

# GESI REVIEW OF YOUTH READY PROJECT MODEL

MARCH 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The Vision for Vulnerable Youth Initiative (VVYI) aims to increase the social agency, skill acquisition, and economic empowerment of 14-29-year-old female and male adolescents and youth, in and out of school living in vulnerable communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia. The project uses the Youth Ready (YR) curriculum, designed to equip youth with new knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to positive self-identity, basic literacy and reading, savings and financial education, health, and self-care, life skills, social-emotional intelligence, entrepreneurship, employability, citizenship, and resilience. Youth participating in YR go through two stages of the “Viability Journey.” In Stage 1, youth join a peer group in a safe space supported by adult mentors and a trained facilitator to guide them through theoretical training on building various skills. In Stage 2, youth create their livelihood pathway plan choosing education, entrepreneurship or employment, which they pursue with support from the same mentors and facilitators.

In 2022, a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) review was conducted to strengthen the curriculum and address youth gender-specific needs within the YR program. The GESI review created a gender-responsive and inclusive education, economic and protection systems for vulnerable adolescents and youth. This collaborative process was grounded in multifaceted components of transformation with the following definitions:

**Gender equality** is the state or condition that affords women and girls, men and boys, equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources.

**Social inclusion** seeks to address inequality and/or exclusion of vulnerable populations by improving terms of participation in society and enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for human rights.



Figure 1: World Vision GESI Domains

## OBJECTIVE

The process objective identified gender issues, inequalities and needs of youth participants and implementing staff to improve the YR curriculum content and implementation. Through primary data collection and desk review findings, the report drew recommendations to ensure the project can address the needs of the most vulnerable youth.

## METHODOLOGY

The review used both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to collect data from project coordinators, facilitators and youth participants in Bolivia and Colombia. Staff structured the GESI review of the YR process in two phases. The first phase was an extensive desk review of the four YR modules, whilst the second phase focused on reviewing the administration of content, processes of implementation and program delivery. Data collection involved interactions with facilitators, youth participants and program managers through interviews and focus group discussions. Both phases of the review process were critical in understanding the current gender and inclusion gaps within the YR project.

STUDY METHOD/ TOOLS	TARGETS	BOLIVIA		COLOMBIA			TOTAL
		FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	OTHER/ LGBTQ	
SURVEYS	YOUTH	194	81	120	38	4	437
	FACILITATORS	2	2	3	1		8
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS	YOUTH	1	1	1	1		4
	FACILITATORS	1	1	1	1		4
	COORDINATORS	1		1			2
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS <sup>1</sup>	YOUTH	1	1	1	1		4

**Table 1:** Study participants

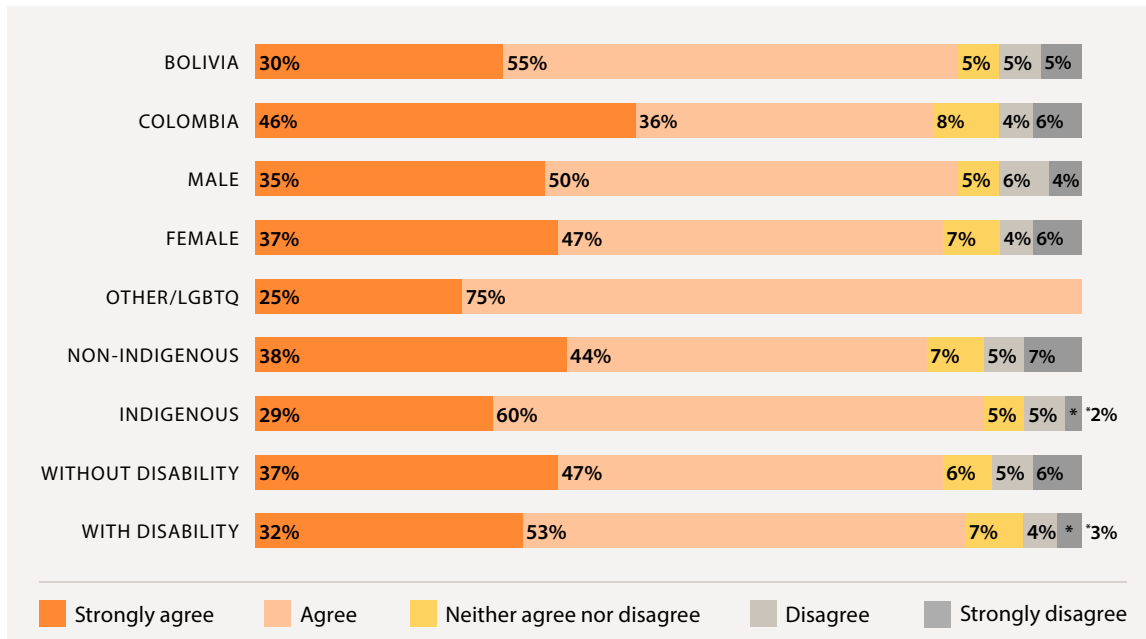
A total of 437 youth participants (314 F, 119 M, 4 Other (LGBTQ+)) responded to a quantitative survey, including 45% of total project participants. Ten key informant interviews (KII) and four focus group discussions were conducted to collect qualitative data from youth participants and project staff. The data collection team included diverse technical and subject matter experts such as Sector Technical Specialists (Gender, Education, MEAL), a project officer, a regional project manager and a MEAL advisor. The data collection tools and analysis were designed based on the five GESI domains of change necessary to result in greater gender equality and social inclusion. Those five domains are access, systems, participation, decision-making, and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

### KEY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH RESPONDENTS

- 72% of respondents were female, 27% male and 1% other (LGBTQ+).
- 73% of respondents were in school (50% female, 22% male 1% LGBTQ+) and 23% out of school.
- 16% of respondents reported having one or more disabilities<sup>3</sup> (13% female, 3% male).
- 97% of respondents were between the ages of 14–29 years old. Nearly 25% of respondents were indigenous, 35% mestizos, 10% Afro-Colombian and 28% others.
- 90% of respondents were single, 7% married or in a common law relationship and 1% divorced. About 15 % of respondents have a child (14% female, 1% male).
- 58% of respondents live in urban communities, 27% semi-urban and 11% rural.
- 79% of respondents have completed the first phase of the YR program.

## ACCESS

The aggregated survey result for the access showed that 84% of youth (83% female, 85% male, 100% other/LGBTQ) have agreed/strongly agreed that they have access to the project and other basic services including health and education. See *Figure 2* for disaggregated results.



**Figure 2:** Access results disaggregated by country, gender, ethnicity, and disability

The study revealed that the YR program is accessible to diverse groups of youth in Bolivia and Colombia, as attested by both the facilitators, youth and program coordinators. Targeted youth populations included the most vulnerable from single-parent, youth-headed or unstable households, and teen mothers. To ensure all vulnerable youth were included, facilitators used selection criteria and coordinated with critical community-based partners such as churches, community action boards, and community leaders. Although there are structures of identification put in place, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of facilitators to identify youth with complex disabilities such as mild cognitive-related challenges or populations who identify as LGBTQI.

## RECOMMENDATION

Include guidance notes on youth selection criteria and addressing their special needs, especially on gender equality and social inclusion.

Challenges and barriers to access for youth in the YR program included restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth in the study expressed that virtual adaptations drove up anxiety, impacting their ability to complete the program. While challenging, youth continued to participate and complete the program. In most cases, facilitators proved to be a critical resource in supporting those struggling and monitoring youth well-being to prevent dropout.

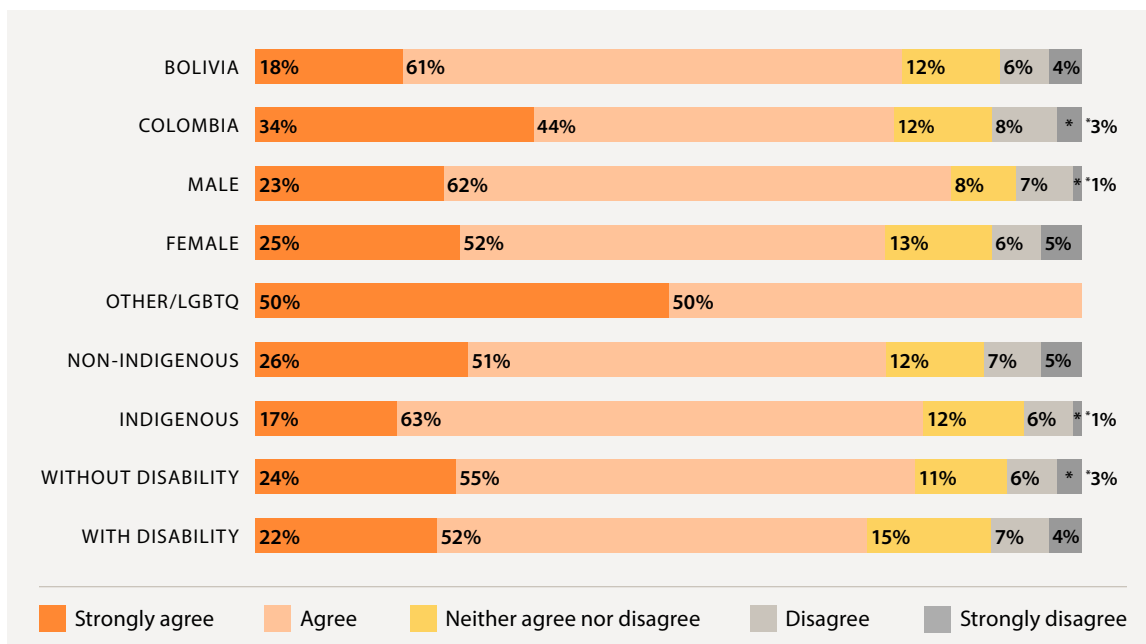
More importantly, introducing the virtual methodology was practical and helped increase access to the remaining sessions that were affected by the pandemic.

Other challenges related to access included the availability of adequate or fixed spaces and the scheduling of sessions, especially at the beginning of the program. In Colombia, this was a considerable challenge in areas needing constant security monitoring to protect youth, e.g., neighbourhoods in Cali with invisible borders that affect the safety of the inhabitants. Mitigation measures included choosing equidistant places from participant homes. To ensure teen mothers' attendance, the project adjusted the schedules to accommodate these participants. Girls also attributed this success to supportive networks within the i) program, i.e., other youth helping with babysitting or YR creating spaces to bring their children and ii) individual households i.e., parents, siblings or relatives managing childcare whilst they attended YR classes.

Other wraparound incentives to support and motivate youth access to the program have been provided across the two countries, including food packs, opportunities for youth to work in the communities, and COVID-19 protective equipment for in-person sessions. The program is also instrumental in creating awareness and knowledge on protection issues, which youth refer to as life-changing knowledge. It has helped both the youth participating in the program and their networks.

## SYSTEMS

The aggregated survey results showed that 78% of youth (77% female, 83% male and 50% other/LGBTQ) strongly agree or agree that the project helped them to improve their social skills and they feel that they receive support from their community. See Figure 3 for disaggregated results.



**Figure 3:** System results disaggregated by country, gender, ethnicity, and disability

Ensuring an availability of equal and inclusive systems promoting equity among diverse youth populations is a priority within YR. The study highlights that promotion of women's equal participation, gender quality and inclusion are covered within the training curriculum for youth.

The critical content includes lessons about labor laws, human rights, non-discriminatory policies protecting youth and women, protection against exploitation, reporting abuse and violence, violence against women, discrimination, stigma, harmful gender norms, etc.

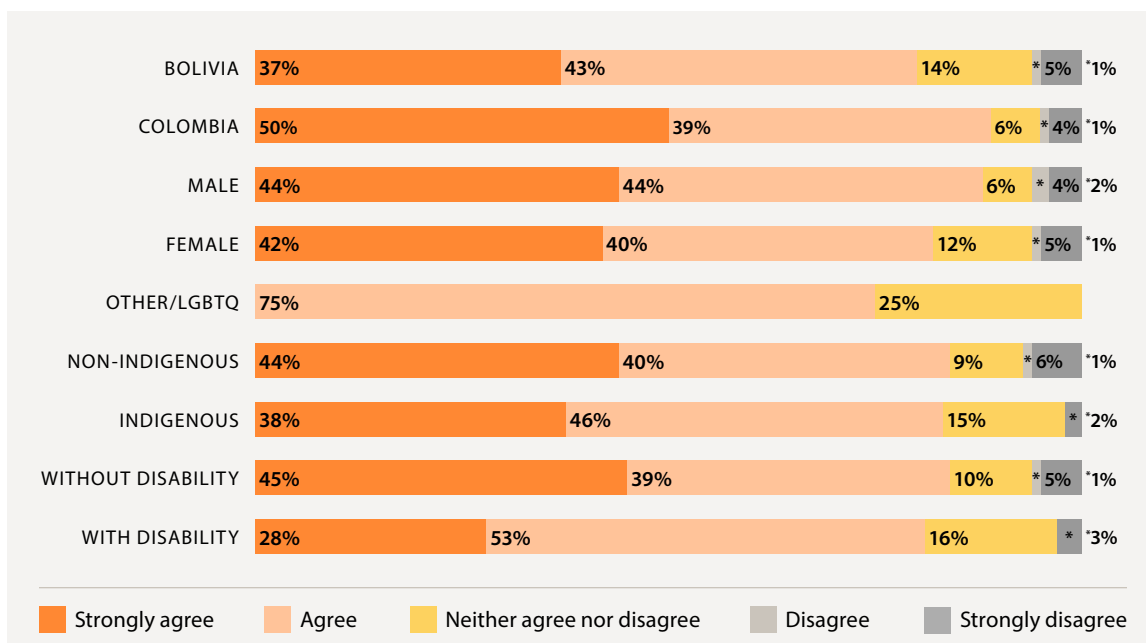
Youth attested that through these sessions, they have a better understanding of some of the barriers that women and girls face in pursuing their goals such as socio-cultural norms, gender roles and expectations, discriminations, and workplace inequalities. Young women also noted they are more equipped to take action in advocating for their rights in employment or education, feel empowered to choose their career pathways without doubt and value themselves and their different talents.

Within the training sessions, facilitators recognised a positive change in male youth behaviour and perspectives towards their female counterparts. They shared that women’s ideas were respected even if more men were in the group. They also share that women and men equally performed roles and tasks without discrimination. Furthermore, youth have changed attitudes towards their counterparts with disabilities and have become more patient, less afraid, and more involved in activities than during the earlier stages of the program. Additionally, beyond the curriculum, the program also collaborated with authorities at national and local municipal levels for service provision and referrals.

The program still shows more need in serving populations with diverse sexual identification. Further capacity strengthening is needed to create an equitable system that caters to all the diversity with youth, including young women and those with diverse identities.

## PARTICIPATION

The aggregated survey results showed that 84% of youth (82% female, 89% male, 75% other/LGBTQ) agreed/strongly agreed that the YR program enables youth to participate in societal affairs and systems of power that influence and determine their development through active participation in community and economic development activities. See *Figure 4* for disaggregated results per country, gender, ethnicity and disability.



**Figure 4:** Participation results disaggregated by country, gender, ethnicity, and disability

Participation in the review assessed youth participation and parental engagement with the YR program. For parents and guardians, qualitative results showed both male and female youth in Bolivia and Colombia had the support of their parents. Facilitators conducted home visits, socialization meetings, informative workshops related to gender-based violence sessions and graduation events to encourage parents' participation and support for their children. Interviewed coordinators also shared communication plans set in place for engaging with parents/caregivers and community members to meet the needs of different groups of youth, including underaged youth and young parents. A small number of parents do not participate due to their work schedules, competing tasks or unwillingness.

The review highlighted several barriers to youth participation in the program. Youth in school reported difficulty in balancing both their school and program workloads. Female youth in particular attributed their inability to complete the program due to extreme machismo attitudes (aggressive masculine pride) in their homes discouraging their participation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and limited access to technology devices and the internet also played a key deterrent in youth participation. Several measures were put in place to address these challenges by both facilitators and youth. Bolivian youth reported that they created small groups to support one another through sharing devices to access online content or attended sessions virtually during the pandemic. In addition, facilitators conducted home visits which proved to be instrumental in garnering support from parents and youth partners.

Partnerships with critical stakeholders was also an important strategy within the YR program. For instance, churches and financial institutions provided financial support or guidance on gender biases or practices to further ensure full participation and completion of the program. Partnerships were also extended to schools with program providing training for teachers to ensure better support for in-school youth.

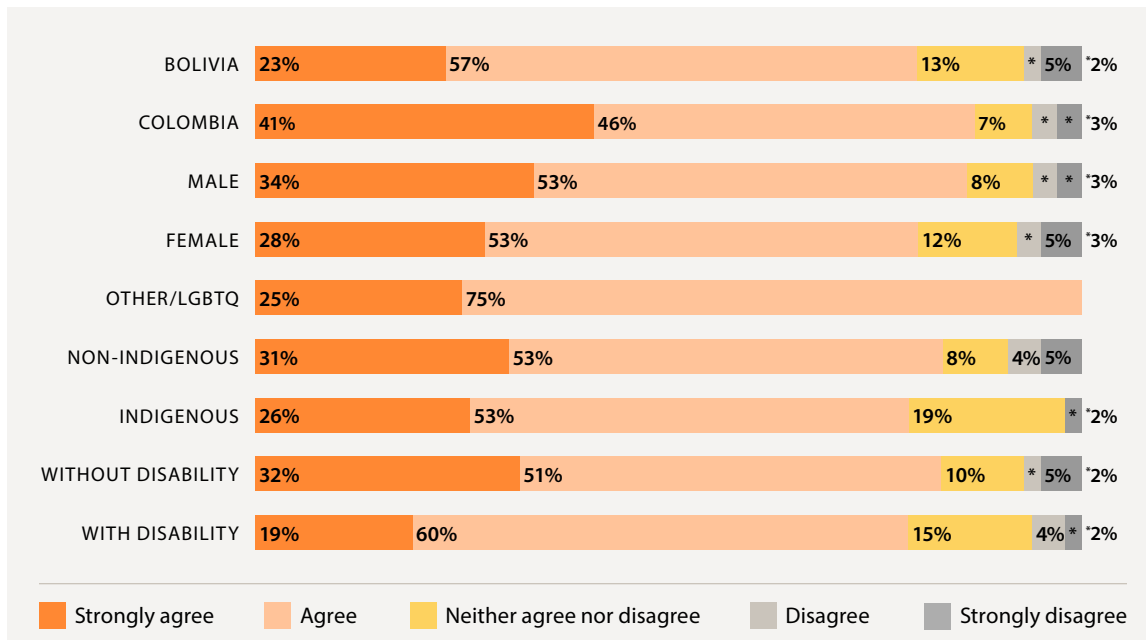
## RECOMMENDATION

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- Strengthen the support provided to youth with children to facilitate their full participation in YR through facilitating child-friendly spaces in YR training sites.
- Include a guidance note to engage parents and partners especially for the engagement of men. Create opportunities for the parents/partners of youth participants across YR countries to ensure that they have a full understanding of what it takes/requires for their children/wives/partners to finish the YR program and implement their life plan.
- Include guidance notes on stakeholder engagement. Reinforce engagement with private companies and other key partners and stakeholders to strengthen support for YR participants to implement their life plans in education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

## DECISION MAKING

Aggregated results show that 83% of youth (81% female, 87% male, and 100% other/LGBTQ) strongly agree/agree that YR helped to improve their ability to make important life decisions. Males and LGBTQ youth tend to be more confident in their decision-making skills compared to females (statistically significant difference ( $p=0.03$ )). See Figure 5 for disaggregated results per country, gender, ethnicity and disability.



**Figure 5:** Decision Making results disaggregated by country, gender, ethnicity, and disability

The sessions within YR have also served a critical role in enabling the youth to feel comfortable in decision-making processes. The ready for citizenship module equips youth to make independent, collaborative and consultative decisions depending on the type of decisions at hand.

Independently, youth are empowered to make decisions on their various career and education pathways. For instance, female youth attested that the program equipped them to make decisions regarding what they wanted to learn and gave them the confidence to develop and implement their life plans based on their newfound learning, including their rights and labour policies that affect them.

Through establishing community projects, youth have been encouraged to work together to identify community problems, engage community leaders, and come up with collective solutions. Additionally, the program has strengthened consultative decision-making processes. Youth showed improved decision-making skills by communicating with others, including YR facilitators, parents/caregivers, and those with experience to help weigh-in. Some examples included what and where to study, which universities/colleges to visit, where to get information about various courses and finding available resources for low-income or disadvantaged ethnic groups. The program also works with parents to ensure that the family is a space where children can speak openly with their parents. According to the youth in the study, parents were open to listening to their concerns (something that seemed impossible before the YR intervention). This support further increased their confidence to speak about sensitive issues and allowed genuine dialogue between parents and their children.

However, the study also noted external factors that may affect some youth in gaining capabilities in decision-making. Such factors included age, gender, cultural dynamics and family hierarchies. For instance, older youth have more confidence and maturity in decision-making as they have more life experience and tend to participate and make decisions that impact their community. On the other hand, younger youth participants still living with their parents/caregivers seek out and rely on their advice when making decisions. Often, their caregivers/parents decide what they study and where they can or can't go.

### RECOMMENDATION

Include activities that improve decision-making skills and confidence for women, girls and younger youth and adolescents (e.g., more social projects, peer groups, networks).

### WELL-BEING

To assess how the YR program facilitates the well-being of youth participants, youth were asked about how the project helped them to: feel better about themselves, develop competence for a better future, feel safe about their participation, and have positive/optimistic attitudes about their future. The aggregated survey results for this domain showed that most of youth participants (87% of youth agreed or strongly agreed with 86% female, 90% male, and 75% other) felt that the program facilitates their well-being. All questions under this domain were highly rated (over 85%) except the question on safety for their participation (74%). See Figure 6 for disaggregated results per country, gender, ethnicity and disability.

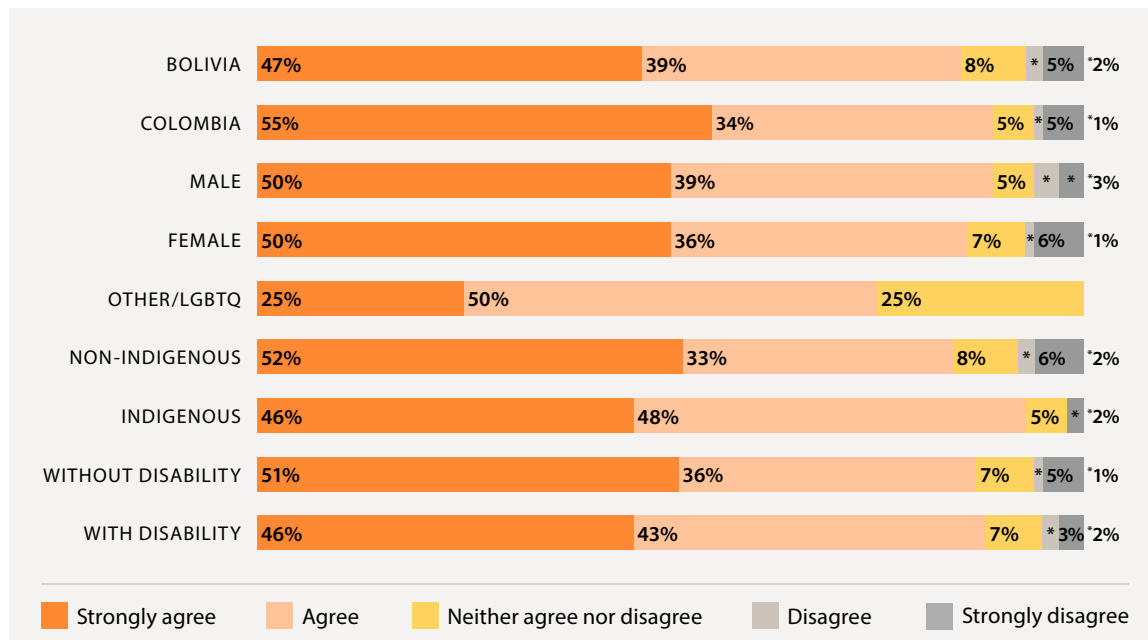


Figure 6: Well-being results disaggregated by country, gender, ethnicity, and disability



The qualitative results provided more insight into the safety concerns of respondents. Both female and male youth respondents from Bolivia and Colombia felt secure during their participation as the program facilitated a safe space for them to share their lives and challenge and support one another. Bolivian female youth shared that they initially felt anxious because of the presence of participants from other areas and did not like to socialize. However, facilitators created an atmosphere that encouraged everyone's equal participation and made them feel welcome. Guardians signed parental consent forms for adolescents under 18, and facilitators established safeguarding measures. As the sessions facilitated opportunities to build trust amongst the group, they felt closer to their classmates over time, developing friendships and turning the sessions into an enjoyable experience for youth. Bolivian male youth indicated no moments they felt threatened as they came from the same neighbourhoods. Instead, they had always respected each other as family or partners.

Safety on the way to the training centres was a key concern for youth. Bolivian youth said that the location of YR workshops held at WV offices was not far from their homes and was within their neighbourhood. In contrast, Colombian youth reported they met in different places until they could find a place that worked for all of them. While most youth participants reported their safety concerns on the way to the training/routes, Bolivian male participants indicated that this was not their concern. Colombian male participants and Bolivian female participants also emphasized because of the safety issue related to invisible borders marked by gangs, they felt insecure crossing these street borders/avenues exposing them to various risks. Youth feeling unsafe were accompanied by family members or friends from the group.

## RECOMMENDATION

Include guidance notes on essential safety and safeguarding policy elements to ensure everyone's protection and security. Keep visual safety instructions in the meeting place so that everyone knows what to do in the event of an incident.

Many Bolivian female FGD participants interpreted "safety" regarding COVID-19 protection and they reported that they felt safe because some sessions were held virtually to minimize COVID-19 transmission; health protocols were followed during in-person meetings; bio-safety supplies were provided; and psychosocial support and other supplies like food were also given to youth and families who contracted the virus.

The YR program has been very critical in addressing the diverse learning needs of the youth, such as developing their competence in soft skills (confidence, critical thinking, public speaking, financial literacy, emotional intelligence), assisting with places to work, and putting in place structures to set up or expand a business. Youth participants were amazed by the content and extremely valued the knowledge and skills they developed. They said their expectations were strongly satisfied, and they were thankful for the training as they could discover their dreams and continuously grow to reach their full potential.

Although youth mainly were excited about the content, male youth from Bolivia suggested they would like to see content on jobs skills, including how to be better productive in their work.

Colombian female participants suggested including topics related to sexual health, mental health, family and relationships. Youth also suggested including more diversity in the content, not just male and female, including visualizing youth with disabilities, indigenous, etc.

Facilitators and coordinators concurred that the program is relevant to young people's well-being and does meet some of the needs of male and female youth participants with various conditions, encouraging the participation of learners who traditionally would be stigmatized, such as young mothers and youth with disabilities. The program equips youth with skills and knowledge on gender equality and inclusion, provides financial support for transportation for people with reduced mobility and refers participants who may require specialized services. However, there are limitations to the support provided, and we could not provide financial support to participants dropping out for economic reasons or migrating to look for work.

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<sup>1</sup> Six to eight individuals participated in each group discussion.

<sup>2</sup> World Vision GESI Approach and Theory of Change

<sup>3</sup> Based on the Washington Disability screening questions, youth participants were asked a set of questions to assess their degree of difficulty doing activities in six basic function domains including seeing, hearing, walking, remembering, self-care and communication using their usual language.