agency collaborates with partners to guarantee proper prioritisation, support relevant capacity building, acknowledge innovation, and publish related achievements.

Strengthen Access to Resources

- Establish youth innovation funds that are flexible, accessible, and minimize bureaucratic hurdles.
- Map funding ecosystems to connect innovators with accessible grants and investors.
- Promote community mapping to pinpoint, organise, and effectively utilise existing resources in the ecosystem.
- Encourage impact investors and corporate social responsibility programmes to prioritise youth-led projects.
- Provide in-kind support such as workspace, equipment, and mentorship alongside funding.
- Create micro-grant programmes to allow youth to assess and prototype ideas quickly.
- Facilitate access to incubators, accelerators, and innovation hubs for scaling projects.
- Promote partnerships with banks or fintech platforms to simplify youth access to capital.
- Encourage peer-to-peer resource sharing and community fundraising initiatives.
- Provide comprehensive training in proposal writing, pitching strategies, and monetary management to support youth innovators.
- Track and publicise successful funding stories to inspire confidence and attract more support.

Toolkit

Resource Mobilisation Toolkit for Girls, Young Women, and Trans Youth (Save the Children)

A practical guide designed to help small-scale startups and youth-led social ventures access funding and resources. The toolkit provides clear strategies for securing grants, mobilising support, and building financial sustainability — even for groups with limited prior experience. It is particularly useful for ensuring inclusive access to resources for underrepresented youth innovators.

Case study

UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme is a cornerstone initiative designed to shift young people from being mere beneficiaries of development to being the architects of it. The “Youth as Researchers” (YAR) initiative helps youth-led projects overcome the common lack of funding and mentorship needed to grow their ideas.

Inclusive Ecosystems

- Ensure participation of marginalised groups (girls, rural youth, differently abled innovators).
- Simplify processes for funding and recognition to reduce barriers for underrepresented innovators.
- Promote cross-continental collaboration to harmonise intellectual property rights and enable scaling across borders.
- Implement mentorship programmes specifically targeting underrepresented youth.
- Provide accessibility tools and adaptive technologies in innovation hubs.
- Encourage diverse team formation to foster multiple perspectives in problem-solving.
- Offer scholarships or fee waivers for training, workshops, or incubator programmes.
- Establish monitoring mechanisms to track inclusion and representation metrics.
- Promote storytelling and visibility of marginalised youth innovators to inspire others.
- Facilitate partnerships with local community organisations to reach underserved youth.

Toolkit

[South African Cities Network \(SACN\) Youth Engagement Toolkit](#)

A practical guide designed to help cities embed youth participation in urban governance and development planning. The toolkit provides methods to engage young people in decision-making, policy design, and civic innovation, making it especially useful for linking youth-led innovation initiatives with local government planning, urban development, and policy processes.

Case study

Wyss Academy [Changemakers Programme](#) is a transformative six-month initiative designed to empower young leaders (ages 18–35) to pioneer sustainable solutions at the intersection of nature and human well-being. It equips youth in Kenya, Madagascar, and Peru with networks and tools to drive community change. Direct mentorship and a global platform enable scalable, climate-friendly business models and community projects that restore ecosystems and support resilient communities.

Monitoring & Impact Measurement

- Develop impact assessment frameworks to track social, environmental, and economic outcomes.
- Use data-driven evaluation to refine programmes and demonstrate value to funders and policymakers.
- Set clear, measurable indicators for short-term outputs and long-term outcomes.
- Incorporate youth-led data collection and participatory evaluation methods.
- Use dashboards or visualisation tools to monitor progress in real time.
- Conduct regular feedback sessions to assess programme effectiveness and lessons learned.
- Benchmark against national or global standards (e.g., SDGsbal youth innovation).
- Share impact stories and case studies to communicate value and attract support.
- Evaluate both quantitative metrics (projects completed, participants reached) and qualitative outcomes (skills gained, empowerment, collaboration).

Toolkit

M&E System Design Framework

Provides a structured approach to design monitoring and evaluation systems that align with programme goals. It tracks the progression from inputs → outputs → outcomes → long-term impact, ensuring that every stage of a youth innovation programme is measurable, accountable, and evidence based.

Case study

Participatory M&E at SOS Children's Village, Cape Town

A study titled "An assessment of participatory monitoring and evaluation in NGOs" examines how SOS Children's Village implemented a participatory M&E framework. The approach actively involves stakeholders — including youth beneficiaries — in monitoring and evaluation processes. This ensures that programme outcomes are transparent, accountable, and reflective of the needs and perspectives of those directly impacted. The case highlights how participatory M&E can strengthen programme quality, empower youth, and create a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

8.

METHODOLOGY: PLAYBOOK CO-CREATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

The Playbook embodies a set of guidelines in its design: youth-led, practical, and inclusive. This Playbook was not only written for youth but with youth, as an equal partner, not just beneficiaries. The core research and drafting team included young entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovation practitioners from across Africa and Europe. The process prioritised voices from marginalised and underrepresented groups, including rural youth, young women, persons with disabilities, and refugees. Regional diversity was intentionally pursued to ensure that the Playbook reflects Africa and Europe's full innovation landscape from urban digital hubs to rural agribusiness while fostering environmental sustainability.

The Playbook was developed through a co-creation process with a steering group composed of representatives from The Youth Cafe. It had reviewers from 7 countries (Kenya, Nigeria, Belgium, Germany, Malawi, The Netherlands and Central African Republic) representing organizations such as Technopolis Group, European Business & Innovation Centre Network, Local Governments for Sustainability, Institute for Qualifying Innovations Research and Consulting. Acting as advisory organizations young entrepreneurs from MMUST Innovation Academy, Makers Valley Collective, Silas Innovation Hub, Youth Entrepreneurship Skills Development Center, Luj Stocks and Hatchery, Finance Pilot, Innovation Hub for Inclusiveness, Empowerment and Social Development also supported the development of this playbook.

To ensure the Playbook answers to contextual challenges, the steering group members organised a structured six-day virtual validation workshop series running from 6th to 13th February 2026. It was carried out by The Youth Cafe aimed at refining its relevance, clarity, and practical application. The workshops brought together youth leaders, entrepreneurs, software engineers, and development practitioners from over 11 countries drawing 154 interested candidates.

A total of 40 participants were selected and 36 from 14 African and European countries participated in the workshop series representing various organisations including: INNOVA srl (Italy), Awawo Africa (Malawi), Everyone is Creative (Uganda), Senga Consultoria Servicos (Mozambique), Biosphere foundation Uganda, Youth Advocacy Africa (Kenya), Ministry of Internal Security and National Administration (Kenya), Rural Women Action on Street Health (Kenya), Africa Arena (South Africa), Foreign Grants and More (Nigeria), AkiraChix (Ethiopia), Solarise Foundation (Kenya), Kosala PME Africa (Cameroon), Kenyatta University (Kenya), Niko Informed (Kenya), EBN, Green Africa Youth Organisation (Ghana), Technopolis Group, NuruFi (France), UNDP (Kenya), Santuri East Africa (Kenya), Dala Connect (Kenya), Hiigsi Environmental Alliance (Somalia), Black Mango Limited (Ghana), Pioneer University (Kenya), Zetech HUB (Cameroon) and BioGold Enterprise (Ghana).

The Youth Innovation Playbook Validation Workshop Series was designed to review, test and refine the Youth Innovation Playbook before its public launch. The workshops engaged youth leaders, entrepreneurs, policy actors, innovation ecosystem builders, researchers, civil society representatives, and institutional stakeholders across Africa and Europe.

Across the six sessions, participants tested the Playbook's practical application, reviewed its structure and tools, applied it to real-life challenges, and provided structured feedback for refinement. The validation process demonstrated that the Playbook is practical, adaptable, youth-centred, action-oriented, and relevant across diverse socio-economic and institutional contexts.

The six-day series used presentations, thematic discussions, regional reflections, breakout exercises, real-world problem application, and structured feedback collection. Each session progres-

sively assessed conceptual clarity, tool relevance, adaptability, and refinement needs.

Attention was given to issues surrounding digital skills development, youth employment, inclusion of women in technology, and innovation ecosystems. The validation process was participatory and interactive, ensuring that feedback was grounded in lived experience and practical realities rather than theory alone.

There is no magic solution or silver bullet in innovation. The Playbook doesn't provide ready-made answers to your challenges but rather starting points and options for improving your innovation

capacity. The Playbook further utilised two surveys to collect over 40 case studies and toolkits as well as gather input from over 100 young entrepreneurs. For this to work, young people have to engage critically with the ideas put forward in the Playbook and adapt them to their own daily context.

ONWARD, LET'S CONTINUE SHAPING THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER!

This Playbook is the result of a dynamic co-creation process shaped by insights from young people and experts worldwide. As we look ahead, we invite you to be part of this collective journey, working together to strengthen and reimagine youth led innovation.



APPLY THE PLAYBOOK WHERE IT MATTERS MOST TO YOU

Just like any real playbook, the Youth Innovation Playbook is meant to be actively used. Created for young innovators, educators, and youth organisations, it offers concrete steps to tackle real-world challenges. We encourage you to use the included templates and tools in collaborative workshops—bringing your peers together to co-create, experiment, and lead change. Explore resources such as the [Facilitation Guide](#) and interactive boards to make innovation sessions dynamic and impactful



WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK

This Youth Innovation Playbook is a living experiment, meant to grow and evolve through your experiences on the ground. We welcome your ideas, questions, and reflections, as they are vital to our collective learning and continuous improvement. Share your journey with us [through the feedback form](#), and help shape the future of youth innovation.



TRANSLATE AND AMPLIFY THE PLAYBOOK'S REACH

Help us make the Youth Innovation Playbook accessible to even more young changemakers by translating it into your language! What we are seeking are translations in French, Czech, Greek, Latvian, Spanish, Portuguese, Kiswahili, and Brazilian Portuguese. We look forward to hearing how you plan to bring the Playbook to life in your own language and community.

9.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A wide range of people worked together openly to create this Playbook, sharing their ideas, perspectives, and recommendations throughout the process. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the members of the Steering Group whose dedication shaped both the design and content of this Playbook. Their contributions reflect a truly global effort, with voices from Kenya, Nigeria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Ethiopia, France, Slovenia, Uganda, Mozambique, Algeria, Somalia, Malawi, and Central African Republic. Advisors from Rwanda, Germany, Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, and South Africa provided valuable guidance throughout the process.

We thank all participants who contributed their time, insights, and lived experiences to the validation of the Youth Innovation Playbook. Your active engagement throughout the workshop series ensured that this Playbook reflects real youth challenges and practical, action-oriented solutions. Your feedback strengthened clarity, inclusivity, and relevance while refining every aspect of the Playbook.

The Youth Café headed the creation of this Playbook as part of the AEIP Programme, working together with partners and experts in innovation, design, and communications for coordination and support. The process benefited from the collective input of analysts, facilitators, and advisors who ensured that the Playbook is practical, inclusive, and ready to empower young changemakers.

10.

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

The Youth Innovation Playbook is part of a broader effort to strengthen innovation capacity across Africa and Europe. It builds on lessons from global cooperation in public sector innovation, while centring the needs and aspirations of young people. By drawing on expertise in areas such as anticipatory innovation governance, systemic capacity building, behavioural insights, and cross-border collaboration, the Playbook provides tools and frameworks that youth can apply directly in their communities.

This document is shared under a Creative Commons Attribution–ShareAlike 3.0 IGO license (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO), ensuring that it remains open, adaptable, and accessible to all. Through this spirit of collaboration, the Playbook embodies the vision of youth-led innovation as a driver of sustainable change.



11.

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