



# YOUTH ACTIVATORS LAB 2024 COHORT

## ACTIVITY REPORT



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## Executive Summary

The [Youth Activators Lab \(YAL\)](#) is a transformative one-year leadership and capacity development program designed for young Nigerians aged 18 to 29. The program empowers participants to collaborate with the Network of Youth for Sustainable Initiative (NGYouthSDGs) to advocate for youth rights, drive systemic change, and champion sustainable development in their communities.

YAL's journey began in 2019 as the NGYouthSDGs Champions Programme, which trained 72 young leaders from across Nigeria's 36 states. In 2023, the program was rebranded and enhanced to become the Youth Activators Lab, offering exclusive leadership development, mentoring, and practical opportunities for the next generation of youth leaders.

We envision a future where young people are empowered to become changemakers, equipped with the tools to ideate, implement, and sustain innovative solutions to societal challenges. By localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their communities, these young leaders can drive meaningful and impactful change. YAL fosters youth leadership by promoting their active engagement in shaping the future, providing practical training to build their capacity, and positioning them as solution providers who can address critical social issues. Through this program, we aim to inspire and equip the next generation to lead with purpose and innovation.

The 2024 cohort of 33 associates began their journey in January, engaging in holistic learning sessions, high-level stakeholder meetings, and collaborative projects. Throughout the year, participants completed:

- 10 Core Learning Sessions:** Covering topics such as Project Management, Personal Leadership, Systemic Change, Advocacy, Strategic Partnerships, Fundraising, Policy Engagement, Youth Mobilization, Personal Branding, and Understanding the SDGs.
- 3 Webinars:** Engaged with global change leaders during sessions titled Lessons with Global Change Leaders.
- 10 High-Level Meetings:** Collaborated with NGYouthSDGs on advocacy and co-implemented community projects.
- Mentorship Opportunities:** Benefited from 3 sessions with renowned global change leaders, fostering inspiration and strategic guidance.

## Key Achievements

- **Graduates:** 28 out of 33 onboarded associates successfully completed the program.
- **Geographical Diversity:** Participants represented 18 states across Nigeria.
- **Professional Growth:** 93.1% of associates reported significant personal and professional development.
- **Learning Sessions:** Completed 10 sessions covering critical topics such as advocacy, project management, and fundraising.
- **Mentorship:** Engaged in 3 mentoring sessions with global change leaders.
- **Webinars:** Participated in 3 Lessons with Global Change Leaders webinars.
- **High-Level Engagement:** Attended 10 high-level meetings and co-implemented projects with NGYouthSDGs.
- **Grant Success:** Associates secured \$10,500 in external grants to support advocacy, research, and community projects.

The Youth Activators Lab has redefined youth leadership in Nigeria, cultivating a network of young changemakers equipped with the skills, confidence, and resources to create a sustainable future. YAL continues to serve as a critical platform for empowering the next generation to lead systemic change.

# Introduction

The Youth Activators Lab (YAL) is a one-year leadership and development program for young people aged 18 to 29, who will collaborate with the Network of Youth for Sustainable Initiative (NGYouthSDGs) to advocate for youth rights in Nigeria. The one year programme is built around impact and leadership as we provide associates with the motivation and frameworks that helps them think critically about how to increase their impact and deliver change that is systemic. It develops the leadership skills needed to help associate lead change in themselves and the society while exposing them to mentors in the social impact space globally.

Young people in Nigeria face significant challenges in participating meaningfully in public life, often being excluded or tokenized in the development and implementation of policies that affect them. This exclusion hinders their potential to contribute to socio-economic development, as emphasized in Nigeria's National Development Plan (2021–2025). A lack of understanding of their rights and roles as active citizens further limits their ability to drive locally-led development. Empowering young people with the knowledge and tools to lead social change is crucial for fostering collaboration with decision-makers to create inclusive policies and programs.

The Youth Activators Lab started in 2019 as a Champions Programme with 72 young leaders across Nigeria and was recently rebranded in 2023 to directly provide exclusive leadership development and mentoring to associates in 2024 and beyond. YAL seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by equipping young people with the tools required to understand and lead social change. It provides an opportunity for participants to engage with local and international role models in business, government and international development towards a systemic change approach to community and nation-building.

YAL 2024 Cohort graduated a total of 28 associates who worked closely with NGYouthSDGs to promote meaningful youth engagement in policies and programs, empowering young people to lead and thrive in Nigeria. With the support of NGYouthSDGs staff, associates got to participate in innovative campaigns that highlight the agency of youth for sustainable development, engaging with policymakers and youth stakeholders to champion the rights of young people in Nigeria.

During the course of the programme, associates received technical training on project management, policy advocacy, stakeholder management, programme design, communication, community engagement, and fundraising.

The associates got to codesign and implement programmes with NGYouthSDGs in their respective states with the opportunity to engage with high-level stakeholders at meetings and they also developed policy briefs and educational articles.

The Youth Activators Lab 2024 cohort had associates represented across **Benue, FCT Abuja, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Gombe, Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, , Enugu, Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo.**

## **Purpose of the Youth Activators Lab**

- Equip associates with practical skills to design and implement innovative campaigns and programs that will cause systemic change in their communities.
- Enable associates to recognize societal challenges and proficiently implement solutions.
- Provide training in technical skills essential for addressing social issues within their communities.
- Identify young people who can imbibe the values of NGYouthSDGs, empower them to represent the organisation and replicate projects/programmes in their respective states.
- Receive support to design innovative campaigns focused on the agency of youth for sustainable development and engaging with policymakers and youth stakeholders for the rights of youth in Nigeria.

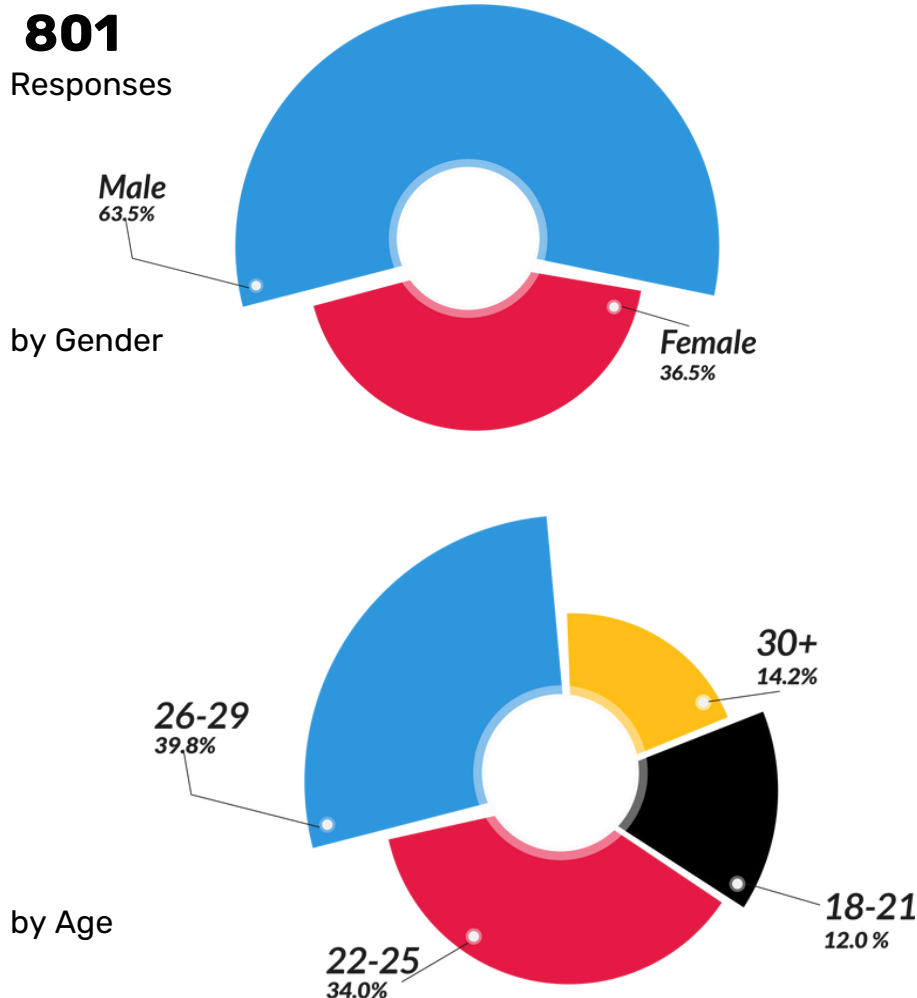
# Recruitment and Onboarding of 2024 Cohort

The recruitment process for the 2024 Youth Activators Lab cohort was designed to identify passionate and motivated young leaders committed to driving social impact in their communities.

## Application Phase

- A comprehensive call for applications was publicized across various platforms, including social media-Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and WhatsApp, newsletters, and partner networks. The application call ran from 1st-30th September 2023.
- Applicants were required to submit detailed applications showcasing their leadership experiences, community impact, and motivation for joining the program. A total of 801 applications were submitted for the 2024 cohort and 33 were shortlisted for the program.

Application responses data based on gender and age

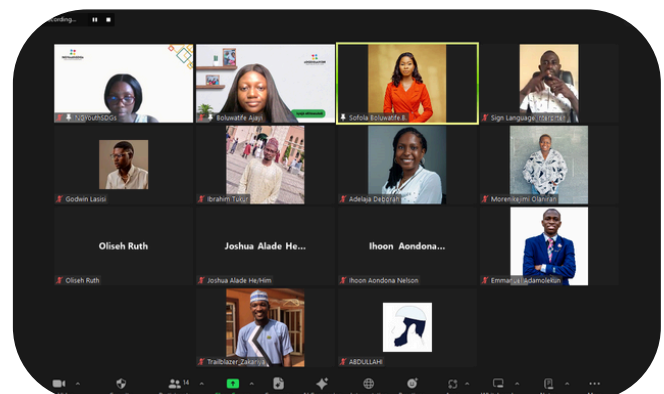
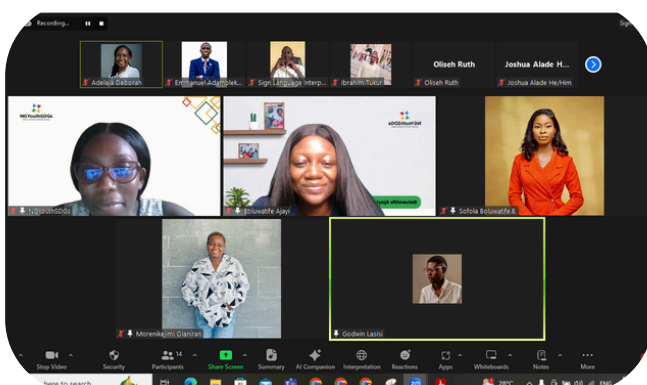
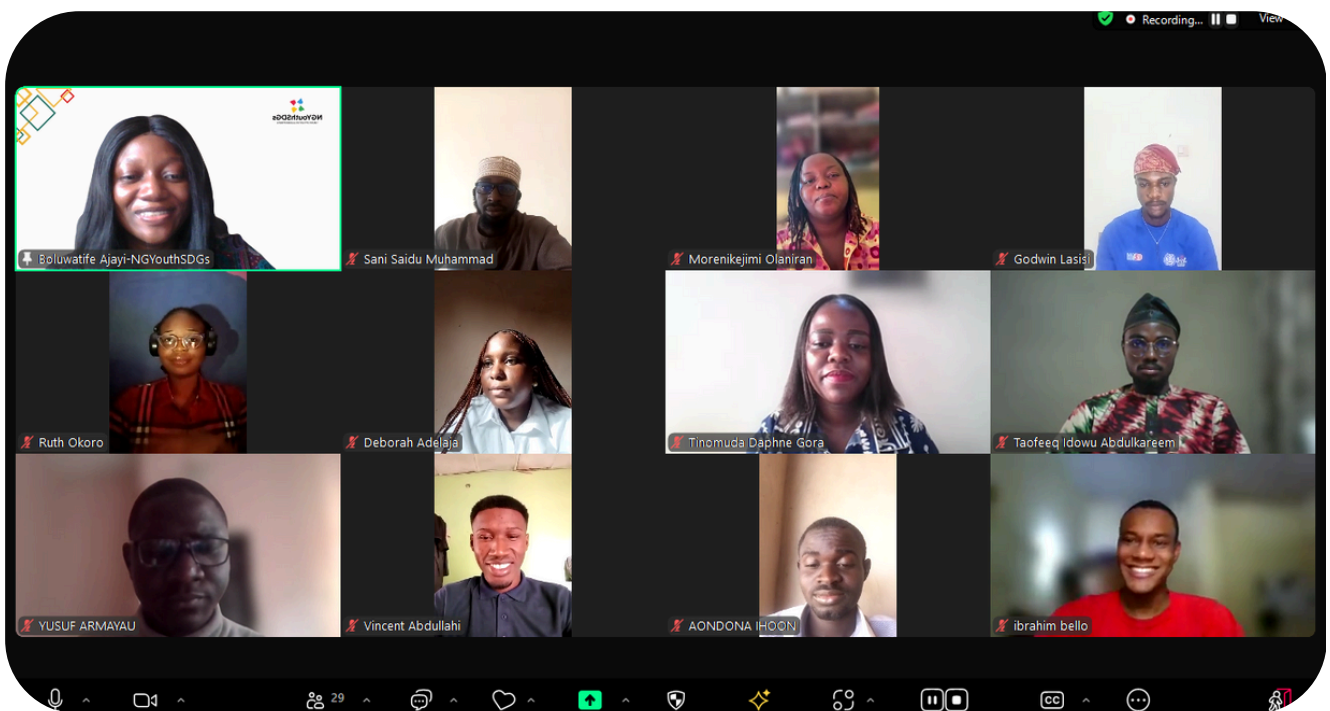


## Screening and Selection

- Applications were reviewed by staff of NGYouthSDGs in collaboration with NGYouthSDGs Champions.
- Criteria for selection included alignment with the program's objectives, a demonstrated track record of leadership, and a clear vision for leveraging the Youth Activators Lab to create community impact. Scoring method was also used to benchmark applicants
- Shortlisted candidates underwent a final review, resulting in the selection of 28 associates from diverse backgrounds.

## Onboarding of Associates

The onboarding process was designed to familiarize associates with the program's goals, structure, and expectations while fostering a sense of community among participants.



## Welcome and Orientation Process

- The selected associates were sent an interest form to confirm their participation in the program. In the interest form, they also indicated their personal information and next of kin details for emergency purposes.
- The selected associates were requested to provide two referees who attested to their leadership capacity. The referees were contacted to fill a form stating how long they have known the applicant and rating their capacity.
- The associates received a code of conduct which incorporated requirements to be fulfilled on the program, what the program would provide and consent to share their progress on the program.
- Associates were added to a WhatsApp group and engaged in a pre-onboarding session in December 2023 where answers were provided to questions and they got to interact within themselves.
- On Saturday January 13, 2024, the selected associates were welcomed into the program through a virtual onboarding session held via Zoom. This session provided a comprehensive overview of the Youth Activators Lab, including its activities, participation requirements, and goals for the program cycle.
- Associates were provided with access to program resources, including training schedules, policy documents, and a detailed handbook outlining their journey in the program.

## Program Activities for cohort 2024

**Methodology:** The 2024 cohort operated in a hybrid format with virtual learning sessions and group work activities. In terms of program implementation, some associates participated in physical program implementation like the Job Sprint Employability Workshop, International Youth Day, Nigeria Futures Summit, Verification exercise for the Empowering Youth Civil Society to Build Stronger Communities in Nigeria project. The associates had three main communication channels; E-mail, WhatsApp Group and Mobile Phone call.

### Onboarding Session

The onboarding session introduced associates to the program's activities, participation requirements, and coordinators, while also providing a platform to meet fellow associates and ask clarifying questions. This comprehensive introduction to the Youth Activators Lab set the stage for a successful year. The session was held on Saturday, January 13, 2024, via Zoom, and the recording is available via [this link](#).

## Training Sessions

Associates participated in virtual technical learning sessions held monthly during the program cycle. These sessions covered topics such as Personal Leadership, Systems Thinking, Understanding the Sustainable Development Goals, A-Z of Advocacy, Policy Engagement, Strategic Partnerships for Social Impact, Youth Mobilization, Fundraising for Social Development, Managing Social Impact Projects, and Building a Personal Brand for Accessing Global Opportunities. Experts including Hammed Kayode Alabi, Joshua Alade, Boluwatife Ajayi, Ruth Okafor, Onome Okwah, Joshua Adedeji, Adenike Bamigbade, Abideen Olasupo, Oluseyi Simeon, and Oluwabusola Fadipe facilitated the sessions. Based on feedback, 100 percent of the associates found the training sessions relevant to their leadership and professional development and delivered effectively.

## Learnings from Global Change Leaders Webinar

Quarterly interactive sessions provided associates with opportunities to learn from global change-makers. In 2024, these sessions featured Dr. Oluseyi Soremekun (National Officer, United Nations Information Centre), Gideon Olarenwaju (Founder, Aid for Rural Education Access Initiative), and Omowunmi Akinghohungbe (Executive Director, WIMBIZ).

## Co-design Programs with NGYouthSDGs

Associates collaborated with NGYouthSDGs on various programs, including the UN Partnership Forum Meeting, International Day of Education (Twitter Space Conversation), Job Sprint Workshop on Employability for Youth, Climate Voices Nigeria Boot Camp, and others. They participated in roles such as panel speakers, moderators, rapporteurs, content creators, and event volunteers. Associates also represented NGYouthSDGs at over 10 high-level engagement meetings, including the 45th UPR Group Proceeding at UN House, Connected Development's Interfaith Dialogue on Climate Change, and the Youth Town Hall on the 2025 Budget Process.

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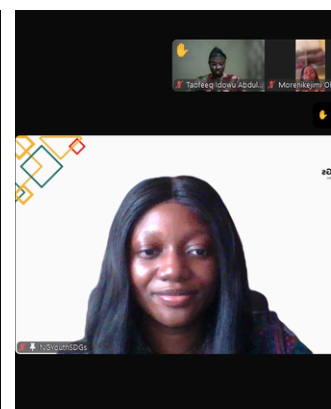
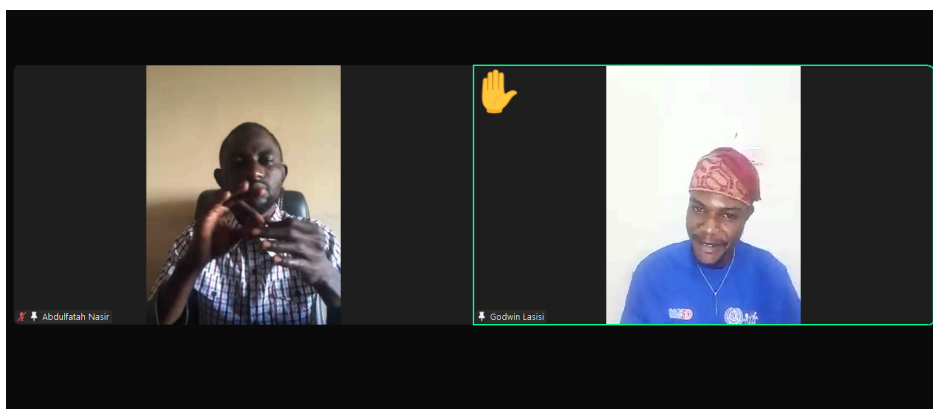
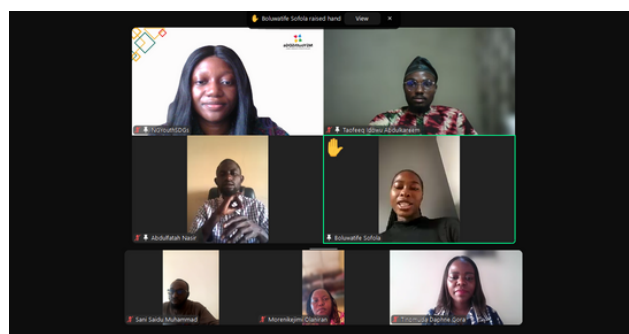
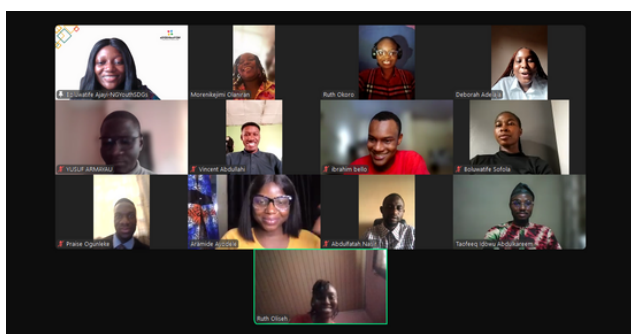
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## Group Work Assessments

As part of the training curriculum, associates worked collaboratively in groups to complete assignments and research tasks. Three groups, each comprising at least 10 members, developed policy briefs on topics such as Addressing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria, Empowering Youth Political Participation, and Enhancing Educational Outcomes for Nigerian Youth. They also authored educational articles addressing issues affecting women globally, including The Significance of Women's Inclusion for Social Impact and Investing in Women to Accelerate Global Progress.

## Graduation Ceremony

The graduation ceremony for the 2024 cohort took place on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, celebrating the achievements of all 28 associates. Development practitioners such as Kamaldeen Afolabi (NYFF), Ruth Okafor (Connected Development), Oluseyi Simeon (Leap Africa), and Oluwabusola Fadipe (Infraspotlight) were in attendance. The event highlighted the associates' commitment, tenacity, and success throughout the program.



## Key Outcomes from Cohort 2024

The 2024 cohort of 33 associates began their journey in January, engaging in holistic learning sessions, high-level stakeholder meetings, and collaborative projects. Throughout the year, participants completed:

- Development of a landing page: The YAL landing page incorporates the program overview, objectives, testimonials, and resources. <https://nigerianyouthsdgs.org/yal>
- 10 Core Learning Sessions: Covering topics such as Project Management, Personal Leadership, Systemic Change, Advocacy, Strategic Partnerships, Fundraising, Policy Engagement, Youth Mobilization, Personal Branding, and Understanding the SDGs.
- 3 Webinars: Engaged with global change leaders during sessions titled Lessons with Global Change Leaders.
- Mentorship Opportunities: Benefited from 3 sessions with renowned global change leaders, fostering inspiration and strategic guidance.
- Skills Acquired: The associates picked diverse skills such as planning and implementing social impact projects, using systems approach to address social issues, fundraising, advocacy, establishing partnerships, drafting policy briefs, personal branding, promoting the SDGs and mobilizing youth for social change.
- Graduates: 28 out of 33 onboarded associates successfully completed the program.
- Geographical Diversity: Participants represented 18 states across Nigeria-Benue, FCT Abuja, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Gombe, Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, , Enugu, Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo.
- Professional/leadership Growth: 93.1% of associates reported significant personal and professional development.
- Development of Policy Briefs and Educational Articles: The associates collaboratively worked on three policy briefs and three educational articles which centered on youth rights and women empowerment. The documents can be accessed via [this link](#)
- High-Level Engagement: Attended over 10 high-level meetings and co-implemented over 10 projects with NGYouthSDGs.
- Grant Success: Associates secured \$10,500 in external grants to support advocacy, research, and community projects.

**Award Recognition and Opportunities:** Several associates have gained significant recognition through prestigious awards, fellowships, and leadership roles.

Notable achievements include receiving the Diana Award, being honored as Volunteer of the Year, serving as a UNODC Ambassador, and securing placements in esteemed development fellowships such as the One Campaign Fellowship and the European Youth Sounding Board, among others. Associates have consistently attributed their success in these endeavors to the skills and insights acquired during the program, which equipped them to excel in competitive global opportunities and leadership positions.

## Testimonials from 2024 Cohort Associates

Before joining the program, I had a strong desire to create positive change, but I lacked the skills, knowledge, and confidence to effectively drive that change. Now, I can:

- Design and implement projects with clarity and purpose
- Conduct advocacy research and write compelling policy briefs
- Communicate effectively with diverse audiences, including stakeholders and community members
- Build and maintain meaningful partnerships with organizations and individuals
- Analyze complex problems and develop innovative solutions



Most importantly, I have gained a sense of community and belonging among like-minded individuals who share my passion for creating positive change. The program has given me the tools, support, and network to turn my vision into action, and I am now more empowered than ever to drive systemic change and advance the SDGs.

**Ibrahim Muhammad Bello**

Since participating in the YAL program, I have developed critical skills and gained valuable insights that have enhanced my ability to advocate for change. I have learned to engage stakeholders more effectively, creating meaningful partnerships, such as with the Ingawa Association of the Deaf. This collaboration has enabled my team and I to push for significant improvements in Deaf Education, Employment, and Empowerment.



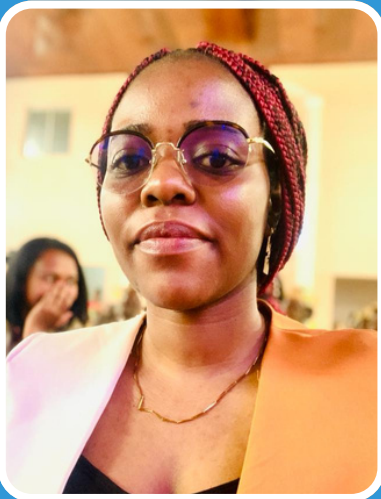
Now, I am better equipped to mobilize resources, influence policy, and create sustainable impact. The program has empowered me to transform my ideas into actionable plans, making a tangible difference in the lives of those I serve.

**Ibrahim Tukur**



Being a YAL associate over the last six months has been an incredible experience that has profoundly impacted my journey as a change maker. The knowledge and insights gained from lessons from change makers have been transformative. Also the opportunity of volunteering to write blog posts for the organization has been invaluable, providing me with the hands-on experience I have eagerly anticipated since the beginning of the program.

**Oluwapelumi Aina**



The program has helped me as a leader enthusiastic about making a positive change. I have met youth who share the same vision and I have not only learned from the facilitators but other colleagues who are doing amazing. The structure of the course and the facilitators have been so professional and the content taught is compelling. I have learned about good leadership, teamwork, and the power of diversity through the training. Before i did not know the steps in lobbying but now I know because of the program.

**Tinomuda Daphne Gora**

## What Worked well during the Program

The Youth Activators Lab (YAL) implemented several successful strategies that contributed to the program's effectiveness and impact:

### 1. Structured Program Activities Outline:

- A comprehensive program outline created by the program coordinator documented key topics, dates, additional reading materials, learning objectives, and planned projects over the 12 months.
- This structure allowed associates to plan ahead, stay informed, and approach each session with preparation and clarity.

### 2. Effective Communication Channels:

- Associates received monthly notifications via email and WhatsApp, detailing session topics, facilitators, and objectives, ensuring they were well-informed and prepared.
- A WhatsApp broadcast list created by the program coordinator helped to deliver private messages directly to associates, effectively capturing their attention for important updates.

### 3. Quarterly Surveys:

- Quarterly surveys provided valuable feedback from associates, helping to gauge their experience and make necessary adjustments to the program. However, it was most effective during the mid year and end of programme.

### 4. Engaging Facilitators and Platform:

- The facilitators and the use of the Zoom platform created an interactive and accessible learning environment, which helped the associates especially with recordings.

### 5. Code of Conduct Enforcement:

- A signed code of conduct bound associates to program expectations, streamlining the removal process for those who could not meet the requirements, ensuring program integrity and commitment. It ensured there was no back and forth with the associates.

### 6. High-Level Engagement Opportunities:

- Some Associates had access to physical high-level meetings and events, which enhanced their networking, public speaking, and stakeholder engagement skills.
- These opportunities allowed associates to amplify their voices and actively contribute to critical discussions with prominent stakeholders.

#### 7. Hands-On Program Involvement:

- Associates co-designed and executed programs with NGYouthSDGs, serving as panel speakers, moderators, rapporteurs, event volunteers, ushers, writers, and content creators.
- This practical experience significantly boosted their project planning and implementation skills.

#### 8. Collaborative Group Work:

- Group projects enhanced associates' teamwork and leadership skills.
- Through these activities, associates researched, developed policy briefs, and created educational articles, which they could present to stakeholders and share to inspire youth-driven social change.
- The collaborative approach fostered among associates during group work emphasized the importance of teamwork and collective effort in achieving shared goals.

#### 9. Social Media Post of Associates:

- Encouraging associates to post their learnings on social media brought increased visibility and publicity to both the program and the organization, highlighting their impact and reach.

## Immediate Impact/Outcome

- **Enhanced Skill Set:** Associates acquired critical skills in project management, systemic thinking, fundraising, advocacy, and leadership, empowering them to implement social impact initiatives in their communities effectively.
- **Professional Growth:** 93.1% of associates reported significant personal and professional development, showcasing the immediate impact of the program in enhancing their capacity for leadership and problem-solving.
- **Increased Visibility and Recognition:** Through awards, fellowships, and leadership roles, several associates gained recognition, elevating their profiles and positioning them as emerging leaders in the development sector.
- **Practical Application of Knowledge:** Associates co-designed and executed projects, created policy briefs, and wrote educational articles, demonstrating their ability to translate learning into actionable outcomes.
- **Networking and Stakeholder Engagement:** Participation in high-level meetings and collaborations with NGYouthSDGs allowed associates to build valuable networks and engage with prominent stakeholders, strengthening their influence and voice.
- **Grant Acquisition:** Securing \$10,500 in external grants directly supported associates' advocacy, research, and project implementation efforts, fostering immediate community-level impact.

## Long-Term Impact

- **Sustainable Community Change:** Equipped with the skills and networks from YAL, associates are positioned to lead long-term initiatives that address systemic issues, drive policy change, and inspire youth-led development.
- **Pipeline of Leaders:** By graduating 28 young leaders, the program has created a pool of well-trained young leaders who can contribute to Nigeria's sustainable development goals and influence youth engagement at various levels.
- **Institutional Impact:** Associates' contributions to policy briefs, articles, and projects have laid a foundation for systemic change in youth rights and women empowerment, with the potential to influence future policies and programs. The materials can be used to engage lawmakers.
- **Global Representation:** Through international fellowships and recognition, associates are now part of global networks, bringing attention to Nigerian youth issues and fostering cross-border collaboration on shared challenges.
- **Capacity for Scaling Impact:** The experience and success stories of associates can inspire and mentor future cohorts, creating a ripple effect of leadership development and community-driven solutions.
- **Programmatic Growth:** The feedback, learning, and outcomes from this cohort set a precedent for refining and scaling the program, enhancing its reach and impact in subsequent years.

## Challenges

- **Delayed Responses from Referees:** Some referees of associates did not complete the required recommendation forms on time, causing delays during the onboarding process.
- **Commitment Issues:** A few associates were simultaneously involved in multiple external fellowships and programs, which impacted their level of commitment to YAL. Associates who missed more than three learning sessions without notice were eventually removed from the program to maintain standards.
- **Disparity in High-Level Engagement Opportunities:** Due to geographic limitations, not all associates could attend high-level meetings and events. The states who had these opportunities were only Lagos, Abuja-FCT, Ogun, and Ondo. This disparity created unequal opportunities for participation and representation at critical engagements.
- **Feedback and Reflection Gaps:** Some associates did not consistently fill out feedback forms for monthly learning sessions, which affected the accuracy and depth of response analysis. While some associates completed pre-learning session feedback forms, they did not always follow up with post-session forms. Additionally, with the shift from submitting reflections in private documents to posting them on social media, not all associates complied, leading to inconsistent reflection documentation.
- **Funding Challenges:** Despite multiple efforts to secure grants, the program did not receive external funding throughout the one-year implementation, which limited resources for scaling and enhancing the program.
- **Accessibility Barriers:** The volunteer sign language interpreter for the cohort was not consistently available, which affected the participation of the associate who is deaf and highlighted the need for more reliable accessibility measures.

## Recommendations and Lessons Incorporated for next Cohort

- **Delayed Responses from Referees:** For the next cohort, the selected associates were made to provide the information of their referees while they filled the interest form sent to them. The referees were also sent reminders and the selected applicants were told to also follow up with their referees. This significantly aided the process as the referee details were provided early.
- **Commitment Issues:** During the development of the application questions for cohort 2025, few questions such as 'How many fellowships/leadership programmes are you currently involved in' were used to identify applicants that would have commitment issues during the program. There were applicants who stated they were involved in more than 3 programs. This process helped to streamline the possibility of having associates that would be committed to the programme.
- **Disparity in High-Level Engagement Opportunities:** Associates get to attend virtual events; however, more effort can be put towards reaching out to CSOs in each state and state government agencies for invitations to their events, stakeholders meetings. This can improve the number of participation in high-level engagements per state.
- **Feedback and Reflection Gaps:** Create query forms and share with associates who default. This can show the seriousness of the activity. For social media reflections, create templates and monitor compliance regularly while spotlighting those who post regularly.
- **Funding Challenges:** A pitch deck was created to help speak to the benefits of sponsoring the program. This can be used to approach potential funders/donors. In addition, diversify fundraising strategies by involving corporate sponsors, crowdfunding campaigns, and partnerships with local organizations.

## Conclusion

The Youth Activators Lab (YAL) has proven to be a transformative leadership and capacity development program, equipping young Nigerians with the skills, knowledge, and networks needed to drive systemic change and address critical societal challenges. The 2024 cohort exemplified this impact through their dedication, growth, and accomplishments.

With 28 graduates out of 33 onboarded associates, the program successfully delivered 10 core learning sessions, three global webinars, and mentorship opportunities, fostering significant professional and personal development for 93.1% of participants. The associates' involvement in co-designed projects, high-level stakeholder engagements, and the creation of impactful policy briefs and educational articles demonstrated their ability to translate learning into actionable outcomes. Their achievements, including securing \$10,500 in grants, receiving prestigious awards, and earning placements in global fellowships, underscore the program's immediate impact on their growth and visibility.

Despite challenges such as commitment issues, funding limitations, and accessibility barriers, the program's structured approach, effective communication strategies, and hands-on learning opportunities ensured its overall success. Key lessons from these challenges will inform future cohorts, helping to build a more inclusive, robust, and impactful program.

The long-term impact of YAL extends beyond the immediate outcomes. By nurturing a pipeline of skilled young leaders, fostering community-driven solutions, and positioning associates in global leadership roles, the program contributes meaningfully to Nigeria's sustainable development goals. Moreover, the associates' experiences and accomplishments have set the stage for future cohorts to build on this legacy of excellence.

As YAL continues to evolve, its success lies in its ability to empower young change-makers to lead with purpose, collaborate effectively, and inspire transformative action in their communities and beyond. The 2024 cohort has laid a solid foundation, and their journey serves as a testament to the power of youth-driven leadership in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future.

# GET IN TOUCH WITH US

For any questions or concerns about the report kindly reach out to us. Also, feel free to stay connected to us to learn more about our work towards meaningful youth engagement, in Nigeria.

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