

DFAT Development Policy Submission 2022

The Importance of Including Young People in Australia's New Development Policy

Overview of Recommendations

Oaktree's primary recommendations are:

1. Recognise the importance of youth engagement in the new development policy by:

- 1.1 Including youth as a cross-cutting issue in this policy; and
- 1.2 Fostering genuine youth participation in decision-making processes.

2. Invest in local youth entrepreneurialism and youth-led organisations by:

- 2.1 Funding youth-led organisations across the Asia-Pacific Region
 - through Oaktree's Youth Solidarity Fund, using a mechanism such as the '[Australian Aid: Friendship Grants](#)'; OR
 - through collaboration with [USAID](#) on their existing program; and
 - 2.2 Providing training and capacity building to support youth entrepreneurship.
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Evidence Base

In 2022, we completed a year-long research project written by young people, for young people, titled *Young People & Covid-19 in the Asia Pacific: Opportunities & Challenges* (attached in submission email). This publication presents the outcomes of a participatory, youth-led needs and strengths assessment, intended to better understand the immediate and emerging needs and opportunities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This research includes an expansive literature review and qualitative interviews with youth-led and youth-focused organisations across the Asia-Pacific (with youth being defined as those between 18 and 35 years of age). The recommendations in this submission are based on the findings of this research, as well as the following past publications:

- [Practice Note: Youth Participation & Development](#), Oaktree & ACFID (2016)
- [Youth Participation in Development: A Practical Guide](#), Oaktree (2021)

Recommendation 1: Include youth as a cross-cutting issue in Australia's Development Policy



The Asia-Pacific region is experiencing a significant ‘youth bulge’. The region is home to 60% of youth globally, and **over half of the region’s total population of 10 million is under the age of 25**.¹ Currently, Generations Y and Z have grown up in a world that poses significantly different challenges to those of their elders. These generations have faced climate change-induced natural disasters, increased health, social and economic insecurity, and a global pandemic all in their formative years. They are the largest stakeholders in a sustainable future and are ‘technology-natives’. Thus, young people are key agents of change that are integral to the success of our development program.

The response of young people to the pandemic has exemplified their expertise, innovation, commitment to community, and resilience in times of crisis. Youth-led organisations in particular filled critical gaps in the humanitarian response to COVID-19 at micro- and meso-community levels, significantly enhancing the ways in which communities were able to manage its impacts.² However, **over 62% of interviewees reported they felt there is a significant need for youth perspectives and input in policy-making**, and that there exists a lack of youth-focused policy at all government levels. In line with the United Nations Youth 2030 agenda,³ there needs to be greater representation of young people in places of power, particularly in the development of youth-focused policy.

To have policies truly reflective of and responsive to the needs of all people, youth must be present at all stages of the decision-making process — after all, they are the majority of the population. With adequate support and investment in the capabilities and skills of young people, the booming youth population across the Pacific has the potential to go from a regional risk to a demographic dividend. It is clear that any effective Australian international development policy must adequately address the challenges and opportunities presented by the regional youth boom.

Given Australia’s intention to strengthen partnerships in the Asia-Pacific, we propose that DFAT:

1.1 Include youth as a cross-cutting issue in this policy

Currently, young people are not included as a focus in Australia’s development policy. We propose that DFAT adopts ‘youth’ as a cross-cutting issue across focus areas such as gender, disability and civil society. For examples of other development strategies that include youth as a focus, see:

- [USAID Youth in Development Policy](#), USAID (2022)
- [DFID’s Youth Agenda: putting young people at the heart of development](#), Department for International Development (DFID) (2010)
- [The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific](#), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2015)

In practice, this could look like including a youth strategy under each of the key thematic areas, including but not limited to:

- Youth and Gender Equality
- Youth and Disability
- Youth Civil Society Engagement

¹ Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) (2015) *The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific* (Suva, Fiji), 5. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/ssbjrq3>.

² Blom, I. M., Nunes Campos, L., Youcef Ali, M., Zhafir Asyura, M., von Metnitz, D., Limann, B., & Janušonytė, E. (2021). Youth versus pandemics: the role of future generations in the pandemic treaty. *The Lancet Global Health*, 9(10), 1361-1362. doi:10.1016/S2214-109X(21)00307-7

³ United Nations Youth Strategy. (2022). *Youth2030: Progress Report 2022*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.unyouth2030.com/files/uqgd/b1d674_13a797e3dff746f488ce4ec5fbad57bd.pdf



- Youth and Climate Change
- Youth and Humanitarian Responses

1.2 Foster genuine youth participation in policy formation and programming

As the biggest stakeholders of our collective future in the region, young people must also be consulted during and after the creation of this development policy. For more information on non-tokenistic inclusion of young people, please see the following guides:

- [Practice Note: Youth Participation & Development](#), Oaktree & ACFID (2016)
- [Youth Participation in Development: A Practical Guide](#), Oaktree (2021)

Recommendation 2: Invest in local youth entrepreneurialism and youth-led organisations

Youth are 1.6 times more likely than adults to be engaged in entrepreneurial activity. Aligning with the UN's Youth 2030 Agenda,⁴ we recommend that in order to maximise the social and economic potential of young people, greater investment is needed to support their entrepreneurial endeavours into the future.

With youth unemployment rising at nearly five times the rate of adults,⁵ young people adopted creative and innovative methods to start businesses and generate income throughout the pandemic. **62% of those interviewed observed a rise in entrepreneurialism amongst their age group**, highlighting the innovation and adaptability of youth. Accordingly, the United Nations Development Programme reported 74% of youth-led enterprises surveyed in the Asia-Pacific have contributed to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.⁶ Demonstrably, youth leadership is powerful in the Asia-Pacific, and the tangible positive outcomes of youth entrepreneurship cannot be ignored.

There is a high demand from youth-led organisations across the Asia-Pacific Region for flexible support and funding to continue their critical grassroots work. Increasing financial and training support to allow youth-run organisations to continue their work independently presents a propitious opportunity to maximise the societal benefits of their work.

We propose that DFAT:

2.1 Fund youth-led organisations across the Asia-Pacific Region

Recently, [USAID](#) announced flexible micro-grants for youth-run organisations. Through this initiative, five youth-led organizations had the opportunity to receive up to \$10,000 each to pilot positive changemaking and research in their communities. This initiative represented their Youth Policy's call to increase funding for local, youth-led organizations. Australia can set up its own program, similar to that of USAID, or collaborate with USAID to expand the existing program. To ensure Australia drives innovation and decolonisation in this space, DFAT should consider developing a new flexible funding stream that reduces the compliance and reporting burden required of larger, more established NGO's.

⁴ World Youth Report. (2020). *Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda*. New York: United Nations.

⁵ International Labor Organisation [ILO]. (2021a). ILO research highlights the massive COVID-19 impact on tourism employment in Asia and the Pacific. International Labor Organisation. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_827494/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ p. 23: United Nations Development Program. (2019). MSMEDA and UNDP mark the Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Day. Egypt: United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/egypt/press-releases/msmeda-and-undp-mark-micro-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-day>



Alternatively, DFAT may choose to run this program through **Oaktree’s existing Youth Solidarity Fund (OYSF)**. We have completed the first year of micro-grants to youth-run organisations in the region and have seen encouraging results (see the **appendix** for details on this fund).

Oaktree’s experience demonstrates there is high demand from youth-led organisations across the Asia-Pacific region for flexible support and funding to champion sustainable development in their local communities. This year, Oaktree received 50 expressions of interests (EOIs) from youth-led organisations to join the OYSF, with minimal marketing. The table below shows the location and area of operations of each youth-led organisation that submitted an EOI for 2022:

Table 2: Location/Focus Area of Youth-led Organisations submitting an Expression of Interest for 2022 OYSF Membership

Timor Leste	Vanuatu	Cambodia	Bangladesh	Fiji	PNG
16	7	5	3	3	2
Sri Lanka	Australia	Myanmar	Philippines	Tonga	India
2	2	2	1	1	1
South Africa	Indonesia	India & Bhutan	Bangladesh & India	All of ASEAN	
1	1	1	1	1	

As Oaktree is not ANCP accredited, funding for these projects could be provided by reopening initiatives such as the [DFAT friendship grant](#).

2.2 Provide training and capacity building support to youth entrepreneurship.

Our research has shown there is also high demand for support through training and capacity building programs. The OYSF offers peer-to-peer support between young people and youth organisations in the region. However, the policy could include an imperative to provide further professional cross-country support to emerging youth entrepreneurs.

Contacts

We strongly believe that young people in the region should be involved in shaping this policy.

For further information or requests for consultation, please contact our Chief Executive Officer (Thenu Herath, t.herath@oaktree.org) or Chief Advocacy Officer (Ashleigh McNeill, a.mcneill@oaktree.org).

Appendix: The Oaktree Youth Solidarity Fund (OYSF)

Background

In 2019, Oaktree met with local youth-led organisations in Timor-Leste to better understand their needs and the practical challenges they encountered. It was found that most local youth-led organisations are not formally registered NGOs, and that the process of registration is time-intensive, overly bureaucratic, and expensive. Many are therefore ineligible to receive official development assistance through DFAT’s programs and partners. These youth-led organisations expressed that





small and flexible funding amounts to cover shorter-term activities (e.g. 1 year) would offer the most beneficial form of support.

In response, Oaktree developed the Oaktree Youth Solidarity Fund (OYSF) which aims to:

1. **Increase the capacity of youth-led organisations**, groups, and grassroots movements to create a more just and sustainable world.
2. **Enable greater access to short-term flexible funding** up to US\$15,000p.a., and support for youth-led organisations, groups, and grassroots movements to grow their impact.
3. **Give young people the ability to lead** and participate in decision-making processes.

In 2021, Oaktree ran a successful pilot of the program in Timor-Leste. In 2022, Oaktree expanded the program across the Asia-Pacific Region. Oaktree received 40 EOIs from youth-led organisations across the region and selected 5 youth-led organisations as partners from across Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Tonga.

The OYSF is a unique program. From our research and analysis, Oaktree is the only Australian-based NGO providing small-scale, flexible support and funding to youth-led organisations across the Asia-Pacific Region.

Case Study: Youth Leadership Development Program, OYSF Partner 2021

For the pilot year of the OYSF, Oaktree partnered with Timor-Leste based organisation Youth Leadership Development Program (YLDP). YLDP is a small youth-led organisation, established in 2017 with a vision of 'truthfully motivating, engaging, empowering, and encouraging young Timorese to be able to think globally and act locally'. The purpose of the organisation is to 'provide a positive learning space and offer leadership training in all areas, especially capacity-building, personal development, and youth debate'.

Despite facing significant barriers to programming in 2021, including COVID-19 related school closures and flooding from Tropical Cyclone Seroja, YLDP delivered a series of transformative leadership workshops to approximately 275 high school students, across six public high schools in March 2022. The OYSF provided US\$5,000 for YLDP to deliver the School Leadership Program. Total expenditure for program delivery was US\$3,485. School representatives who participated in the reflective interview sessions agreed that the school leadership program contributed to their self-awareness on how to invest in their personal skills, how to discover their potential, and how to improve their capacity and self-empowerment.⁷

Programming: Cost to Impact

The OYSF model allows Oaktree to deliver higher-impact, lower-cost programming, allowing us to partner with more organisations and impact more young people across the Asia-Pacific, relative to our previous partnership and funding model. Below is a breakdown of Oaktree's international programming expenditure in 2021, which compares our existing/traditional programs alongside our OYSF partner.

Table 1: Oaktree Programming Costs 2021 Comparison

⁷ Youth Leadership Development Program, *Report: School Leadership Program from YLDP-TL, November 2020–2021 (2022)*, 6.





	Existing Programs		Youth Solidarity Fund (OYSF)
	KYLA Project Cambodia	FoLiHa Project Timor-Leste	YLDP Project Timor-Leste
Total Cost	US\$46,835	US\$66,537	US\$3,485
(#) Direct Participants	336	50	275
Cost per participant	US\$139.4	US\$1,330.7	US\$12.7
Brief Program Description	336 young people provided with leadership & advocacy training and access to digital careers & employment advice.	50 young people are highly trained in community advocacy, video making, theatre skills, civic journalism & non-violent conflict resolution.	275 students across 6 secondary schools provided leadership workshops & training.

Potential Impact of Australian Government and DFAT Support

In 2022, Oaktree is partnering with 5 organisations across Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Tonga through the OYSF for a combined amount of US\$54,000. The average funding amount per organisation is US\$10,800. This is representative of Oaktree’s current financial capacity to support this program.

Additional funding from DFAT would enable an increase in the number of youth-led organisations Oaktree could partner with through the OYSF, and reach a greater number of young people across the Asia-Pacific region. A grant of AU\$250,000 would provide enough funding for Oaktree to support approximately 15 youth-led organisations through the OYSF for a 1-year period.

