There are an estimated 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the world today. Around 90% of these adolescents and youth live in developing countries, where they make up a large proportion of the overall population. Policy makers in many developing and emerging economies acknowledge the pressing nature of the “youth bulge” challenge and are trying to identify ways to successfully integrate young people into their countries’ societies and labour markets.

With regard to these endeavours, many other development actors have shifted their focus to youth. Among these actors, foundations have allocated increasing resources and support for exploring innovative ways to empower youth in developing countries. Foundations belonging to the OECD Development Centre’s Global Network of Foundations Working for Development – “netFWD” – have identified youth empowerment as a priority. They aim to share and codify knowledge in order to build on emerging good practices and scale up emerging successes.

The study “Philanthropy and Youth Empowerment: Foundations’ Innovative Approaches to Support Youth” provides a qualitative analysis of the ways in which foundations work to empower young people in developing countries. It brings together case studies from 11 foundations supporting youth and offers insights on the uniqueness of the philanthropic approach to youth empowerment. It provides new research and evidence-based examples from a sample of foundations that have pioneered particularly innovative approaches. The foundations surveyed for this study include:

- African Capacity Building Foundation
- Emirates Foundation for Youth Development
- Instituto Ayrton Senna
- MasterCard Foundation
- Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development
- Olusegun Obasanjo Foundation
- Sawiris Foundation for Social Development
- Sinopec-Addax Petroleum Foundation
- Stars Foundation
- The Edmond de Rothschild Foundation
- The Rockefeller Foundation
The landscape of foundations that work in youth empowerment

The research for this study quickly revealed the significant diversity across foundations in terms of their missions, strategies and operational approaches towards youth empowerment. Foundations surveyed for this study were loosely grouped in the categories of individual family foundations, a bold and new set of philanthropists from the global south, corporate foundations and foundations that emanate from collaborations between governments and civil society.

Why foundations focus on youth

Foundations work with young people for the same reasons as other development actors do – they recognise that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a critical window of opportunity while understanding “youth” as a stage in life rather than a specific age.

It is the prime stage of life to set a young person onto the pathway to prosperity. However, this is also a period of risk – it is during this stage in life that young people tend to drop out of school, experience unemployment and unwanted pregnancies, acquire sexually transmitted infections, turn to violence or get married prematurely. In many countries the consequences of youth unemployment amount to a loss of several percentage points of GDP per year.

However, it is also a stage of life where well-targeted investments can yield enormous benefits for youth and society alike. Young people can make invaluable contributions to their families, economic growth, peace building and sustainable development. The dynamism, entrepreneurialism and innovation young people often exhibit provide a vast base of economic potential if harnessed adequately.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
Empowering youth is defined in this study as “creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others.”
(Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007).
The challenge lies in identifying precisely these “adequate” initiatives that empower youth, which necessarily vary from one target group to another and among focus countries. Supporting youth empowerment thus goes far beyond the youth employment or education and skills agendas. From the perspective of foundations, working on youth empowerment is thus defined by the question of how to create an enabling environment that best allows youth to use the window of opportunity at a given stage of their life.

While foundations may vary in terms of their overall focus on youth, this diversity also fosters innovation and creativity in the types of programmes and models they support.

Some foundations place young people at the centre of their mission. A foundation’s mission sometimes stems from the personal conviction and passion of its founders. Other times the drive to work with youth is based on the belief in the power and potential of young people as the leaders of tomorrow.

Other foundations may not be exclusively focused on youth, but rather support youth as a means to a broader development outcome, such as poverty reduction or more inclusive growth. Indeed, the youth agenda is often linked to all of the Millennium Development Goals: food security, education, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, entrepreneurship, access to clean water.
The unique roles of foundations

Foundations play unique and catalytic roles in the youth empowerment landscape that extend far beyond funding programmes. They add value in a wide variety of ways throughout the entire lifecycle of a programme or initiative. A selection of roles in these different programme stages is listed on the next page.

The programme development cycle

Note: This figure represents a theoretical simplification and by no means claims universal applicability. Rather, it should be understood as tool that aids at distinguishing, analysing and organising the different roles and entry points of foundations when supporting youth.

Source: Dalberg Global Development Advisors.
**Innovate and design:** One of the most catalytic roles that foundations play in at the “Innovate and design” phase is sponsoring research, identifying new opportunities and mapping out strategies for innovative programme design. Some foundations provide much-needed funding for earlier-stage organisations, programmes or ideas.

**Operate:** In the “Operate” stage, foundations often support the incubation and institutional strengthening of organisations and enterprises that offer promising solutions for youth. Beyond financial support to programmes, they often provide “capacity building grants” to reinforce technical expertise, broker partnerships or sponsor speaking opportunities for relevant knowledge-sharing events in order to strengthen the core or organisational capacity of their partners.

**Evaluate:** Foundations are pioneering new methods for measuring the impact of their programmes. Anticipating the crucial challenge of facilitating scale-up once a project has proven successful, some foundations are designing their M&E frameworks in a comprehensive and accessible manner that will make it easier to convince potential partners from the public or private sector to pick up pilot projects and bring them to scale.

**Advocate:** Some foundations use their funding and technical expertise to bring youth to the forefront of the international development debate and beyond. Foundations also act as advocates and brokers of approaches that have proven successful enough to call for scale-up. Foundations can also play important roles in convening policy makers and youth advocates on a regular basis to engage in dialogue.
Supporting youth empowerment: Scale of action

There are multiple areas where foundations can target their interventions. Ideally, these complement each other to offer youth a comprehensive support system for their individual development, be it within a foundation’s programming or through partnering and co-ordinating with other actors. Below are examples of four significant entry points foundations can use when working to build an enabling environment for youth and the impact they measure.

**Education:** An external evaluation found that Instituto Ayrton Senna programmes improved school completion rates by 11 times in the high schools of the 946 partner cities during the period 1996-2006.

**Skills training:** NairoBits, a social enterprise in Nairobi supported by Stars Foundation, has a 90% success rate in placing their young ICT training graduates into internships with local ICT-related companies. More than 80 percent of those internships eventually turn into full-time formal employment.

**Employment:** Samasource, a social business supported by the Rockefeller and MasterCard Foundations, has provided life-changing work to more than 3,000 people, impacted more than 9,000 workers and dependents, and paid out over USD 2 million in living wages since 2009.

**Citizenship:** Since 2007, the volunteer programme of the Emirates Foundation for Youth Development, Takatof, which provides social volunteering opportunities to Emirati youth, has brought together 34,295 youth as participants. In 2012, Takatof supported over ten other sector entities looking to promote volunteering, recorded over 130,000 volunteering hours and signed up 3,000 new volunteers, all of whom were trained.

Source: Dalberg Global Development Advisors.
**Challenges and recommendations**

Below is a selection of the challenges identified in the full study as well as corresponding recommendations.

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<th>CHALLENGE</th>
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<td><strong>Youth are living in a complex social context.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Approach youth empowerment holistically.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Recognise that young people are students, consumers of health care, workers, care givers and more, and develop programmes that work with the multi-dimensional aspects of this target group. This lens not only sees the intertwining of issues that converge in the life of a young person, but also helps set priorities when they are facing competing demands. Employing positive youth development or empowerment practices to complement education or employment goals for youth is suggested.</td>
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<td><strong>Many foundations have displayed little appetite for taking risks.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Envisage taking risks as an integral part of addressing the youth challenge.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Given that foundations have a uniquely independent mandate and are ultimately accountable only to their boards, they can and should push boundaries. Risk taking must thus be encouraged, both when making funding decisions but also in terms of geographical allocations. Foundations can also mitigate some of the risks of moving into nascent or challenging areas through strategic partnerships with other development actors that can offer expertise or more extensive operational capabilities.</td>
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<td><strong>There is a serious lack of reliable data.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Explore partnering with actors from academia or the private sector and compile and share data through networks.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Addressing the evaluation challenges with outside expertise can provide fruitful results. Foundations should explore partnerships with the academic community to design innovative M&amp;E frameworks. Next to investing into rigourous evaluation, foundations should also aim to share their data with networks that can disaggregate data in a way that can make youth-specific work more transparent and accountable.</td>
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<td><strong>Transformative programme models are often resource intensive, making scale-up difficult.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Prepare to demonstrate and advocate.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Foundations should build a strong emphasis on gathering the information that would help “make the case” for the programme to eventually be scaled up. Early in the process, they could also identify what kinds of funders might be potential partners for subsequent rounds of funding, and engage them early in a programme’s lifecycle to encourage buy-in.</td>
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*Source: Dalberg Global Development Advisors.*
Conclusion

Foundations’ support is critical for youth empowerment efforts. In 2012, private grants, including philanthropic flows from foundations, accounted for merely 6% of the total net resource flows from Development Assistance Community (DAC) donors to developing countries. Yet while their financial contribution is relatively small in overall development terms, foundations are taking a lead in employing innovative approaches to philanthropy and providing more than just funding: they serve as advisors, provide technical assistance, support research and advocate for innovation.

The changing face of foundations needs to be acknowledged. Historically associated with the global north, in particular the United States, the landscape is changing with the emergence of foundations based in the global south, such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation and the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, and/or established in the north by individuals from the south, like the Mo Ibrahim Foundation. These foundations are becoming an important voice in development. Many foundations are also changing their operating models and experimenting with more business-minded approaches associated with models – such as venture philanthropy or catalytic philanthropy – that break with the long-standing non-profit dogma.

Based on this review of cases from foundations working with youth, this study found that foundations employ innovative approaches in all stages of the programme development cycle and have an important role to play in addressing the global challenge of empowering young people. They can do so as promoters of innovation, by testing and operating new models that work for youth or simply by experimenting and admitting that not all experiences are successful and that learning also happens through these failures. In addition, the study finds that foundations often complement the efforts of other development actors and can optimise them too. Yet, such collaboration still represents untapped potential as it could become more systematic on an issues-based approach. It could also become even more effective through investing in more rigorous M&E, employing new types of information technologies and social media to facilitate direct engagement with youth, and through bridging the gap between government and the private sector. In profiling selected foundations, this review has led to a set of recommendations relevant to foundations and other development actors that work with youth in developing countries.
This review further identified significant gaps in the current literature on philanthropic engagement for youth that could be addressed by future work. One of the common demands from stakeholders and aid actors in developing countries is to explore ways to structure partnerships more effectively with the broad range of foundations that are active in supporting youth. The study points to taking research one step further and possibly developing a handbook or practical guidance note addressing these questions. This would require a comprehensive review of existing partnerships in selected countries, an identification of the challenges they are faced with and an analysis of how their partners have addressed them. The Guidelines for Effective Philanthropic Engagement, developed under the supervision of netFWD, could constitute the basis for such an effort.
The OECD Development Centre was established in 1962 as an independent platform for knowledge sharing and policy dialogue between OECD member countries and developing economies, allowing these countries to interact on an equal footing. Today, 24 OECD countries and 18 non-OECD countries are members of the Centre. The Centre draws attention to emerging systemic issues likely to have an impact on global development and more specific development challenges faced by today’s developing and emerging economies. It uses evidence-based analysis and strategic partnerships to help countries formulate innovative policy solutions to the global challenges of development.

For more information:
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