

THEORY OF CHANGE

A strategic framework encapsulating our current understanding of how change occurs and outlines necessary transformations exhibited by our partners, to benefit the youth. This Theory of Change helps us structure our learning and measurement efforts more effectively and inform strategic decisions for the evolving practice of the Fund.

Unpacking the Journey: FYL's Theory of Change Narrative

The ToC narrative below delves into the context, elucidating our change model and the rationale behind each step along the route. It explains how and why the different steps are interconnected, outlines the enabling factors, and identifies the risks and assumptions associated with the change we envision. This detailed explanation ensures a clear understanding of the processes and strategies that guide our efforts.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY YOUTH AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP?

Youth: At FYL, we define young people broadly as individuals aged 18 to 35. This inclusive range acknowledges that leadership journeys can start at different stages, especially for those who have faced identity-based or ability-based discrimination. Leadership journeys may begin later when youth start to understand the discriminations and demand change.

Youth Leadership: We recognize that youth leadership is diverse and context-specific. Leadership manifests in diverse ways, from self-discovery and building confidence to agency and personal growth. It can involve resisting societal challenges like underage marriage, rallying peers for community causes, or championing personal identity. Our approach values the unique and varied journeys of young people as they take ownership of their lives and make meaningful choices. We believe leadership is a dynamic spectrum of expression, enabling youth to shape their decisions and amplify their voices.

- **Leadership can be personal:** Standing up for one's beliefs, asserting one's identity, or defying societal norms can all be acts of leadership.
- **Leadership can be diverse:** Whether mobilizing a group to address sanitation issues, championing LGBTQIA+ rights, or pursuing self-discovery, leadership has countless forms.
- **Leadership is about agency, resilience and courage:** Young people must be enabled to define their goals, make informed decisions, and take action to achieve them.

BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE - THE VISION STATEMENT

The FYL Fund aims to foster youth leadership in South Asia by supporting organizations committed to Fulfilling or unlocking the potential of young people. These organizations enable South Asian young people with the skills, confidence and opportunities they need to make informed decisions and drive meaningful change in their lives and communities. By providing strategic support and fostering nurturing environments, we underscore the transformative value of youth leadership. This approach enables partner organizations to prioritize leadership development, equipping young people with the tools and resources to embark on and sustain impactful leadership journeys.

OUR APPROACH

FYL wishes in partnering with like-minded **organizations focused on youth leadership in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh** that share our vision. This involves providing these organizations with **boundless support**, i.e., to create accessibility for applicants of the FYL fund, without boundaries based on sector, geography, target audience, or the type of NGO (including its size, operating structure, or leadership model). Our accountability principle for boundless support is diverse, and equitable, recognizing the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and challenges faced by youth in South Asia. Through this process, the Fund seeks to create an ecosystem where youth leadership is celebrated, supported, and enabled, ultimately leading to positive transformation.

Our funding model is designed to be flexible, equity-driven, and rooted in **participatory grant-making**. It enables organizations to allocate funds according to their unique needs, fostering youth leadership effectively. At the core of our approach is a commitment to **trust-based relationships** with partner organizations, recognizing that they are best positioned to understand and address the grassroots needs of youth leadership development.

Recognizing the importance of shared agency and meaningful youth involvement, we have consciously shifted decision-making power dynamics. We employ **an end-to-end collaborative approach**, co-creating the Fund's operations and selection process with youth, youth leaders, and sector experts from India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. This diverse group forms our selection jury, which follows a rigorous selection process with specific eligibility criteria to shortlist organizations. Organizations advance to the final selection rounds only if they demonstrate a 'youth leadership focused' approach and uphold equitable and inclusive organizational and programmatic practices.

THE CORNERSTONES OF PARTNERSHIP - QUALITIES WE SEEK IN OUR PARTNERS

Our approach to advancing youth leadership is grounded in three cornerstones, shaped by our understanding of the ecosystem, its barriers, and the levers that drive change. We seek to invest in organizations that apply these different cornerstones, reflecting shared values and principles, fundamental for achieving impact.

Cornerstone 1: Foster a 'youth leadership focused' approach to support youth in the realization of the outcomes based on their aspirations

"We believe in enabling young people to set their own goals, make informed decisions, and take meaningful action. This journey fosters the realization of their true selves and living in accordance with reason and virtue, leading to deep fulfillment and purpose. It's not about seeking achievement or pleasure, though it may result; it's about the impact of cultivating young leadership over simply producing young leaders. This transformative journey can be incredibly powerful."

Why? The rationale: Investing in youth leadership cannot be driven solely by donor-defined outcomes, nor can it reduce young people to mere 'agents of social change.'

The true purpose of this investment is to enable young people with the skills and competencies to lead the realization of the outcomes they desire. We aim to build a common narrative recognizing leadership for its heterogeneous nuances, and appreciating the diverse forms and expressions. We hope to foster an environment where their voices and perspectives shape every stage of the process.

We are committed to fostering **meaningful participation** of youth throughout the lifecycle of initiatives, from conception to evaluation. This approach ensures that young people are not merely recipients of support but active contributors at every stage—whether during brainstorming, planning, implementation, or final evaluation. Youth participation is integral to achieving impactful and sustainable outcomes

What we seek: Organizations **focus on youth and keep youth leadership at the centre of their work**, viewing it as both the journey and the destination. This will ensure their efforts are aligned with the real needs and aspirations of young people, making the approach effective and sustainable.

Cornerstone 2: Recognize the diverse spectrum of identities and lived experiences of youth through an intersectional lens to ensure increased representation

“We believe young people and their leadership journeys are as diverse as their fingerprints. Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept but a dynamic mosaic shaped by the aspirations of young people, the needs of their communities, and the evolving realities of the world around them”

Why? The rationale: In South Asia, the intersecting realities of caste, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and disability create unique vulnerabilities and strengths for each individual. Recognizing this, FYL incorporates an **intersectional lens** to address the diverse realities, therefore ensuring that all youth feel represented, and everyone has the freedom to participate in building their leadership capabilities. By supporting organizations embedded within diverse communities and authentically advocating for their needs, we wish to amplify marginalized voices and ensure our initiatives are grounded in the lived experiences of the youth.

Our commitment to **diversity** also means actively seeking out and supporting organizations representing a broad spectrum of identities and experiences, creating an ecosystem of partner organizations of across different sectors. We want to work with youth groups, of different sizes and stages of development, that may belong to remote geographies across India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

What we seek: Our partners demonstrate **a deep understanding of the complex issues** across contexts, collaborate with the communities they work with, and are committed to tackling the underlying root causes when approaching youth leadership. They define their evolution and notion of youth leadership by considering their unique challenges and opportunities.

We value partners who **embrace evidence-based learning**, are open to experimenting with new approaches to unique challenges, and are willing to share their insights beyond their organizations.

While not a strict eligibility criterion, we encourage our partners to **maintain open and empathetic relationships with local leaders**. These leaders possess a profound

understanding of their community’s needs and can facilitate sustainable and equitable changes in the long run.

Cornerstone 3: Design responsive systems for decision-making by applying an equity and inclusivity lens to shift power dynamics and question traditional power structures

“We believe that every voice matters, every perspective enriches, and every youth deserves the opportunity to be heard and valued. Equity and inclusion are not just values; they are guiding principles in shaping every decision and every action, as we work towards an ecosystem of leadership where equity is upheld, and everyone has a seat at the table.”

Why? The rationale: Youth partnerships are often tokenistic, with young people not being adequately valued for their contributions and inputs. This reinforces power structures, marginalizes marginalized voices, and limits the effectiveness of youth-focused and youth-led initiatives. By prioritizing **an equity and inclusivity-based approach**, the FYL Fund ensures that all young people, regardless of their background, have the opportunity and support to take on decision-making roles and be engaged in meaningful ways. This also speaks to the importance of community voices in decision-making processes, ensuring that interventions are responsive to their unique contexts. This approach fosters greater ownership and sustainability of projects, as these are co-created with the youth.

What we seek: We support organizations that **meaningfully include youth** in their decision-making structures and processes.

We encourage simple yet important steps such as having **participatory processes** in place for decision-making where the needs of the young people are understood or soliciting suggestions about the organization’s programs.

This can be made possible through **creating feedback loops** via surveys, focus group discussions, and engagement activities. Moreover, it is important to demonstrate how organizations **ensure safety and security** so that the youth can bravely participate, tackle backlash, embrace setbacks as learning experiences, and share honest feedback

JOURNEY TO IMPACT – OUR THEORY OF CHANGE FRAMEWORK

Our Theory of Change (ToC) map outlines the steps toward achieving our larger vision i.e., every young person in South Asia is enabled with the skills and opportunities to exercise their voice, agency and rights within a safe and supportive ecosystem, enabling them to be on a path to achieve their full leadership potential and fulfil their aspirations.

We recognize the importance of adopting a comprehensive Field Building Approach for FYL in South Asia, as it is vital for creating a robust ecosystem that nurtures and sustains youth leadership. This approach aligns with the principles of collaboration, shared learning, and systemic change, which are essential for long-term success. However, at the pilot stage of the Fund, our primary focus is on providing resources, such as flexible and long-term funding, to youth-focused organizations. This initial emphasis is a critical step in supporting immediate needs and ensuring foundational stability.

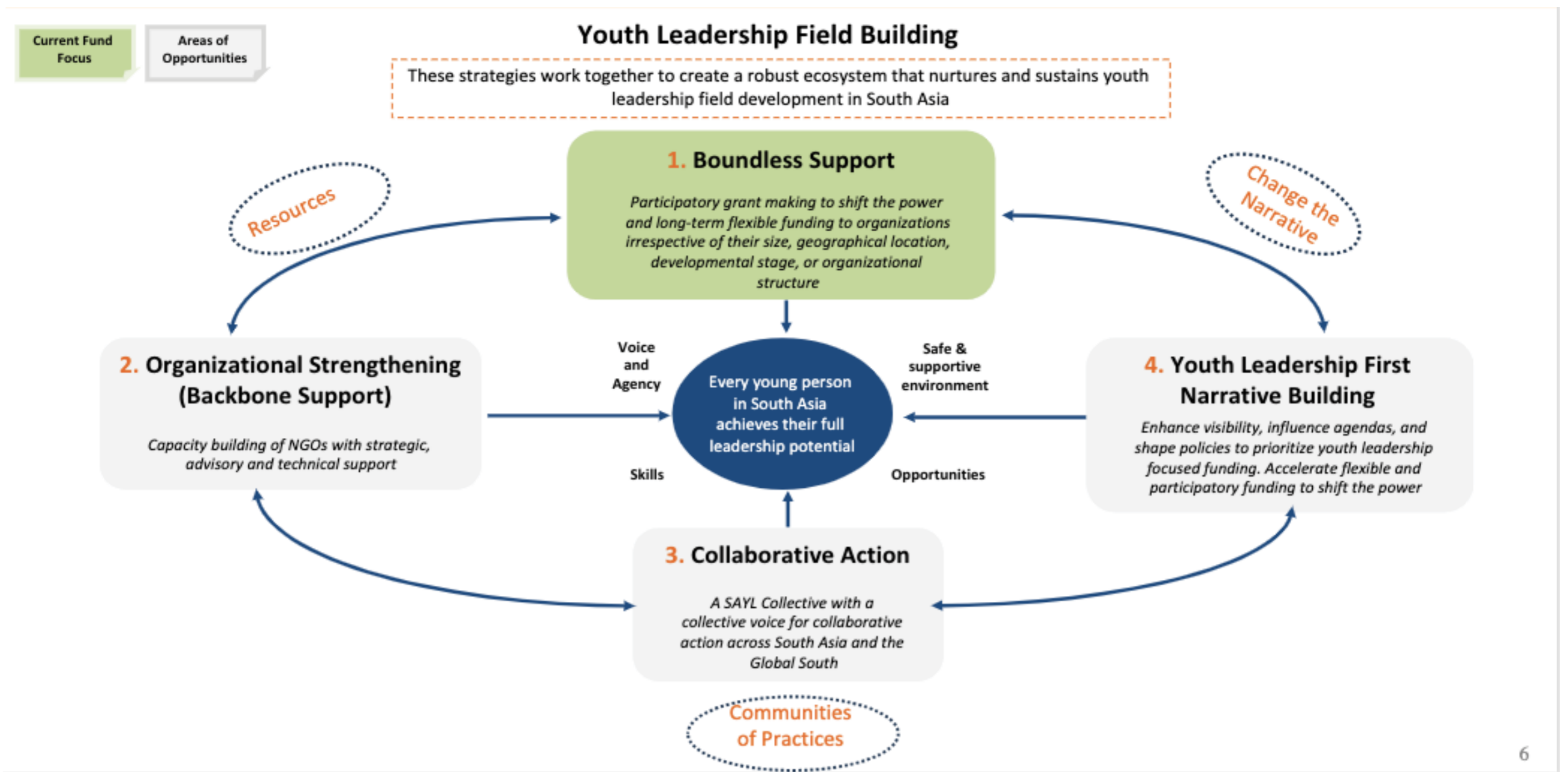


Figure 1: Drawing from the Field Building Approach to Visualise Change

Note: The Field Building Approach is an important systems change tool introduced by the Bridgespan Group. It is a coalition-based approach to changing systems to realize equitable and durable outcomes at scale. To know more: <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/field-building-for-equitable-systems-change>

Yet, to holistically achieve our vision, it is crucial to also engage in other key strategies, including providing capacity building support, building communities of practice, and driving narrative change. These areas are essential for bringing in resiliency in youth focused organizations and in fostering a broader cultural and policy shift towards valuing youth leadership.

Therefore, we see significant opportunities in expanding our

efforts to include these additional strategies, and something for the Fund to consider as it continues in this landscape. This holistic approach will amplify the voice and agency of youth, enhance organizational resilience, and position South Asia as a powerful influencer in the global youth leadership landscape.

Keeping this in mind, below is our representation of the FYL's Theory of Change model.

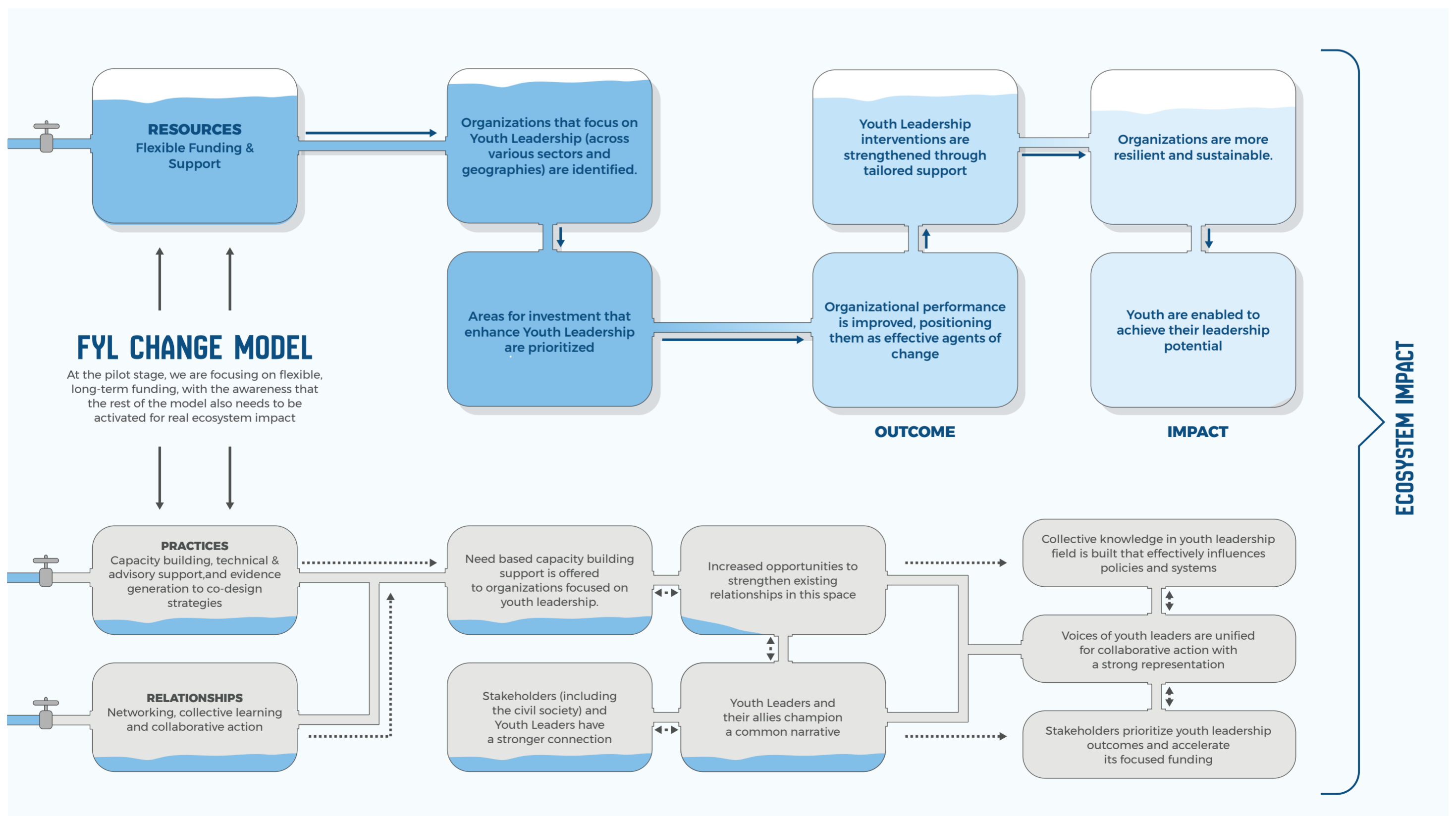


Figure 1: Drawing from the Field Building Approach to Visualise Change

Note: The Fund's current focus area is marked in blue, while grey areas represent essential factors critical in achieving this collective broader vision, enhancing the youth leadership ecosystem. Terms: SA - South Asia, YL - youth Leadership

At the pilot stage of the Fund, we recognise that our accountability lies with organizations focused on youth leadership through the resources that we are providing, which is **flexible funding**. However, we are aware that the rest of the model also needs to be activated for real ecosystem impact.

To highlight this, our ToC map marks the Fund's current focus area in blue. The changing gradient of blue from input to impact illustrates the reduced control over the path due to interconnected factors.

These interconnected factors, marked in grey, are critical to achieving the Fund's broader vision, as they encompass essential components of practices and relationship building that enhance the ecosystem around youth leadership. While the Fund's current interventions focus primarily on direct resource provision, the dotted arrows indicate pathways where the Fund currently has limited direct influence but recognizes as essential for holistic success.

The Theory of Change is a living document, and if and as our operations foster an enabling ecosystem that drives impactful interventions, we will refine our contributions in line with the dotted lines and the areas of opportunity identified through research, evaluation, and evidence-based approaches.

It's important to note that our map is a simplified, linear representation of change. We are aware that the systems in which we operate are complex, with cyclical and nonlinear connections. This understanding informs our flexible and adaptive approach to achieving meaningful and lasting impact.

PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVING OUR VISION – FROM INPUT TO IMPACT

The Fund envisions three key inputs that are crucial to achieve its overarching vision. While the current focus is on providing resources, it is important to imagine them as contributing interchangeably as that will be instrumental towards the development of the outputs and the overarching outcomes holistically. The inputs are:

- **Resources**, which are direct resources provided in the form of flexible funding and long term support
- **Practices**, in the form of capacity building support, technical assistance, advisory support and co-designing of strategies
- **Relationship building**, that includes support with building networks, dialogue platforms, archiving best practices and developing a knowledge repository to influence the ecosystem

These inputs are across program efficiency, organizational sustainability, and network creation.

The ToC is rooted in two important pathways:

1. Supporting organizations build better responsive programmes and systems: Supporting partners to improve their organizations at three levels (organizational and programmatic)
2. Supporting in network creation, peer learning and documentation: Furthering partners' connections with other stakeholders at a South Asia level, starting at the local level with the aim of creating an ecosystem level of network

Currently, the Fund is primarily focused on providing direct resources. **With this in mind, the pathway from input to impact is envisioned specifically through the lens of resource allocation.** This involves outlining the anticipated outputs, outcomes, and impacts of this direct intervention.

However, as the gradient of blue lightens along this path, it signifies a reduced level of control due to various interconnected factors. These factors introduce complexity and influence the degree to which the Fund can directly shape outcomes, emphasizing the importance of understanding and navigating these broader influences.

The areas for outputs, outcomes and impact that can be achieved through the areas of opportunities are highlighted in boxes.

Outputs: Degree of Influence

- *The Fund identifies organizations that focus on youth leadership in South Asia across diverse geographies and various sectors that prioritise equity and intersectionality in their approach to youth leadership, keeping youth at the centre of their work*
- *Organizations prioritise their needs, focus on youth leadership and allocate funds towards their own sustainability, allowing them to advance in youth leadership initiatives more effectively*

These outputs are imagined to be achieved through the direct intervention of the Fund at this stage, and therefore is highlighted in the darkest gradient of blue.

The participatory, open and equitable process of selecting organizations is an important precondition for the realization of expected outputs. Once the Fund on-boards organizations that share the same view to youth leadership and organizations become partners - receiving our flexible funding would allow them to start and or/better prioritise their journey towards youth leadership focussed interventions in a more systematic manner.

Outputs: Degree of Influence

The ToC recognises that by providing 'practices' support via capacity building and relationship building support, the Fund would also be able to achieve the following outputs

- *Need-based and contextual capacity building support is offered to organizations focused on youth leadership*
- *Increased opportunities for organizations to build and strengthen existing relationships in the youth leadership space*

As an area of opportunity, the Fund can connect the new organizations with its established network of organizations and other relevant actors for an enabling ecosystem. This initiative provides opportunities for them to build and strengthen relationships. This essential component of support fosters learning and encourages organizations to collaborate for greater impact.

We also recognise that to truly help the organizations realise their potential of creating programmes with a stronger intentional focus on youth leadership, it would be essential to provide capacity building support. This is represented as the dotted linkage arrow in Figure 2.

The outputs are visualised to help achieve the following outcomes.

Outcomes: Degree of Influence

- *Organizational performance is improved, positioning them as effective agents of change for youth leadership in South Asia*
- *Youth leadership interventions are strengthened through tailored support*

Through interventions such as resource provision, organizations have the flexibility to allocate funding according to their immediate needs, whether for programmatic or organizational development with a youth leadership focus. This support enables organizations to enhance their knowledge and capacity, allowing them to create actionable, goal-driven plans. They also strengthen their internal systems and processes, resulting in more targeted youth leadership outcomes. For some organizations, this may involve diversifying their funding sources.

While certain changes may take time and depend on specific needs, some partners may require additional resources beyond what the Fund provides. This is why the gradient colours for outcomes are lighter, indicating less direct control over the results.

As organizations gain confidence and improve their planning and management systems, they become more adept at learning and adapting. This transformation enhances their ability to systematically document and demonstrate their impact. By capturing and reflecting on these lessons, organizations are better equipped to share resources and knowledge effectively, fostering a cycle of continuous improvement and positive learning.

Outcomes: Degree of Influence

- *Organizations have new and strengthened relationships and improve their capacity to systematically document evidence of their work, share resources, build collective repository of good practices, and expand their networks in South Asia*
- *Youth leaders and their allies are more visible and champion a common narrative*
- *Stakeholders (including civil society + youth leaders + youth focussed organizations) create a South Asia collective that have strengthened connections and share knowledge and resources*

With the area of opportunity output of providing need-based and contextual capacity-building support to partners and increasing opportunities for partners to build and strengthen relationships in the youth leadership space, organizations can develop new and stronger connections. This enhances their capacity to systematically document evidence of their work, share resources, compile a collective repository of best practices, and expand their networks across South Asia.

Such support can lead to the creation of a South Asia collective of civil society members, youth leaders, and organizations focused on youth leadership, fostering stronger connections and sharing knowledge and resources. As a result, youth leaders and their allies become more visible as champions for a unified youth leadership narrative. For those interested in expanding their networks, relationship-building support can help establish new or strengthen existing connections at local, regional, or ecosystem levels.

We recognize the importance of collective action in achieving a unified narrative on youth leadership and unlocking

systemic changes in this area. However, since the Fund currently cannot directly influence these outcomes, the Theory of Change diagram represents these opportunities with dotted lines and in grey colour, indicating they are areas of opportunity rather than direct control.

The outcomes are visualised to help achieve the following impact indicators:

Impact: Degree of Influence

- *Organizations improve performance in advancing youth leadership and are more resilient and sustainable*
- *Youth are enabled to achieve their leadership potential*

The FYL Fund fosters long term, trust-based relationships with partner organizations, enhancing their performance, community reach, and the quality of their interventions. These relationships contribute significantly to the sustainability and resilience of these organizations. While these outcomes are anticipated as a result of long-term resources support, they are also influenced by broader interconnected factors. As such, the degree of influence is represented by the lightest gradient of blue, reflecting the shared responsibility and collaboration required to achieve these impact indicators beyond the Fund's current scope

Impact: Degree of Influence

- *Collective knowledge in the youth leadership field is built that effectively influences policies and systems*
- *Voices of youth leaders are unified for collaborative action with a strong representation*
- *Stakeholders prioritize youth leadership outcomes and accelerate its focused funding*

The areas of opportunities for the ecosystem impact show the following - by participating in the development of a youth leadership - focussed ecosystem and engaging in repository creation and networking activities, these organizations and young leaders gain greater visibility and are better equipped to influence decision making systems related to youth leadership. Organizations focused on youth leadership, youth leaders and their allies have a common voice and are more visible as advocates for driving a common narrative on the core idea of what it means to invest in youth leadership to guide the work of a diverse but complementary set of actors. A robust, credible, participative collaborative, and adaptable knowledge base is created that informs the field's strategy and acts as a strong point of reference. Influence stakeholders to prioritize Youth Leadership outcomes, & accelerate Youth Leadership focused funding.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

Our ToC is built on several assumptions that underpin our strategy and approach. These assumptions explain the journey towards our intended impact and outcomes. It is based on these assumptions that

Impact

- Changes to social, cultural, economic, and political structures and systems for an enabling environment for partner's work to remain sustainable.
- Organizations focused on youth leadership are core agents of change and have that significant influence on youth to enable them in realising their agency in decision making,

and at the same time influence socio-behavioural changes in recognising equitable youth and adult partnerships amongst families, communities and the larger society

Outcomes level

- We believe that local, organizations focussed on youth leadership know the ground level realities and challenges faced by youth and therefore, investing in them, when they need the investment, the most is the most effective approach to drive positive youth leadership solutions and outcomes
- Collaborative platforms accelerate learning, innovation, and adaptation. We believe that organizations have the willingness and capacity to engage in sustained collective

action to drive meaningful change. Furthermore, we trust that participation in an FYL-facilitated network will yield long-term benefits, with any potential challenges outweighed by the advantages of enhanced visibility, connectivity, and shared learning.

Output Level

- Organizations when they receive flexible, unrestricted funding will address the significant gaps that they are facing to achieve youth leadership outcomes
- By having an equitable, intersectional, inclusive and diverse lens to grant making, it will unleash a cohort of organizations that are willing to invest and improve outcomes in youth leadership

APPENDIX

This Theory of Change IS A:

- Strategic framework outlining our vision, goals, and methods for fostering youth leadership
- Living document that will evolve based on ongoing learning and feedback from stakeholders
- Guide for creating flexible, adaptive and equitable MEL system that emphasizes improvisation

This Theory of Change IS NOT A:

- Fixed or final blueprint that dictates specific actions or outcomes, with rigid accountability
- Traditional MEL framework focused on proving the worth of financial investments to donors
- Prescriptive models forcing projects into predefined moulds with no capacity for adjusting

HOW DO WE SEEK TO CATALYSE CHANGE?

We support organizations focused on youth leadership in accessing the necessary resources in an equitable, flexible, non-restricted, and sector-agnostic manner to use in training, mentorship, and program development that they believe is essential for effective youth leadership initiatives.

We adopt a boundless approach, providing long-term capital to organizations irrespective of size, geographical location (including remote areas), developmental stage, or organizational structure. We are committed to supporting 'youth-leadership first' organizations in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh; our accountability is linked to organizations that are youth leadership-focused, for ensuring our assistance is inclusive and adaptable in their unique contexts.

We aim to enable organizations to build resilience, providing them the flexibility to address the unique needs and aspirations of each young person they serve. Equitable funding mechanisms and an enabling environment can help

HOW WILL WE ENSURE THE TOC REMAINS A LIVING DOCUMENT?

We will conduct regular quarterly reviews and annual comprehensive assessments, incorporating feedback from stakeholders through consultations, surveys, and collaborative learning sessions.

This adaptive framework allows real-time adjustments based on new insights, ensuring continuous relevance and improvement. Transparent communication and documenting changes will maintain clarity and accountability.

organizations integrate youth centrality into their programming. Adequate resources can help view youth leadership as a transformative process and outcome. The approach will prompt organizations to move with a steadfast commitment towards agility and foresight for evolving with changing circumstances while remaining true to their mission.

Our long-term vision is for youth leadership to receive positive visibility and recognition in South Asia. It will create a common narrative about the importance of investing in youth leadership, considering the unique intersectional realities of South Asia that stem from caste, religion, gender identities, and vulnerabilities in remote and hard-to-reach communities. By documenting good practices, and allowing opportunities and platforms among youth-focused organizations – we aim to establish a South Asian network that promotes continuous learning and the creation of a comprehensive repository of resources. This network will guide the work of diverse but complementary actors in the ecosystem, ensuring a holistic approach to youth leadership development in the region.