



Youth who have benefited from Titukulane's vocational skills training program, trained in Tailoring and Fashion Design, in Mangochi. Photo: ©Titukulane RFSA 2021/Fundi Kayamba-Phiri

Bridging Perspectives: Key Insights from a Gender & Youth Integration Learning Event

Background

In light of the need to learn from and collaborate with other USAID implementing partners on effectively addressing the issues that affect women and youth in their programming, **Titukulane** organized a focused event in September 2022. Prioritizing the engagement of women and youth in all development activities has immense importance and needs more emphasis. This is particularly true for projects that aim to create lasting impact and positive change in communities. Titukulane, through USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, organized a collaborative meeting with USAID Implementing Partners in Malawi. Through this effort, the implementing partners identified potential areas for integration and collaboration that can further enhance the impact of development programs.

Background of the USAID Implementing Partners

Strengthening Higher Education Access In Malawi Activity (SHEAMA) is a 4 year activity (2018 – 2022) implemented by Arizona State University in collaboration with the five public universities. It aims at increasing access to higher education and an employable workforce (including self-employment).

The **Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project** (2019 – 2024) is under the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe (DREAMS) partnership funded by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and is implemented by FHI360 in partnership with MACRO. The program targets sexually exploited adolescent girls between the ages of 15-17 and young female sex workers (FSW) between the ages of 18-24.

The **Local Endeavours for HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment (LEAP)** is an activity aims to reduce HIV infections and transmission among key populations.

Ana Patsogolo (APA) is another DREAMS intervention. The aim of the intervention is to prevent new HIV infections and reduce vulnerability among Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in 8 districts in southern Malawi (2020 – 2025).

Youth Business Acceleration & Investment Facility (YBAIF) is 3 – 5yr activity implemented by the Alliance of Bioversity International and International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) which began in 2021. It supports businesses with incubation and acceleration services and a finance facility of \$3.5 million. Targeting USAID's Resilience Focus Zones, the activity focusses on 50% youth entrepreneurship and prioritization of 50% female owned enterprises.



The cross-learning event aimed to achieve two primary objectives:

- to foster cross-learning among the USAID projects on the various thematic areas they focus on for gender and youth integration.
- to facilitate discussions and learning of specific approaches implemented by the USAID projects to ensure effective integration of gender and youth perspectives in their projects.

Besides representatives of the implementing partners, Activity Managers from USAID Mission in Malawi also participated and contributed to the discussions.

Key approaches

Titukulane project uses the **Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach**, a participatory methodology involving communities in designing, implementing, and monitoring development interventions. The SAA approach recognizes the importance of involving everyone, including women and youth, in decision-making processes and ensuring that their needs and concerns are addressed. The project engages with communities through SAA to understand their social dynamics, power relations, and cultural and gender norms that affect women and youth. This approach helps the project to design interventions that are responsive to the needs of women and youth and promote their participation and inclusion in project activities.

The Titukulane project trains youth, including women, in **Participatory Theatre for Development (TFD)** as a tool to foster civic dialogue and disseminate important messages to the community for behavior change through adopting promoted practices. TFD is a popular educational methodology that uses theatre to foster social and behavioral change. Through TFD, youth are empowered to address issues such as health and nutrition, WASH, disaster risk reduction, gender based violence and marketing, which are critical to the project's overall success. TFD is an engaging and interactive approach that allows youth to express themselves creatively while conveying important messages to the community.

Titukulane also uses the **Positive Youth Development framework** as an approach to youth development that emphasizes fostering young people's positive qualities and strengths to support their growth and development into successful, healthy, and contributing members of society.

The PYD framework recognizes that youth have inherent strengths and capabilities that can be developed and nurtured through positive relationships, experiences, and opportunities. Titukulane provides youth vocational skills

and entrepreneurship training to address the challenge of unemployment and illiteracy. Through this training, youth are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to start and manage small businesses, thereby improving their livelihoods and contributing to the local economy.

The SHEAMA project uses a variety of approaches to integrate gender and youth in its programming. One key strategy is targeting adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), who often face barriers to higher education due to cultural norms and gender stereotypes. The project also focuses on persons with disabilities and rural vulnerable groups of students who would otherwise have no access to higher education.

To improve access for these groups, SHEAMA works with universities to establish **district satellite Open, distance and e-learning (ODEL) centers** in remote areas. This approach enables students to access education from anywhere, even if they live far away from traditional universities. The project also provides scholarships and improved student services to support vulnerable students in accessing higher education, both face-to-face and through ODeL.

The SHEAMA project also addresses gender and youth issues by offering targeted **training and mentorship programs**. For example, the project provides leadership and entrepreneurship training for AGYW, which can help to build their confidence and skills in the workforce. The project also offers mentorship programs for students with disabilities, providing them with role models and support networks to help them succeed in higher education.

The EPIC & LEAP projects use a **Direct Participation model (PE)** to integrate gender and youth in their programming. This model involves actively engaging youth in planning, implementing, and evaluating project activities to ensure that their perspectives and needs are considered. Additionally, the project engages with gatekeepers at the community level, such as parents, community leaders, and teachers, to build their support for gender and youth integration. This helps to ensure that the project's interventions are well-aligned with community values and norms.

Further, EPIC & LEAP projects collaborate with stakeholders such as the police and DREAMS partners to promote safe spaces and protective environments for youth. The project also uses a multi-sectoral approach, working with partners in health, education, and other sectors, to address the complex and interrelated factors contributing to gender inequality and poor health outcomes for youth.

In addition to these strategies, the EPIC (DREAMS) project employs a range of innovative approaches, such as digital platforms and peer-to-peer support networks, to engage and empower youth. These approaches aim to promote greater agency and leadership among youth, thereby contributing to their long-term success and well-being.

Ana Pa Tsogolo (APA) Project uses the **Siyakha model**, a comprehensive approach used to reduce the risk of HIV infection and unintended pregnancy among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in sub-Saharan Africa. *Siyakha* is a Zulu word meaning "we are building."

The *Siyakha* model has three main components:

1. **Access to contraception:** The *Siyakha* model provides access to a range of contraceptive options to AGYW, including long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) and emergency contraception. The model also provides information on contraceptive use, side effects, and benefits.
2. **PrEP:** Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a medication taken daily by HIV-negative individuals to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV. The *Siyakha* model provides **PrEP education and information to AGYW** to help them make informed decisions about their health.
3. **Youth-friendly services:** The *Siyakha* model provides youth-friendly health services that are designed to meet the unique needs of AGYW. These services are delivered by trained healthcare providers who are sensitive to the cultural, social, and economic factors that affect AGYW's access to healthcare.

In addition to these three components, the *Siyakha* model also incorporates community engagement and empowerment strategies, including peer-led education and outreach, social support networks, and economic empowerment initiatives.

Lastly, **YBAIF** is a new activity and is using several gender integration strategies such as targeted calls for women through communications and engaging community female mentors to support female youth in pushing through social norms. It involves youth by utilizing the national youth council to engage youth clubs and it advocates the benefits of youth entrepreneurship and leverages other youth to share their success stories.

All of the projects prioritize community-based approaches that aim to involve women and youth in decision-making processes. Additionally, these projects incorporate community engagement and empowerment strategies, including skills training, to promote sustainable adoption of practices and growth. While the core themes of these projects include food security, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and access to education, their broader

aim is to promote community development through inclusive and participatory approaches.

Enhancing gender and youth integration

Gender and youth integration are crucial for sustainable and inclusive development, particularly in development programming, food security, sexual reproductive health and rights, and financial inclusion projects/initiatives.

Gender integration addresses the underlying causes of gender inequality, such as social norms and discriminatory policies. It ensures that women and men have equal access to resources and opportunities and that both genders' needs and perspectives are considered. Gender integration can positively impact a range of development issues, including health, education, and economic growth (UNDP, 2018). For example, research shows that integrating gender into agricultural programs can increase agricultural productivity and improve food security for women and their families (FAO, 2011).

The participation and engagement of youth is critical for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Youth integration can promote intergenerational equity, enhance program outcomes, and help build the skills and capacities of young people. It can also help address some of the challenges faced by young people, such as unemployment, marginalization, and social exclusion. Youth-led and youth-centered approaches have been found to be effective in a range of development issues, such as health, education, and economic empowerment (UNFPA, 2019).

Food security, sexual reproductive health and rights, and financial inclusion are all critical development issues that require gender and youth integration. Food security is particularly important because women and youth are often responsible for food production and preparation, but they may lack the resources and support they need to do so. Gender and youth integration can ensure that women and youth have access to the resources and support they need to produce and prepare nutritious food. Sexual reproductive health and rights are also essential for achieving gender equality and empowering women and youth. Gender and youth integration means addressing the unique challenges that women and youth face in accessing sexual reproductive health services and promoting gender equality. Financial inclusion is important for reducing poverty and promoting economic growth, and gender and youth integration are crucial for ensuring that everyone has access to financial services. It means designing products and services that meet the needs of women and youth, such as microfinance and mobile banking.

Event Outcomes

Potential areas of integration

During the workshop, USAID implementing partners discussed how they could integrate their activities (see Table 1) in the areas of gender and youth to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. Some key takeaways from the exercise include:

APA's interest to provide foundational skills training to students to integrate the education component into their programming; an approach that SHEAMA is using through the ODeL courses. APA were also interested to document the step-by-step process of vocational skills training for youth and link them to internships based on Titukulane's youth vocational skills training program. EPIC & LEAP will intensify

gender-based violence awareness, such as sex for grades in schools, and integrate approaches used by SHEAMA to promote gender equality and prevent GBV. EPIC & LEAP and Titukulane will integrate career guidance on access to higher education, as SHEAMA is doing. Titukulane will also integrate community sensitization on open and distance e-learning courses and potential scholarships for TVET graduates in the vocational skills training program.

By integrating their activities, the implementing partners can promote gender and youth integration, which is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. This will help ensure that young people have access to the resources and support they need to develop their skills, pursue their career goals, and achieve their full potential.

Table 1 Potential areas of integration identified by USAID Implementing Partners

	APA	EPIC & LEAP	SHEAMA	Titukulane	YBAIF
APA			Foundational skills training.	Document step by step process of vocational skills training for youth and link them to internships.	
EPIC & LEAP			Intensify GBV awareness e.g sex for grades in schools. Career guidance on access to higher education.		
SHEAMA		Access to DreamBuilder for TVET graduates for business management.		Community sensitization on ODeL courses and potential scholarship for TVET graduates. Career guidance on access to higher education.	
Titukulane		Financial literacy and entrepreneurship for youths Using existing structures e.g, youth clubs, Teen clubs, VCPCs, VNRMC, Watershed committees	Using of community radios to create awareness of the program and marketing of MEGs products.		Using existing structures eg youth clubs, Teen clubs, VCPCs, VNRMC, Watershed committees.
YBAIF					

Potential areas for collaboration

Several key areas of potential collaboration emerged between the programs (Table 2). Aside from capacity building through entrepreneurship and social network trainings, establishing a community of practice to share resources and expertise in co-located project is considered an important area for developing synergies.

Titukulane would like to work with Pakachere, who have extensive experience in Youth Social network

trainings and integration of activities for Social Behavior Change. SHEAMA and Titukulane would explore internship placement for both formal and informal TVET graduates to enhance benefits from Titukulane's vocational skills training program. APA, LEAP & EPIC, and Titukulane were all interested in collaborating with SHEAMA to provide their project participants with access to SHEAMA's DreamBuilder, an

online entrepreneurship training platform, to promote entrepreneurship and improve their income.

The partners all agreed to explore leveraging resources and expertise, especially in areas where partners share geographical locations. Titukulane conveyed interest in collaborating with the YBAIF project, which is yet to commence implementation, to provide opportunities for their youth beneficiaries to expand their businesses.

By collaborating and sharing resources, the implementing partners can promote gender and youth integration, which is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. These partnerships can help young people gain access to the resources and opportunities they need to develop their skills, pursue their career goals, and achieve their full potential.

Table 2 Potential areas for collaboration identified by USAID Implementing Partners

	APA	EPIC & LEAP	SHEAMA	Titukulane	YBAIF
APA			Access to DreamBuilder (entrepreneurship training platform) for AGYW		
EPIC & LEAP			Access to DreamBuilder (entrepreneurship training platform) for AGYW	Use VSLA methodology and financial education	
SHEAMA				Explore internship for both formal and informal and formal TVETS graduate	
Titukulane		Youth Social network trainings and integration (including the use of human resources for capacity building) on Social Behavior Change – Pakachere have extensive experience	Access to DreamBuilder (entrepreneurship training platform) for TVET graduates for business management.		Leveraging of resources/expertise especially in areas where partners share geographical locations
YBAIF					

Ensuring safe programming – minimizing (un)intended consequences

The implementing partners also discussed safe programming, as intentional and systematic measures to minimize potential unintended consequences of development programs and maximize positive outcomes for the beneficiaries. This involves a holistic approach that considers the targeted communities' social, economic, political, and cultural context. Safe programming aims to ensure that the program activities do not harm the beneficiaries or the environment and that they promote sustainable development. Safe programming was discussed taking into consideration the Malawi's socio-cultural context, where gender-based violence, child abuse, and exploitation are prevalent (Kachale, 2014). The following are

measures that the partners discussed to improve on safe programming:

Titukulane:

Include **M&E procedures in the program, including risk assessment:** This involves monitoring and evaluating program activities to ensure that they align with the objectives of the program and are not causing any harm to the beneficiaries or the environment.

Include **mentorship for TVET youth:** This will ensure that the youth are adequately supported to achieve their goals and avoid engaging in harmful behaviors.

Include **Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Exploitation, Abuse lessons in YSLAs:** This will equip young people with

skills and knowledge on how to identify and avoid sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse.

SHEAMA:

Project advisory board should provide **policy guidance and monitor project interventions**: This will ensure that the program activities align with the program's objectives and the targeted project participants' needs.

Some students may indulge in bad behavior because of the scholarship funds. To minimize unintended consequences they **conduct regular orientation before providing the scholarship**: This will prepare the beneficiaries for the responsibilities that come with the scholarship and help them avoid engaging in harmful behaviors. **Terminating scholarship on academic or social grounds**: This will ensure that the scholarship program only benefits those who are committed to achieving their academic goals and behaving responsibly.

EPIC & LEAP:

Review lessons learnt and adapt: This will ensure that the program activities are relevant and responsive to the beneficiaries' needs.

Resources allowing, employ **universal targeting** e.g. providing nutrition to both performers and non-performers in viral load suppression: This involves targeting not only the program beneficiaries but also those who are at risk of being left out, such as non-performers. This was cited as one possible way to mitigate instances of individuals intentionally contracting HIV to gain benefits from the project.

YBAIF:

Review language used in training materials that would exacerbate abuse to the voiceless like girls and women should be undertaken: This will ensure that the program activities are not perpetuating harmful social norms that lead to abuse and exploitation of girls and women.

Work closely with community structures and agencies that represent women and girls including men/boys: This will ensure that the program is responsive to the needs of the targeted beneficiaries and that there is increased participation and ownership.

Creation/strengthening of systems and structures that are inclusive and prepared to render support especially to survivors of abuse. For instance, creating a conducive learning environment for pregnant students in schools. This

will ensure that the program activities are adequately supported to overcome any challenges they face.

Convene stakeholders to review GBV cases, and pushing for action: This will ensure that there is increased accountability and that the program is responsive to the beneficiaries' needs.

In closing, one of USAID's Activity Managers, Mary Chisulo, mentioned that,

"such initiatives are crucial, and USAID would like to transform this into a community of practice that would allow partners to share their knowledge and experience on an annual basis".

Having a cross-learning event for partners implementing gender and youth integration activities is critical to maximizing the impact of USAID funding in Malawi. With funding from the same pool, it is essential to promote collaboration and knowledge sharing, ensuring that projects complement each other and are not duplicating efforts. This will show more value for money and increase the chances of successful and sustainable outcomes. Sharing best practices and lessons learned will help partners identify and address common challenges and increase the effectiveness of their programs.

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This learning brief was written by Fundi Kayamba-Phiri with contribution from IFPRI's **Suresh Babu** and **Nandita Srivastava**, and CARE's **Anthony Malunga** and **Sairana Ahsan**.

Recommended citation

Kayamba-Phiri, F. (2023). *Bridging Perspectives: Key Insights from a Gender & Youth Integration Learning Event. Learning Brief*. Produced by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Titukulane RFSA.

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Disclaimer

This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Titukulane and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.