

A photograph of a young woman, Betany, as the background for the title. She is wearing an orange and grey baseball cap with 'CAPTAINS' written on it, a blue denim jacket, and a name tag that says 'Betany'. She is looking upwards with a smile. In the background, another person is blurred.

# TRANSFORMING LIVES, TOGETHER

STRATEGY 2025

# OUR VISION

*Young people inspired and equipped  
to realize the future they want*

# OUR MISSION

*To connect young people  
with opportunities to transform their lives*

# OUR VALUES

**INCLUSION** // *Consider all perspectives equally and honestly*

**INTEGRITY** // *Honor the best in ourselves and others*

**INSPIRATION** // *Move people to believe in better*

**INNOVATION** // *Make a difference, differently*

**IMPACT** // *Create change that matters*



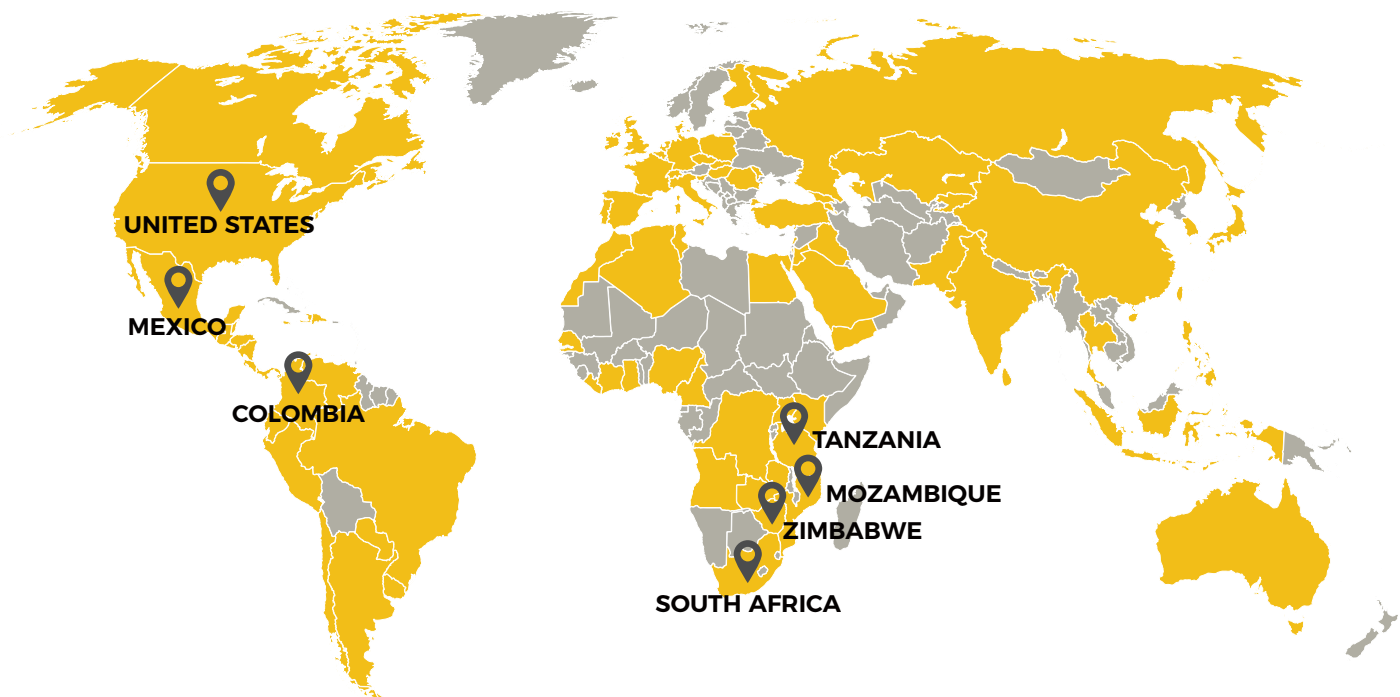
# INTRODUCTION

The International Youth Foundation® (IYF) stands by, for, and with young people. Our work is guided and fueled by the belief that young women and men everywhere possess dreams, ambition, and the same spark of potential. However, we also know that opportunities are not so equitably distributed. This means that far too many young people, often for reasons beyond their control, can't create the lives they desire for themselves and their families.

This is unacceptable, not only because youth everywhere deserve the opportunity to unlock their potential and realize the future they want, but also because educated, employed, and engaged young people are the world's best bet for solving the challenges that affect us—all of us—the most.

We envision a world in which all young people are inspired and equipped to transform their lives. For 30 years and counting, we have focused our youth development efforts on making this vision a reality. At IYF, we're *transforming lives, together*.

## 30 YEARS OF IMPACT



- IYF programs (since 1990)
- Locally-led IYF offices



7.7MM

YOUNG PEOPLE  
DIRECTLY SERVED

615

PARTNERS

105

COUNTRIES

30+

YEARS



# PARTNERING FOR PROGRESS

Tackling the world's toughest challenges is not something that needs to be undertaken alone—indeed, it must be done together. It will involve a concerted effort among diverse stakeholders in the youth development ecosystem: corporations and foundations, multilateral organizations and local leaders, communities and—most importantly—young people themselves.

IYF is unique in that we engage with all members of the ecosystem. Playing the role of **connector** and **convener**, we ensure that individual efforts are aligned, communication channels are open, and solutions include and respond to the real needs of young people. Individually, each actor in the ecosystem contributes something specific and essential—but it's when we work together, listening to and learning from each other, that we truly achieve transformation.

Throughout IYF's history, we have earned the trust of partners. This is due not only to the depth of our experience and expertise, or the proven effectiveness of the interventions we deliver, but also to our ability and willingness to listen, learn, and respond to real needs. Whether it's a multinational corporation, a community-based organization, or young people themselves, we meet our partners where they are, strive to understand the nuances unique to each context or challenge, and then work collaboratively to find the right, most sustainable solutions.

This is what it looks like to **transform lives, together**.

“IYF was able to see the work *Skills* does in a way that we—that I—hadn't considered before. And then they articulated it in a way that made an impact.”

— Marie Trzupek Lynch  
Founder and CEO, Skills for Chicagoland's Future

## SOME OF OUR PARTNERS



# TRANSFORMATION 2025

When the International Youth Foundation was created in 1990, the world was a very different place. For one thing, despite surging global unemployment among 15- to 24-year-old men and women and the early warning signs of generational displacement and social unrest, the development sector generally did not focus on teenagers or young adults. IYF entered the picture to change that.

Built on the premise that educated, employed, and engaged young people possess the power to solve the world's toughest problems, IYF pioneered an unusual approach to raising funds and awareness. We began by partnering not only with philanthropies, but also corporations that were beginning to recognize that social impact mattered to their business. At the same time, IYF broke ranks with most international nonprofits by choosing to work exclusively with locally-led organizations to deliver programs.

The recipe worked. Over the past three decades, IYF's network has grown from a single partner—Fundación Esquel in Ecuador—to more than 600 in over 100 countries today. More importantly, IYF programs have deepened and expanded to serve 7.7 million young people directly and an additional 12 million individuals indirectly. We're proud of what we've accomplished in our first 30 years. But we'll be the first to tell you: there's plenty of work left to do. That's why we've created

“Young people can serve as our greatest catalysts for change, yet we've allowed too many barriers to stand in their way. This must change.”

—Susan Reichle  
President & CEO  
International Youth Foundation

*Transformation 2025*, a strategic plan to guide our efforts over the next few years—and beyond.

To start, we recognize that the world has changed around us. With more than 1.2 billion young people now on the planet—21 percent of whom are not in school, work, or training—we must increase our scale and impact.\* The stakes are high.

The citizens of the world face an uncertain future. The situation is especially acute for young people struggling to find their way through a shifting political and cultural landscape. We know they yearn to contribute to society in meaningful ways, but too often they're being prepared for the world that was, not the world that is—much less the world that will be.

As you can see from the framework on the facing page, we've set an ambitious *goal* whereby young people will exercise greater agency, access more and better economic opportunities, and benefit from systems that are more youth inclusive and responsive. We built our three *strategic objectives* to drive towards this holistic goal, and they acknowledge the critical importance of finding ways to help young people overcome the significant *barriers* currently standing in their way.

It's gratifying to know that IYF is no longer a singular force in the area of youth development. Many strong and purposeful organizations are now working to develop solutions to the challenges young people face, and we welcome them to the movement. Given our history and track record of programmatic impact, we're excited to fuel our new strategy with a set of *unique assets* that we continue to refine to meet the day's challenges and opportunities.

And finally, the five *grounding principles* underpinning our strategic framework connect us to our heritage and will keep us clear-eyed and consistent in our approach. Central to these principles is partnership. Whether we're talking about foundations, corporations, multilateral organizations, government agencies, community-based organizations, fellow global nonprofits, or young people themselves, collaboration is going to be the key to success at scale.

We can achieve the ultimate goals of *Transformation 2025*—greater agency, more economic opportunities, and inclusive systems—only if every one of us stands by, for, and with young people.

\* UN: Inability to find appropriate jobs is causing young people to withdraw from the workforce. (2019, April). Retrieved November 8, 2019, from Economic Analysis & Policy Division | Dept of Economic & Social Affairs | United Nations website: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-april-2019-briefing-no-125/>

# STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

## GOAL

By 2025, young people will exercise greater **agency** and access more and better **economic opportunities**, and **systems** will be more youth inclusive and responsive.

## EXTERNAL BARRIERS

Young people are not aware of or able to act on their agency

Young people cannot access or create economic opportunities

Systems are not preparing young people for work or life

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1

Youth agency, youth-led initiatives, and youth ability to influence systems are strengthened

2

Youth economic opportunities are expanded through access to market-responsive skills and services

3

Systems are more youth inclusive and responsive

## UNIQUE ASSETS

Collaborative strategies to drive systems change

Youth-informed digital solutions

Highly experiential life skills curricula

Demand-driven workforce development programs

Networks to accelerate youth social entrepreneurship

Tools for gender equity and social inclusion

## GROUNDING PRINCIPLES

We engage young people as partners

We work with and through local actors

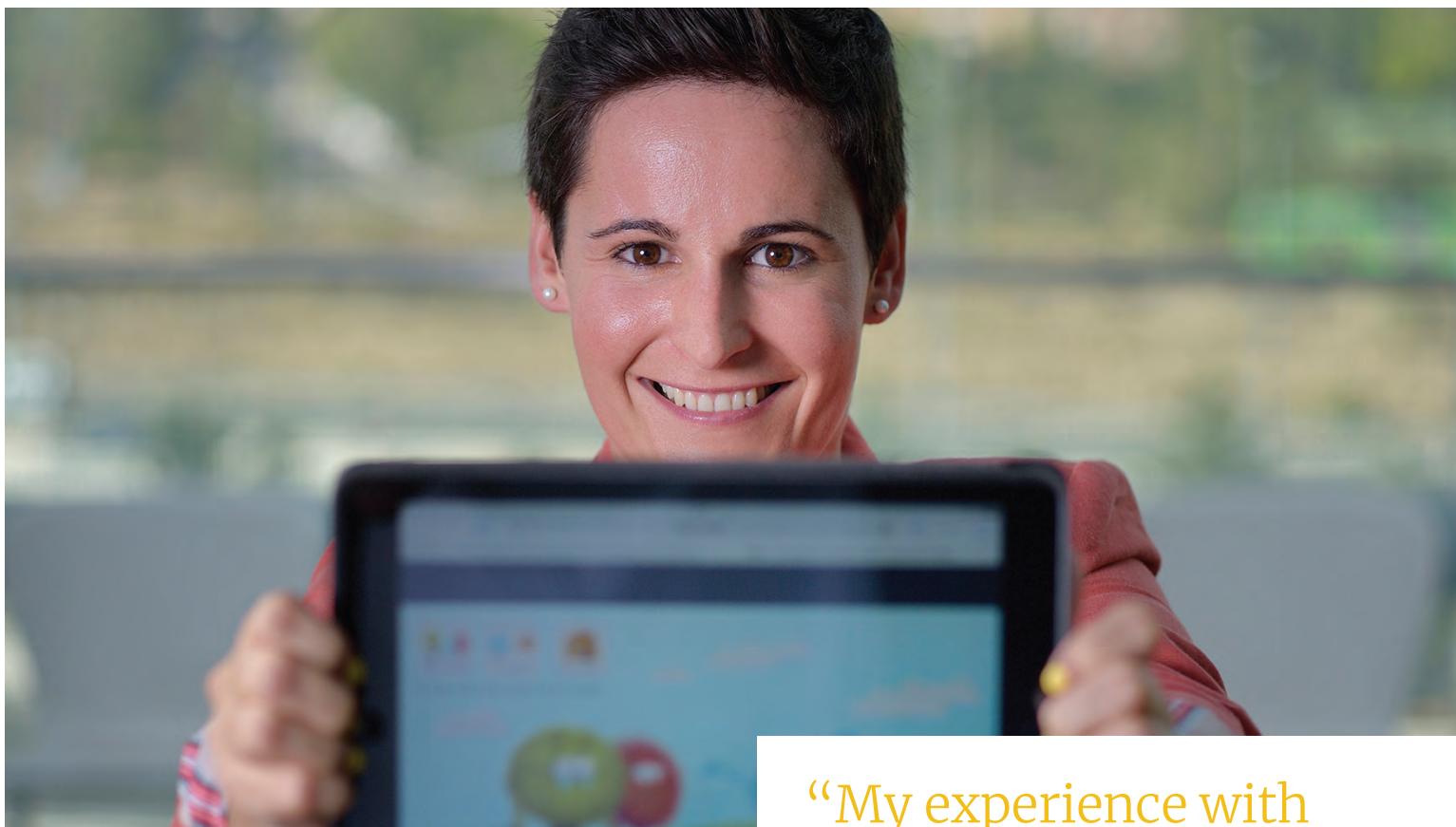
We advance Gender Equity and Social Inclusion

We partner for success at scale

We measure impact and share what we learn

# OBJECTIVE 01: YOUTH AGENCY

*Helping Young People Unlock Their Highest Potential*



Youth agency is the desire and ability of young people to make decisions and drive change—in their own lives, in their communities, and in their larger spheres of influence. To have agency, young people need to believe in themselves, know how to work effectively with others, and understand the challenges and opportunities in the world around them. Too often, however, youth are not even aware that agency is their right. They don't understand that they possess a voice that—productively raised—can make a real difference. They cannot fathom that they have the capacity to instigate change. At IYF, we believe that teens and young adults who discover and exercise their agency are problem solvers, not problems to be solved, and they can ultimately become the architects of their own future.

## AN INVESTMENT IN YOUTH AGENCY IS AN INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL CHANGE.

According to IYF's Global Millennial Viewpoints Survey of 7,600 youth in 30 countries, young people in both developed and developing nations overwhelmingly report that they care about gender equity, human rights, and civic transparency, among other socially responsible values. At the same time, they feel ill-equipped to turn their passion into meaningful action. This disconnect is at the core of the youth agency challenge we all face.

“My experience with IYF helped me believe for the first time that I could spend my life leading change.”

—Miriam Reyes  
Co-founder, Aprendices Visuales, Spain

Unquestionably, equipping young people to act on their values has a ripple effect across families and communities. When young people possess life skills, they learn how to navigate our rapidly changing world. When they learn how to express themselves clearly, they find they can resolve conflicts more easily. When they volunteer in their neighborhoods and engage with adults, they become role models for siblings and friends. When provided with opportunities to lead, they



come up with innovative approaches to addressing community issues. And when they're informed about their rights, they're better able to hold leaders and systems accountable on issues of injustice.

Across all socio-economic backgrounds, young people who become civically engaged experience boosts in both their educational attainment and the income levels they achieve in adulthood.\* Activities such as volunteering, voting, and community engagement can be both formative experiences and pathways to future opportunities. And when young people get involved in their communities, their towns, and their nations, the world becomes a better—and more just—place.

## TO ADVANCE YOUTH AGENCY, IYF CONVENES AND CONNECTS YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS.

Unlocking agency is a two-way street. Dependent on mutually beneficial interaction between young people and adults, IYF designs youth agency initiatives to address the needs and aspirations of both sets of people. After all, it's not enough to prepare young people to see and interact with the world differently; we also need to prepare the world to see and interact with young people differently.

IYF programs equip young people and adults of all backgrounds and circumstances to come together to identify the goals they have in common and capitalize on their respective strengths to attain them. In schools and cities, in families and communities, with governments, nonprofits and the private sector, IYF is shaping a world where adults not only value young people, but seek their input.

We help young people identify, process, and understand the problems that directly impact their lives and communities. And then we encourage them to participate in service learning and volunteer opportunities to play a role in tackling those issues.

We help young people increase their self-awareness, build life and socio-emotional skills, and practice inclusive attitudes toward others. And then we encourage them to step up as leaders in their communities, lending their voices to the larger policy dialogue and creating inclusive and impactful social ventures.

Whether it's neighborhoods, schools, industries, or the national government, we help young people learn how systems work. And then we connect them with opportunities to develop their advocacy skills so they can act as agents of change in their communities and beyond.

## YOUTH AGENCY IN ACTION

The YouthActionNet® Initiative



2,000+

YOUNG SOCIAL  
ENTREPRENEURS

24

YOUTH LEADERSHIP  
INSTITUTES

94

COUNTRIES

1.7MM

LIVES IMPACTED

In 2001, IYF launched YouthActionNet®, founded on the belief that youth are uniquely positioned to build a more just and inclusive world. The initiative ensures that aspiring and accomplished young leaders gain the support they need to deliver on their social change goals. In fact, more than 2,000 young leaders in 94 countries have already benefited from the leadership training, funding, networks, and resources we provide.

Today, our Cohort 2030 and Strategic Alliance Initiatives build on this legacy of nurturing young leaders as they tackle urgent social challenges. In partnership with the **Rockefeller Foundation** and **Carnegie Mellon University**, Cohort 2030 aims to advance the globally adopted Sustainable Development Goals. The Strategic Alliance Initiative is a consortium of youth-led social ventures partnering with IYF to drive impact and innovation on pressing global issues. The Alliance represents 20 countries and an array of areas, including health, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and education.

\* Ballard, P. J., Hoyt, L. T., & Pachucki, M. C. (2018). Impacts of Adolescent and Young Adult Civic Engagement on Health and Socioeconomic Status in Adulthood. *Child Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12998>

# OBJECTIVE 02: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

## *Sparking Access to a Brighter Future*



The 1.2 billion young people in the world today represent a wellspring of energy, enthusiasm, and potential. Unfortunately, not all young people receive the same opportunities to unlock that potential and earn a decent living. The most recent global data tells us young people are nearly twice as likely as adults to be unemployed, and 21 percent of youth are not in employment, education, or training.

As these numbers make clear, something must be done. That's why IYF works to ensure that young people everywhere can access the education, training, guidance, and connections required to successfully achieve economic security and independence.

### AN INVESTMENT IN YOUTH IS AN INVESTMENT IN A SHARED FUTURE.

In our rapidly changing world of work, no one knows for certain which jobs will become obsolete or emerge due to automation or which technical skillsets the marketplace will demand. What is clear, though, is the world's young people are eager to secure livelihoods that will help them create the futures they want. When young women and men have economic opportunities, they not only elevate themselves, but also their families, communities, and whole economic systems. The world is more connected than ever before, and our future is a shared one.

### IYF'S APPROACH TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IS LOCALLY DRIVEN, MARKET ALIGNED, AND YOUTH INCLUSIVE.

Whether it's formal wage employment, informal gig work, entrepreneurship, or some combination of the three, young women and men will choose employment paths based on a host of distinct factors. Similarly, the barriers they face in pursuit of their goals will also be unique.

IYF begins by identifying a target population's greatest challenges. These can include confronting racial and gender biases and stereotypes embedded in education and employment systems; poverty; structural barriers, such as geographic isolation; or market systems that exclude young people. We work with local partners to ensure equitable access to opportunities, which can mean integrating transportation and meal stipends, childcare services, psycho-social supports, and other wrap-around services.

Around the world, employers across sectors identify two critical skills gaps: in relevant technical skills and in life skills like critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. With these needs in mind, IYF's approach to facilitating economic opportunity includes connecting young people to technical training identified through market analysis and employer interviews. Our programs improve skills alignment and



equip young people to effectively contribute to a workplace, thrive in self-employment, or succeed in an entrepreneurial venture. Through our **Passport to Success®** (PTS) life skills training, young people develop timeless, transferable skills which allow them to recognize and control their emotions, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and set and achieve positive goals.

In addition to skills training, our interventions connect young people to support services that allow them to pursue their goals, whether it's accessing career counseling, learning how to write a CV, or gaining valuable insights for launching a business. We work with local partners to ensure young participants understand their livelihood options and receive personalized guidance that is grounded in the local reality.

Underpinning this work, IYF strengthens the capacities of the local organizations with whom we partner, creating stronger enabling environments. We provide local partners with proven tools, best practices, and curricula to support the delivery of effective, relevant, and youth-friendly services. We also promote equitable, youth-friendly workplaces and youth-informed decision making.

For young people to thrive economically, market systems must be youth inclusive, providing opportunities for youth to drive transformative change. While each market system presents unique challenges and opportunities, we aim to shift the way market systems function for the benefit of all system actors.

“At first when I came here I was shy. So PTS has given me the confidence to be able to speak to other people, to tell them my ideas in a respectful and positive manner.”

—Primrose Mfilitwa, Hilton Durban Team Member, South Africa

## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IN ACTION

Zimbabwe:Works Multi-stakeholder Alliance



29K

YOUNG PEOPLE  
SERVED

80%

OF INTERNS SECURED  
FULL-TIME JOBS

1,900

JOBS CREATED THROUGH START-UPS OR BY  
GROWING EXISTING YOUTH-OWNED BUSINESSES

With a special focus on reaching young women, Zimbabwe:Works prepared the country's marginalized young people to enter the workforce. Receiving initial funding from **USAID** and an additional commitment from **DFID** and the **Embassy of Sweden**, this initiative brought IYF into partnership with local nonprofits and companies to provide critical job readiness training. We also helped entrepreneurs succeed in self-employment through business coursework and access to microfinance savings and loan programs. Through use of IYF's locally adapted Passport to Success® curriculum, Z:W empowered young Zimbabweans with life skills such as increased self-esteem, and it promoted civic engagement. Throughout the initiative, which was a part of the global Youth:Work framework, IYF's capacity strengthening work guided our local partners to develop the business acumen to succeed and operate sustainably.



# OBJECTIVE 03: SYSTEMS CHANGE

## *Transforming Lives by Transforming Systems*

From educational systems that influence what gets taught in the classroom, to norms within labor markets that define which jobs are deemed appropriate or inappropriate for certain members of society, systems are a ubiquitous part of our world—and they don't always serve the best interests of young people. At IYF, we believe for young women and men to experience their own agency, transform their lives, and realize the future they want, the systems surrounding them must be made more relevant, inclusive, and responsive to their real aspirations, challenges, and needs.

### THE SCALE OF THE SOLUTION MUST ADDRESS THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE.

Through programmatic interventions—such as life skills and demand-driven technical training—thousands of young people can be better prepared and connected to opportunities. However, the scale of the youth unemployment challenge pushes into the millions, and moreover, after a program ends—usually within five years—the systemic challenges that necessitated the intervention often persist.

Systems change is the process of making positive, incremental changes to system components which, taken together, result in significant improvements in the way a system works to serve young people. When systems include young people—drawing on their experiences, insights, and enthusiasm—the resulting improvements benefit everyone. When the youth-inclusive components of market systems are strengthened, for example, the systems become more innovative, dynamic, competitive, and resilient; when educational systems equip young people with in-demand skills, employers are better able to fill positions with qualified candidates.

Systems change often takes longer than purely project-based approaches, requiring a generation shift; however, return on investment is dramatic. Impact can be lasting and sustainable, rippling far beyond a program's lifespan to benefit untold numbers of young people for decades to come.

### TO ACHIEVE THE GREATEST IMPACT, SYSTEMS CHANGE AT IYF IS TARGETED, HOLISTIC, AND SCALABLE.

First, we define the target population—a subset of young people—and determine which systems are most relevant and hold the greatest potential for serving the needs of the target population.

Next, using a host of diagnostic tools, IYF maps the connections between key components in the selected system, determines power dynamics between actors, gauges stakeholder interest in generating a more youth-responsive system, and decides how best to leverage existing system infrastructure and incentives to facilitate change, generate buy-in, and achieve scale and sustainability. Based on



these and other ecosystem-wide analyses, we develop a theory of change—a game plan of sorts—that is continuously updated and revised as the project moves forward.

As a convener, IYF builds consensus, facilitates collaboration, and manages multiple stakeholders from across sectors. Then, we design an initiative that delivers on each key stakeholder's vision and, most importantly, improves the selected system. Together, we develop, adopt, implement, and iterate innovative solutions to better serve young people and move the needle on systems change.

Lastly, we monitor the effects of implementations so adjustments can be made when necessary. We leverage metrics and analytics to promote scalable replication and expansion of promising practices among system stakeholders. Once a solution is adopted, IYF helps ensure that new policies, procedures, and practices take hold. We provide our partners ongoing support—helping strengthen internal capacities to foster sustainable, lasting change at scale.



“So far, we’ve built the capacity of over 400 teachers. ... I hope we can help governments understand the importance of investing in this approach so we can collaborate with them to transform education.”

—Victoria Ibiwoye, 25, Founder of One African Child

## SYSTEMS CHANGE IN ACTION

The Rutas Program



35K

YOUNG PEOPLE  
SERVED

32%

REDUCTION IN  
DROPOUT RATE

11

POLICIES CHANGED AT  
STATE & NATIONAL LEVELS

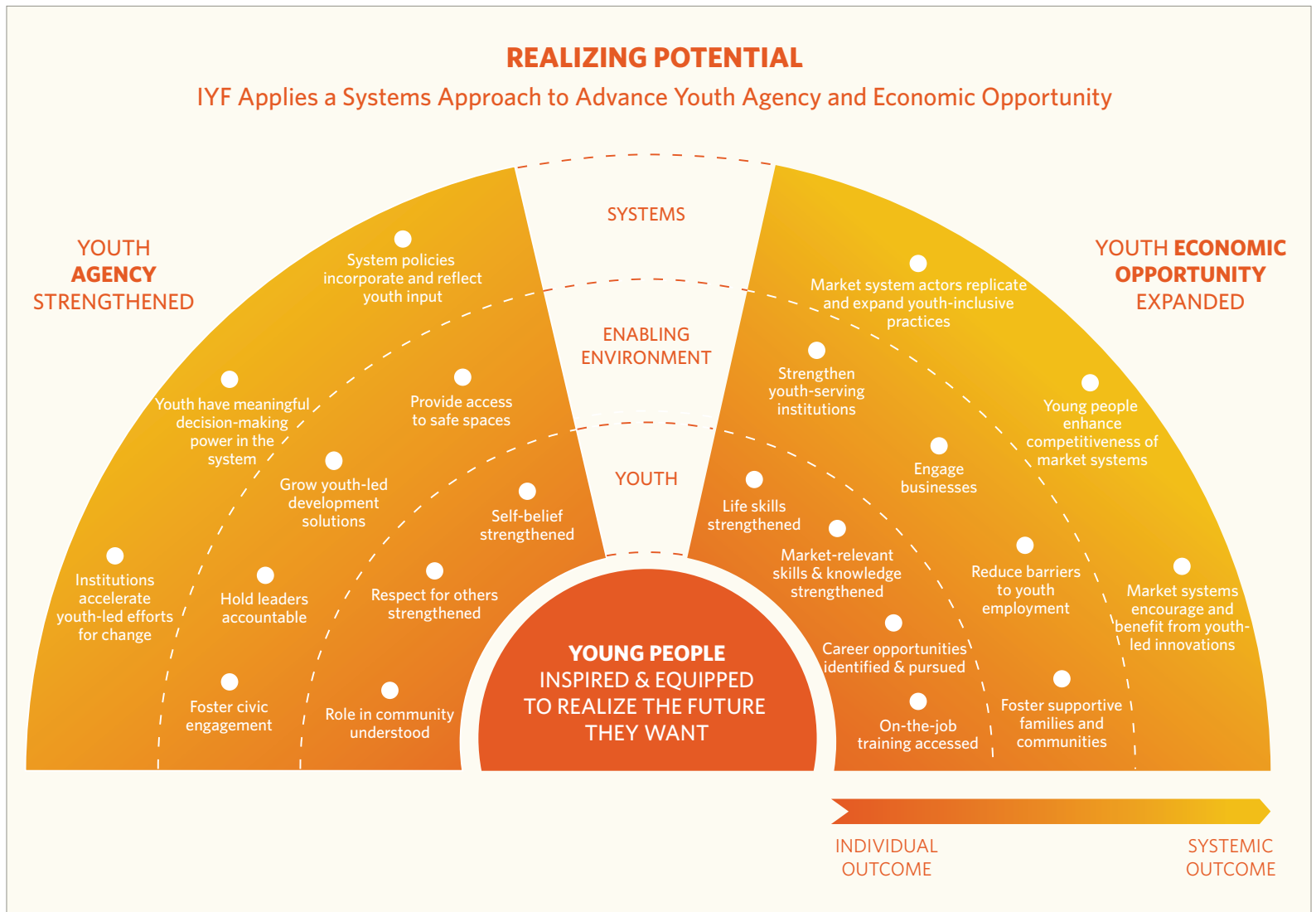
3,240

HOURS OF  
CURRICULUM ADOPTED

As part of IYF’s Rutas initiative, high school students in Mexico benefited from the integration of the Passport to Success® (PTS) life skills training into their daily curriculum. An impact evaluation revealed that after receiving PTS for one semester, students saw a 3.8 percent increase in GPA and a 32 percent reduction in dropout rates.

Supported by **USAID**, Rutas helped close the talent gap in the border states of Nuevo Leon and Chihuahua. Through the initiative, we reformed the technical upper secondary education system to be more in line with the needs of employers in key growth sectors, like the aerospace industry. Rutas was an associate project of the NEO initiative which was led by the **Inter-American Development Bank** and IYF and was supported by **Microsoft**, **Caterpillar Foundation**, and **Walmart**, among others. NEO improved employment opportunities for young people across Latin America.

# TRANSFORMATION 2025



Three interconnected strategic objectives power IYF’s mission: strengthening youth agency, expanding economic opportunity, and ensuring systems are more youth inclusive and responsive. Our initiatives help young people gain market-relevant technical and life skills, and they foster enabling environments and enhance the systems within which we all live and work. We actively engage young people in driving this change. Their insights, ideas, enthusiasm, and energy represent an integral part of every solution.

As we strive to meet our strategic objectives, we believe it’s important to hold ourselves accountable. Our work by, for, and with young people is rooted in effective performance measurement, evaluation, and learning. That means we use monitoring and performance measurement data to assess ongoing progress and the degree to which projects are achieving our objectives, to inform mid-course adjustments, and to make evidence-based decisions to maximize

project impact. In addition, our measurement, evaluation, research, and learning practice generates lessons that contribute to a wider conversation about positive youth development, which we share with other youth-serving organizations and institutions worldwide.

Around the world, the distinction between local and global is starting to blur. Challenges in one region have implications for others, and local solutions often have global applications—and vice versa. Young people understand these connections better than anyone. In their own communities and beyond, they are already leading the way, embracing and embodying the role of global citizens.

At IYF, we connect young changemakers around the world with the opportunities they need to realize their potential, transform their lives, and create the future they want—a future not only for themselves, but for all of us.







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