



Evidence Building Exercise

School Youth Networks of Collaboration for Sustainable Solutions (SYNCS) Programme

February 1, 2018

World Vision Georgia

Acknowledgements

The School Youth Networks of Collaboration for Sustainable Solutions (SYNCS) Evidence Building Exercise is a result of a collaboration between CRRG-Georgia and World Vision Georgia. The CRRG-Georgia team would like to thank the following people for their support in carrying out the evaluation: Irina Grdzeldze Faith in Development Manager (WV Georgia), Dariko Bakhturidze Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Officer (WVSC), Irakli Giorbelidze Youth Technical Program Coordinator (WV Georgia), Kristine Ter-Abrahamyan Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Senior Coordinator (WVSC), and the MEER Evidence and Knowledge Management Team.

Affirmation

Except as acknowledged by the references in this paper to other authors and publications, the evaluation herein consists of our own work, undertaken to secure funding, implement the activities, describe and advance learning, as part of the requirements of World Vision's Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Learning System.

Primary data collected throughout the study remains the property of communities and families described in this document. Therefore, the information and data must be used only with the project beneficiaries' consent.

Executive Summary

Between February 2016 and January 2018, World Vision Georgia carried out the School Youth Networks of Collaboration for Sustainable Solutions (SYNCS) project in Georgia in cooperation with the Civic Development Institute (CDI), Marneuli Youth Centre, and Youth2Georgia. In addition, the action's associates included the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs (MSY) and Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). The project's overarching goal was to "contribute to improved and sustainable community-based solutions to targeted community needs through increased civic activism of public school students, universities, local governments and CSOs." The project had four primary components:

1. Youth (from school clubs, school self-governance bodies, youth-led CSOs) were trained on leadership development, effective communication, advocacy and child and youth rights;
2. The project established proactive partnerships between community adults (municipality representatives) and youth leaders;
3. The project established working partnerships between university students and school students;
4. The project developed a web portal to facilitate civic engagement.

*While the project contained the above four activities, **this evidence building activity focuses on the first two.** In this regard, it is important to note that this report has been written in tangent to a standard project evaluation. The evaluation focused on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the project. In contrast, this report focuses on rigorously testing the above hypotheses, with the goal of understanding whether the theory accurately describes how the SYNCS project did or did not achieve the results it expected to, in the manner described in the theory of change.*

The link between the above activities and results was the project's theory of action (ToA). At project outset, the theory was called "Youth Activism – A Way to Participatory Decision-making". The theory proposes that as a result of increased youth activism and increased capacity of LG in youth work, school leadership and local government would value youth more, which in turn would contribute to the improved practices of participatory decision-making. In other words, the more active youth are and more qualified LG is in youth work, the more trust would be shown in them by school leadership and the LG, and the more willing both actors would be to collaborate with young people. As a result of increased value and trust, youth would be allowed and empowered to participate in decision-making processes at various levels, including within local government and schools. According to this ToA, youth being valued by school leadership and LG is an interim result, without which the end result – participation in decision-making – cannot happen.

The overarching purpose of this evidence building exercise is to test and revise the project's theory of action to establish whether there is evidence of change brought to the target communities as a result of the SYNCS project implementation as well as how that change was brought about. The study, in turn, is intended to inform project team members as well as other actors working towards the development of the society, including youth. To achieve these objectives, the project team has carried out a study of the theory noted above and its three hypotheses. The three hypotheses include:

H1: Increased youth activism leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and LG;

H2: Increased capacity of LG in youth work, leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and LG;

H3: Increased value of youth among school leadership and LG leads to greater levels of participatory decision-making.

To test the hypotheses, the project team has used a mixed methods approach that includes quasi-experimental analysis of survey data collected as well as the examination of pathways of change through qualitative data collected in focus groups and key informant interviews. The survey data included 1337 interviews in 61 schools with 640 interviews in participating schools (30 schools) and 697 interviews in comparison schools (31 schools). In treated schools, 291 students reported participating in World Vision Georgia programming. The number of schools and students interviewed per region is presented in the table below:

Unit	Imereti	Samtskhe Javakheti	Kakheti	Kvemo Kartli	Samegrelo	Shida Kartli	Total
Students (Schools) control	47 (7)	57(7)	123(4)	138(4)	132(6)	200(3)	697 (31)
Students (Schools) Treatment	53 (7)	55(7)	80 (4)	138 (3)	140(6)	174 (3)	640 (30)
Total	100	112	203	276	272	374	1337

Among these students, three groups are present:

1. Comparison students who did not participate in the project (the control group)
2. Students that participated in the SYNCS project either as leaders or through participating in programming that the student leaders organized inside the treatment schools (the directly treated group);
3. Students that did not participate in the SYNCS project either as leaders or participants, but who attend the schools with students that did participate (the indirectly treated group).

Through matching the 2nd and 3rd groups above with students in the first group it is possible to test for a number of effects, including an overall project effect on the communities; an effect on direct participants, and a spill over effect. These comparisons are described in the table below.

Overall effect on communities	Effect on direct participants	Spillover effects
1 vs 2+3	1 vs 2	1 vs 3

Overall, the data collected and analysed within the evidence building activity provides strong support for the first and third hypotheses put forward above, and relatively weaker support for the second hypothesis.

Relevant findings for hypothesis one suggest that the project increased the rate of project participants:

- Participating in an organization focused on improving the social situation by 72%;
- Wanting to participate in politics or non-governmental organizations as an adult by 11%, suggesting a degree of sustainability to the action and increased trust between young people and relevant adults;
- Taking a concrete step towards solving a community issue by 80%.

However, relevant findings for hypothesis two suggest that students did not perceive either local government or school administrations to value them more, at least through the proxies of these collected during the survey.

Relevant finding for hypothesis three suggest that the project increased the rate of project participants:

- Engaging their local government by 214%;¹
- Engaging in school level decision-making by 35%.

While the project had a clear impact, a number of prerequisites and intermediary factors were missing from the theory of change. Specifically, youth required increased capacity to engage before their activism would lead to increased value among teachers and government officials. Moreover, parents and school teachers' lack of support for student civic engagement hampered the levels of student engagement; hence their support was requisite to the success of the project. In overcoming this issue, the critical factor was students delivering tangible results. Not only did the delivery of tangible results overcome school and parents scepticism to a great extent, it also lead to increased value being placed on youth by school leadership and local government. In response to seeing tangible results, both groups of adults encourage and worked further with young people in their activism. This led to a positive feedback loop, with students engaging in more activism, delivering tangible results, and local government and school leaders supporting students more (even providing them with funds from limited school budgets) to engage in further activism.

The theory of action above suggests that increased capacity of local government in youth work would lead to increased value placed on youth. While the trainings appear to have facilitated this, it appears that precedents of successful collaboration and the experiential learning contained within those collaborations was more important than the trainings themselves in achieving this result.

When it comes to school leadership and local government valuing youth leading to improved practices of participatory decision-making, the theory of action was largely accurate. However, the relative levels of improvement and participation in decision-making among youth was mediated by support from senior managers (school principals and governors) as well as of central government. In cases where the support of these key actors was present, the participatory decision-making was stronger.

Based on the findings of the activity, a number of recommendations and lessons learnt emerged. In this regard, it is recommended that future projects working towards students' engagement:

- Place equal emphasis on enabling all adults in children's lives to support their engagement in civic activities;
- Carry out trainings as compliments to experiential learning whenever possible, as the experiential learning consistently fortifies the classroom training;
- Bring senior management on board, and ask them to signal their support throughout their organization;
- Seek out central government buy in at project start up, particularly if local government actors will engage in the project, particularly for short term projects;
- Attempt to ensure the sustainability of best practices through working with central government to enable their institutionalization and thus sustainability;
- Utilize a combination of bottom up and top down approaches to ensure the sustainability of short term interventions;
- Create the conditions for increases in mutual levels of esteem to encourage continued, sustained, and higher levels of engagement of all parties involved.

¹ Effects and changes on scales are calculated using the growth formula within this report – (Treatment mean-Control mean)/ Control Mean – for ease of understanding, since the simple additive indexes are less intuitive to understand changes in. With this formula it is possible that a percentage change is greater than 100%. In the above case, the 214% change could be interpreted as the figure was 2.14 times higher or the behavior of interest doubled in frequency.

The report below proceeds as follows. First, background on the context in which the SYNCs project took place as well as the SYNCs project itself are provided. In the subsequent section, a detailed description of the methods used to draw conclusions about the project are described. Next, a description of findings about each hypothesis is provided. A discussion and conclusions including a visualization of a revised theory of change is provided thereafter. The report concludes with recommendations and lessons learnt.

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List of acronyms

ADP	Area Development Program
CDI	Civic Development Institute
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
LG	Local Government
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
SC DME	South Caucasus Design, Monitoring and Evaluation
SYNCS	School Youth Networks of Collaboration for Sustainable Solutions
WVSC	World Vision South Caucasus
WVG	World Vision Georgia

Background and Context

Georgia is a republic situated on the Black Sea, with Turkey to the West, Armenia and Azerbaijan to the South, and the Russian Federation to the north. The country gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which ushered in a wave of domestic social unrest and economic collapse. The country stabilized from 1995, and has rapidly developed since 2004, following the 2003 Rose Revolution. During this period, the country also developed democratically with the first peaceful transfer of power in the country's history occurring in 2012 via parliamentary elections. The country's education system is in significant need of improvement, and the relatively low quality of education represents a structural bottleneck for the country's economic development as it attempts to move from middle-income to upper-income status, attempting to avoid the middle income trap in the next several decades.

Among the subjects of significant importance for Georgia is civic education, both formal and informal. Civic engagement and education are critical to Georgia's future as they have the potential to help Georgia maintain and expand upon the democratic growth it has experienced in recent years; maintain Georgia's civil society, which is among the most vibrant in the region; and encourage good governance through promoting active citizenship. This has been recognized by the government through the introduction of civic education classes in school as well as the international community through their engagement in and funding for a wide variety of civic education programming.

Despite Georgia's relatively vibrant civil society, previous studies show that grassroots civic engagement levels are low and citizens lack the capacity to influence decision-making processes (Lutsevich, 2013).² According to Sumbadze (2013), there is a large gap between public perceptions of the importance of civic engagement and its perceived possibility, with an overwhelming majority of Georgians believing they cannot exert any influence on important national decisions.³

While informal, one-off forms of civic engagement—including pro-social helping behaviors toward family, friends, neighbors and other Georgian citizens—are quite widespread, formal civic engagement is low in Georgia. Interestingly, people who are more proactively engaged with NGOs tend to be younger, have higher levels of education, report accessing the internet more frequently, and surprisingly, are more distantly located from the capital, i.e. living in rural areas (CRRC/GPAC survey 2014).⁴

According to Caucasus Barometer 2015, only 21% of Georgia's population reported volunteering during the six months prior to fieldwork, only 17% reported attending a public meeting, only 6% reported signing any petition (including online petitions), and only 5% reported writing a letter or making a phone call to a newspaper, TV or radio program. With all the above activities, the involvement of young people is higher.⁵ Young people are also less likely to hold fatalistic views, agreeing more with

² Orysia Lutsevych. "How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine," *Chatham House* (2013): https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0113bp_lutsevych.pdf.

³ Nana Sumbadze. "Determinants and Consequences of Civic Participation," *Academic Swiss Caucasus Net* (2013): http://ascn.ch/en/Book-Presentation-2013/mainColumnParagraphs/00/download_website.pdf.

⁴ G-PAC. "Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia: Follow-up Report on Civic Engagement," *G-PAC East West Management Institute* (2014): http://crrc.ge/uploads/tinymce/documents/Completed-projects/FINAL_GPAC_2014_Civic_Engagement_Report_04.08.2014_ENG.pdf.

⁵ CRRC-Georgia. "Civic engagement in Georgia." *Caucasus Research Resource Center* (2016): <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2016/07/civic-engagement-in-georgia.html>.

the statement that “people shape their fate themselves” versus “Everything in life is determined by fate” (CB 2015).⁶

The above findings indicate that there is a great need to improve civic engagement practices in Georgia and young people living in rural areas seem to be the most valuable resource for boosting activism at the local level. This is also reflected in the EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society, according to which youth involvement and strengthening links between CSOs and civic education curriculum are important for enhancing civic participation in all regions of Georgia.⁷

Besides schools and CSOs, municipalities can greatly affect civic engagement at the local level. Yet, according to a study on forms of civic participation in rural areas of Georgia carried out in 2014 by the Open Society Institute, low civic engagement levels in rural communities can be explained, on the one hand, by the lack of information, and on the other hand, by widespread pessimism that people’s actions cannot bring any result. The study showed that people living in rural areas of Georgia are largely unaware of: 1. Their own rights; 2. Resources and competences of the local self-government; 3. How to identify a problem, organize themselves around this problem and present it to the local self-government. Moreover, the study showed that there might be some resistance from local governments to engaging people in decision-making processes. As local government neglects the problems community members raise, people become pessimistic and come to believe they can not affect decisions, even at the local level.⁸

Project Background and Theory of Action

Within the above context, World Vision Georgia implemented the School Youth Networks of Collaboration for Sustainable Solutions (SYNCS) project between February, 2016 and January, 2018, in cooperation with the Civic Development Institute (CDI), Marneuli Youth Centre, and Youth2Georgia. In addition, the action’s associates included the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs (MSY) and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). The project’s overarching goal was to “contribute to improved and sustainable community-based solutions to targeted community needs through increased civic activism of public school students, universities, local governments and CSOs.”⁹ The project’s specific objective was that, “Networks of youth-led movements, CSOs and school self-governance bodies drive positive social change in collaboration with adult-led CSOs, governmental and higher educational institutions.”¹⁰

In order to achieve the overall and specific objective, the project had four primary components:

1. Youth (from school clubs, school self-governance bodies, youth-led CSOs) were trained on leadership development, effective communication, advocacy and child and youth rights. Youth were empowered to advocate for various changes at the community and school level by applying gained competencies through different non-formal education methods (awareness raising campaigns; round table discussions, conferences on youth-related issues, and workshops with peers to promote youth activism).
2. The project aimed to establish proactive partnerships between community adults (municipality representatives) and youth leaders. The main activities aimed at enabling community adults to

⁶ “Caucasus Barometer Georgia, 2015,” *Caucasus Research Resource Centers* (2015): <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015ge/FATEINLF-by-AGEGROUP/>.

⁷ “EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society, Georgia 2014-2017,” *European Union* (2014): http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/civil_society_library/eu_roadmap_georgia.pdf.

⁸ “Handbook on civic engagement on local municipality levels,” USAID (2017): <http://www.lsg.gov.ge/contentimage/tees.pdf>

⁹ Interim Narrative Report.

¹⁰ Annex A. Grant Application Form.

be receptive to working with youth via Citizen Voice & Action methodology. These included training local authorities on youth engagement; funding small grant initiatives for local community adult-youth groups to encourage cooperation; facilitation of structural dialogue between school club leaders and adult municipality representatives to ensure youth voice in municipality decision-making, and conducting study tours for local municipality representatives from the target regions to learn about different practices.

3. The project aimed to establish cooperation networks between universities and public schools in 6 target regions. After laying the groundwork for youth-led activism on the municipality level through targeted youth- and adult-focused activities, work was set to begin on fostering closer links among a larger set of community stakeholders on the regional level. Initially, the project aimed to establish collaboration networks between regional universities and public schools but to later expand to include CSOs and local government. The project aimed to recruit 24 students from 6 universities and train them on action-oriented research and form partnerships with 6 public schools in each region. The project aimed to have student volunteers and members of student self-governance bodies develop joint action plans and disseminate research results at joint conferences in each region. The project aimed to have assessments of local problems at the school or community level developed, followed by research on public school-CSO cooperation. It also aimed to develop a policy paper and to present it in selected regions and the capital. Finally, to encourage collaboration networks on the larger scale, a national competition was held for school-university networks to compete for project-based solutions to local problems.
4. The project team aimed to create an online platform to build and enhance effective dialogue and engagement of different stakeholders. The platform would serve as a forum for communities, teachers, school staff, parents, university staff, university students and youth to discuss problems and identify common solutions as well as to share resources and news on school life and youth activism. The web portal aimed to promote the cooperation opportunities between public schools and universities, CSOs and youth. The web portal also intended to provide useful information to LGs, municipal authorities and MoES. As a result, these institutions would better respond to the needs of youth participation in public schools.

As a result of the above activities, the project expected to achieve the following estimated results:

1. Empowered young boys and girls plan and implement community initiatives;
2. Proactive partnerships are established between community adults (municipality representatives) and youth leaders;
3. Cooperation networks between universities and public schools are established in 6 target regions;
4. A virtual web-based portal is developed to serve as a platform to share best practices and strengthen cooperation between schools and civil society stakeholders.

While the project contained the above four activities, **this evidence building activity focuses on the first two activities and expected results.** The link between the above activities and results was the project's theory of action (ToA). At project outset, the theory was called "Youth Activism – A Way to Participatory Decision-making". The theory proposes that as a result of increased youth activism and increased capacity of LG in youth work, school leadership and local government would value youth more, which in turn would contribute to the improved practices of participatory decision-making. In other words, the more active youth are and more qualified LG is in youth work, the more trust would be shown in them by school leadership and the LG, and the more willing both actors would be to collaborate with young people. As a result of increased value and trust, youth would be allowed and empowered to participate in decision-making processes at various levels, including within local government and schools. According to this ToA, youth being valued by school leadership and LG is an interim result without which the end result – participation in decision-making – cannot happen.

The overarching purpose of this evidence building exercise is to test and revise the project's theory of change in order to establish whether there is evidence of change brought to the target communities as a result of the SYNCS project implementation as well as how that change was brought about. The study, in turn, is intended to inform project team members as well as other actors working towards the development of the society, including youth. To achieve these objectives, the project team has carried out a study of the theory noted above and its three hypotheses:

H1: Increased youth activism leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and LG.

H2: Increased capacity of LG in youth work, leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and LG.

H3: Increased value of youth among school leadership and LG leads to greater levels of participatory decision-making.

To test the hypotheses, the project team used a mixed methods approach that includes quasi-experimental analysis of survey data collected as well as the examination of pathways of change through qualitative data collected in focus groups and key informant interviews.

As noted above, this evidence building exercise and the above theory of action focuses on the first two components of the project. In this regard, for a full treatment of all four activities and expected results within the SYNCS project, please view the evaluation which CRRC-Georgia carried out for World Vision in the appendices to this report. In this regard, the two documents have also been written as compliments to each other. While the evaluation report focuses on the standard international criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, this report focuses on testing the theory of action and measuring the impact of the project in causal terms. In this regard, the report aims to answer the questions

1. Did the project lead to better participatory decision-making practices?
2. If yes to question 1, how did the project lead to better participatory decision-making practices and is the process well described by the theory of action?

The remainder of the report proceeds as follows. In the next section, there is an overview of the evidence building exercise's methodology. In the subsequent section, the results of the exercise are presented. Afterwards, conclusions are presented together with revisions to the theory of change. The final section of the report presents lessons learnt and recommendations. In the appendix to the report are the evidence building exercise's terms of reference, the inception report of the evaluation, survey questionnaire, key informant interview and focus group guides, the project's evaluation, a list of documents reviewed, the frequency tables from the unmatched survey data and its disaggregation by gender, and match balance tables.

Methodology

In order to test the three hypotheses described above, the organization has used a mixed methods methodology. This has included quantitative data collection, using a matched sampling strategy and a quasi-experimental data processing technique known as genetic matching. At the same time, the organization also collected qualitative data through key informant interviews and focus groups with project participants. The section below presents an overview of the data collection and analysis methodology used for the evidence building exercise.

Quantitative methods

To measure impact, the organization has used a quasi-experimental data collection and analysis strategy that consisted first of using a matched sampling strategy, then an individual level matching strategy following data collection. Data collection was carried out within schools, and hence all participants of the survey were between the ages of 14 and 19. Next, the project team carried out regression analyses to test whether changes were significant and to estimate the amount of impact attributable to the project.

Sampling schools using quasi-experimental blocking through genetic matching

To carry out sampling, CRRC-Georgia first took a clustered, stratified sample of the schools that WVG worked in, with probability of selection proportional to the size of the school. Stratification was carried out by region. The number of students in the school was taken to be a proxy for the size of the indirect beneficiary population. Hence, assuming this is a valid proxy, the sample can be considered as representative of the targeted indirect beneficiary population of the program. Of the 55 schools with students that participated in the project, 6 no longer had young people in them that participated in the project, and hence they were not surveyed and removed from the sampling frame. A total of 31 schools were sampled.

After sampling the schools that the SYNCs project worked in, the organization used a matched sampling strategy to identify comparison schools. Within the matched sampling process, the organization first calculated propensity scores for each school in the treatment group and every other school in the regions the project was carried out in. Propensity scores were calculated using a logistic regression with the outcome variable being participation in the project and the predictor variables including the following in the year prior to treatment (2015)¹¹:

1. Student count;
2. Share of female students in the school;
3. Official language(s) of instruction (using binary variables for every combination of language including Georgian, Azeri, Armenian, and Russian);
4. Share of ethnic minorities in the school;
5. Share of students from families receiving social assistance;
6. Dropout rates for 9th grade students;
7. Student teacher ratio;
8. Share of certified teachers in school;
9. Naturalized differences in vegetation index (a proxy for agricultural productivity in rural areas);
10. Region (using binary variables for each region).

¹¹ The year prior to treatment was used in order to ensure that schools that were most similar to the treatment ones prior to the program implementation were selected. Had current data been used, this could have led to selection of schools that are more similar to the participating schools as a result of the project, rather than prior to the project.

After calculating propensity scores, the organization then calculated genetic weights for each covariate in the regression analysis above as well as for the propensity score. This process was carried out to support the matching process in finding the most similar schools in the country to those which participated in the program. Next, the organization used multi-variate matching with genetic weighting (genetic matching) in order to identify the most similar schools. Finally, balance tests¹² were performed in order to test for the balance on co-variables described above between the schools WVG worked in and the comparison schools that the matching algorithm identified. After this process, the organization carried out the same process to create a reserve list of schools in case any principal did not support fieldwork in their school.

Within schools, classrooms were surveyed. Classrooms that had student leaders from the project in them were selected for interviews. In order to ensure that enough students were interviewed to test for spill over and to interview students that participated in the project, but were not in the student leaders' classes, the same age class was also selected if present, and in cases when they were not, one class from the grade level below the student leader's class was selected. In matched schools, the same classes were selected as in its matched treatment school. In cases when the same classes were not present, students of one grade below were selected.

After sampling was carried out CRRC-Georgia carried out interviewer training and fieldwork. As a result of fieldwork, the organization completed 1337 interviews in 61 schools with 640 interviews in participating schools (30 schools) and 697 interviews in comparison schools (31 schools). In treated schools, 291 students reported participating in World Vision Georgia programming. The number of schools and students interviewed per region is presented in the table below:

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Total	100	112	203	276	272	374	1337

Among these students, three groups are present:

1. Comparison students who did not participate in the project (the control group);
2. Students that participated in the SYNCs project either as leaders or through participating in programming that the student leaders organized inside the treatment schools (the directly treated group);
3. Students that did not participate in the SYNCs project either as leaders or participants, but who attend the schools with students that did participate (the indirectly treated group).

¹² KS tests and T-tests depending on the variable type. The minimum p-value prior to matching was $p < 2.22 \times 10^{-16}$. Following matching, the minimum p-value between groups was $p = 0.34182$. While the pre-matching minimum suggests significant differences between groups, the post-matching p-value suggests no significant differences between the control and treatment schools on the observable variables.

Through matching the 2nd and 3rd groups above with students in the first group it is possible to test for a number of effects, including an overall project effect on the communities; an effect on direct participants, and a spill over effect. These comparisons are described in the table below.

Overall effect on communities	Effect on direct participants	Spillover effects
1 vs 2+3	1 vs 2	1 vs 3

The following table provides the number of students in each of the three groups:

Group	Frequency
Control Group	697 ¹³
Directly Treated	291
Indirectly Treated	349

Genetic Matching at the Individual Level

After fieldwork, the organization again carried out genetic matching, however, this time at the individual level. This process was similar to the process of matching schools described above. However, instead of matching on characteristics of schools, the organization matched on characteristics of students and their families. The following variables were used in the matching process:

1. Household assets (five different assets as binary variables, a proxy for household economic status);
2. Gender;
3. Ethnicity (Georgian, Armenian, Azeri as binary variables)
4. Religion (Orthodox Christian, Muslim as binary variables)
5. Student age
6. Mother’s education level (a strong proxy for social and economic status; binary variables for primary, secondary, secondary technical, tertiary, and higher education)
7. Father’s education level (a strong proxy for social and economic status; binary variables for primary, secondary, secondary technical, tertiary, and higher education)
8. Propensity scores calculated based on the above.

In contrast to when identifying schools, the number of potential comparison students relative to the size of participating students was small. In turn, this meant that achieving balance on the above variables between the comparison group and the SYNCs schools required the use of callipers. Callipers are a tool that restricts the sample so that only broadly similar individuals are included in it. Nonetheless, the data analysis contained sufficient power and obtained sufficient balance so as to not require controlling for confounding variables at the data analysis stage of the process.

As a result of the above matching process, the organization matched students in the SYNCs schools to enable the testing of overall impact on the area, direct impact on the young people who participated in the project, and finally the young people who did not participate in the project, but went to the same school as the leaders of the project.

¹³ 47 students in the control group reported that they had participated in a World Vision Georgia activity. Following conversations with the SYNCs project team it was decided to leave these students in the sample, as they were unlikely to have participated in the SYNCs project.

Data analysis

After carrying out matching, the organization constructed simple additive indexes to operationalize the various indicators and outcomes of interest. Simple additive indexes were constructed rather than using factor analysis or principal components analysis for indexing in order to ease interpretation of results. The construction of indexes are summarized in the excel file embedded below:



Evidence Building
Exercise Variables.xl:

To carry out data analysis, the evidence building team used ordinary least squares regressions in any case where an index was constructed and ordered logistic regressions to test for significance on non-indexed questions. An alpha level of $p < 0.05$ is considered significantly different. Any p-value above this or in any case when confidence intervals cover positive and negative values in the case of ordered logistic regressions are considered insignificant. Clustered standard errors were calculated in order to take into account the clustering of observations at the school level.

Qualitative methods

In order to supplement the quantitative data collection and identify how and why the program activities achieved or did not achieve their goals, CRRC-Georgia carried out key informant interviews and focus groups. The full key informant interview and focus group guides are presented in the appendices.

Key informant interviews

The general purposes of the key informant interviews was to understand the project's implementation, and to generate an understanding of the how's and why's for the project's successes and failures. Key informants included World Vision staff in Tbilisi, local coordinators, school principals and teachers, and local government officials. The sample of individuals interviewed was determined in collaboration with the World Vision Georgia team. Following key informant interviews, the interviews were transcribed and the project team analyzed the transcripts to answer the evaluation questions described above. The type of key informant interview, their number, and location are presented in Table 2, below:

Table 2: Key Informant Interviews

Target Group	Number of respondents	Location
Local Government	6	Samegrelo, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti, Imereti
School Administration	6	Samegrelo, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti, Imereti
Regional Coordinators	6	Samegrelo, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti, Imereti
Program Staff (WVG)	4	Tbilisi

Focus Groups

Within the evaluation process, the organization carried out focus groups with participants from the six regions that the project was implemented in. The sample of youth who participated in the focus groups was determined by World Vision Georgia. The focus groups aimed to understand the how's and why's of the project's successes and failures from the perspective of the participants. In total, 11 focus groups were carried out. Following the focus groups, transcripts were produced, and the project team analyzed them to test hypotheses. The region of each focus group and the number of focus group participants are provided in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Focus Groups

	Location	Number of participants
1	Imereti	10
2	Kakheti	6
3	Samtskhe-Javakheti	10
4	Shida Kartli	10
5	Kvemo Kartli	9
6	Samegrelo	10

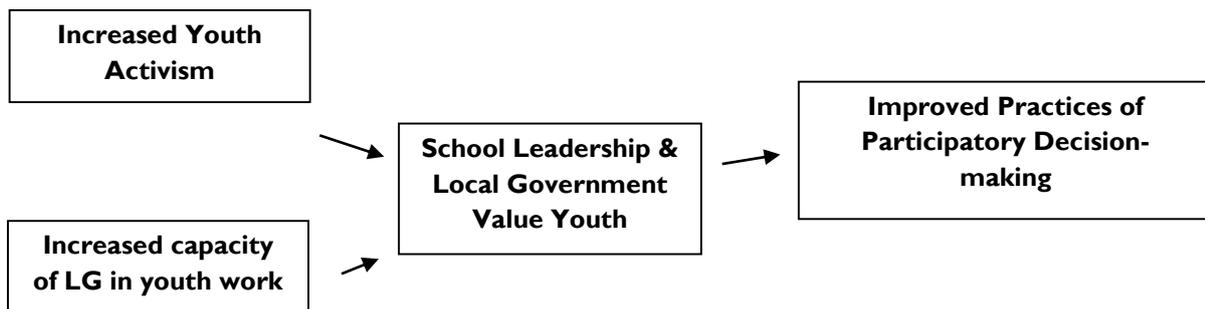
Limitations

Although the evidence building exercise team made all efforts to rigorously test the evidence of the theory of change, a number of limitations are present. First and foremost, the project did not have baseline data available on the participants of the program. This means that the study must assume that before the program, the young people involved and not involved had similar attitudes, behaviours, and dispositions, and that any differences found at the end of the program are explained by the project. To help with this, the organization selected comparison schools based on data prior to the intervention. Second, although the matching strategy described above has helped make the comparison between treatment and control schools and students more accurate, the research design did not include random assignment to treatment and control schools. Hence, it can only be assumed that the groups are comparable along observed variables (e.g. those matched on at the school level and at the individual level) rather than unobserved variables. Third, simple additive indexes rather than factor analysis based indexing took place, to ease interpretation. Hence, the indexes are less direct proxies for the concepts they are intended to proxy. Fourth, no funding was available to carry out a teacher, local government, or school leadership survey. Hence, proxies from the student survey and qualitative data are used to test hypothesis two.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the evidence building exercise in relation to the three project hypotheses. The three hypotheses presented below include H1, that increased youth activism would lead to increased school leadership and local government valuation of students; H2, that increased local government capacity would also lead to increased school leadership and local government valuing of youth; and H3 that through increased valuing of youth by local government and school leadership, improved practices of participatory decision-making would result. Together, the three hypotheses make up the project’s theory of action, which is visualized in the flow-chart below:

The Theory of the Action



Below, each hypothesis is presented as originally envisioned at project start-up. The evidence for or against the hypothesis is presented. Throughout, additional factors that mediated or otherwise affected the theory of action are presented. In general, in the section below, the results are discussed in terms of direct impact (i.e. on the students who participated in the programming compared to similar students that did not in control schools), because during the statistical analyses no indirect impact (spill over) was uncovered.¹⁴ The specific questions used to operationalize each index described below are provided in the evidence building exercise variables excel sheet described above, and the specific questions for each index are also footnoted throughout the findings section. Overall, the evidence building exercise suggests significant support for hypotheses 1 and 3, and limited support for hypothesis 2. As noted in the previous section all significance testing was done using ordinary least squares regression or ordered logistic regression.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis that the evidence building exercise tests is that increased youth activism leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and local government. The hypothesis is visualized in the flow chart below:

Hypothesis 1: Increased youth activism leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and LG.



¹⁴ Analogously, the overall community level effect is not presented, as the lack of spillover suggests that the impact stems from those who directly participated in the project.

For this hypothesis to be true, the first step would be that youth would become more engaged in activism. To increase youth activism WVG identified and trained a core group of youth in six targeted regions. Having completed trainings in effective leadership communication, advocacy, civic participation, 64 young boys and girls (core group) in six target regions were equipped with better skills, enabling them to engage in activities related to community development. The youth core group in targeted regions mobilized their peers and started organizing advocacy campaigns and awareness-raising campaigns about different needs-based issues, such as child labour, early marriage, and bullying, etc. Additionally small grant initiatives of youth were funded by WVG that encouraged cooperation between youth, school leadership and local government.

The results of analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data suggest increased youth activism.¹⁵ All stakeholders interviewed within the auspices of the evidence building activity reported that young people increased their activism as a result of the project. This is reflected in the significant increase in students engaged in youth or other community organizations when compared with the control group schools within the quantitative data. On an 8 point index of student engagement, the average score among participants (4.95) was 2.1¹⁶ points higher than the students in the control group (2.87). This amounts to a 72% increase.¹⁷ When it comes to participation in an environmental organization, 83% of students that participated in the project were engaged compared to 62% of the matched students. In the control group, 27% of students had participated in the activities of a human rights organization compared with 69% of students that participated in the project. When it comes to participating in a voluntary group that was doing something to help the community, 80% of students that participated in the project reported they had compared with only 49% of the comparison students. When it comes to participating in the activities of a charity, 63% of students that had participated in SYNCS had engaged in such an activity compared with 53% of the comparison students. Hence, it is clear that there was an increase in student activism as a result of the project.

Not only did young people increase their activism, but they were also more likely to engage in and want to engage in higher-order levels of activity. This is demonstrated through the fact that the chance¹⁸ that a young person reports they were engaged in an activity wherein “Young people have ideas, create projects, and invite representatives of the older generation to make decisions together with them,” was 40% in the treatment group compared with only 19% in the control group.¹⁹ Moreover, when asked what type of activities young people wanted to engage in, there was a 54% chance that a participant in the program would report they prefer this type of activity compared with 39% of the young people in the comparison group.²⁰

¹⁵ Operationalizations are generally as described in the text. For a more detailed look at operationalizations, please see the variables listed in the methods section as well as the survey questionnaire, in Appendix.

¹⁶ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=2.1$, $SE=0.34295$, $p<7.42 \times 10^{-9}$. Questions in the present index include q10.1; q10.2; q10.3; and q10.4.

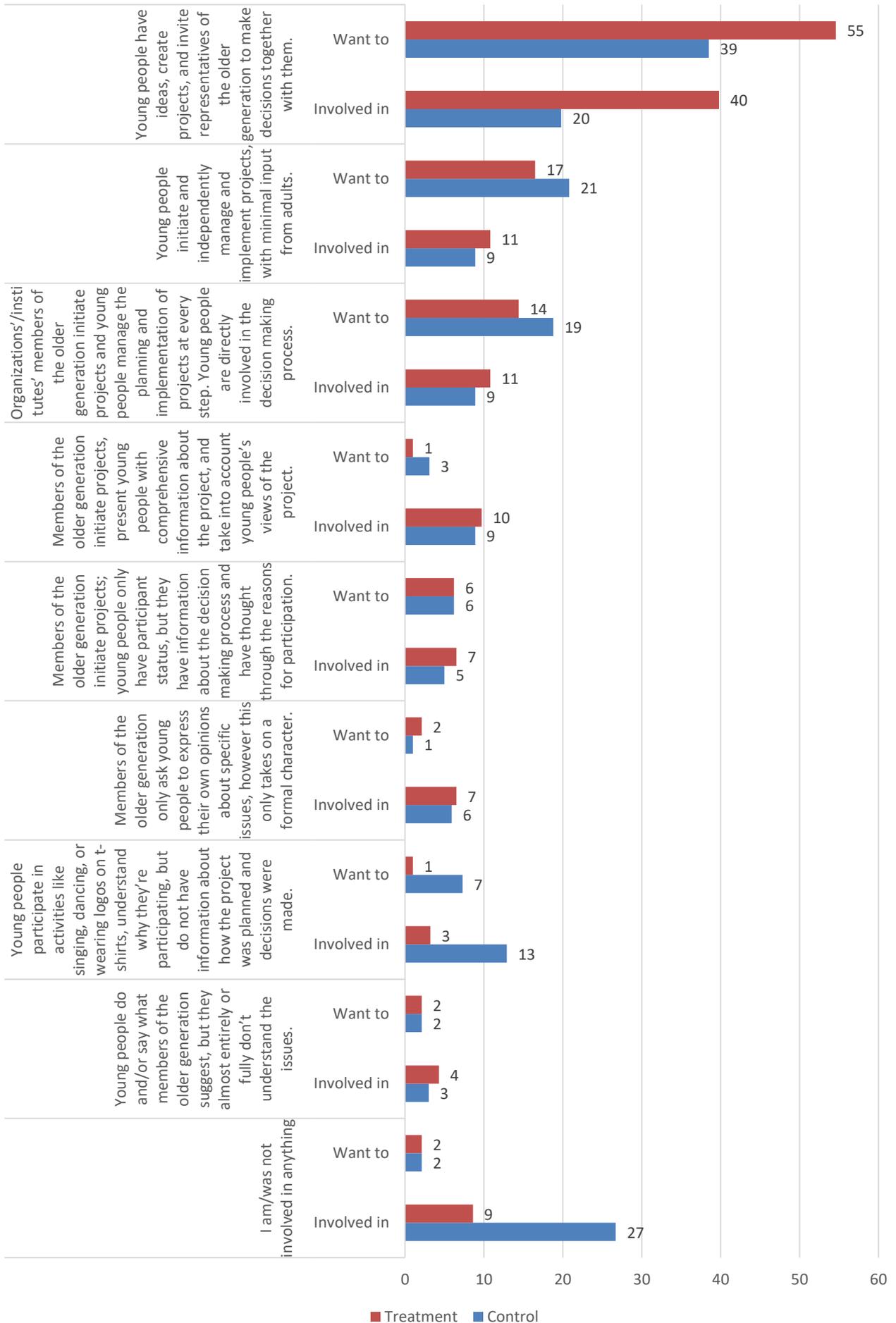
¹⁷ Effects and changes on the scale are calculated using the growth formula – (Treatment mean-Control mean)/ Control Mean – for ease of understanding, since the simple additive indexes are less intuitive.

¹⁸ This statistic is a predicted probability. Predicted probabilities are not the percentage of respondents in a survey who respond in a certain way, but rather the chance that an average participant in a given group would respond in a certain way. The data presented in this paragraph should be interpreted with this in mind. Moreover, the data are not the same as those presented in the chart, because the calculation of predicted probabilities is slightly different in the present case than the calculation of frequency distributions.

¹⁹ Results come from ordered logistic regression: $\beta=1.059$, $SE=0.2619$, $t=4.04$, $OR=2.883486$.

²⁰ Results come from ordered logistic regression: $\beta=0.5894$, $SE=0.2679$, $t=2.2$, $OR=1.802906$.

Below there are different levels of participation. Personally, how have you engaged in/ want to engage in activities where... (%)



According to youth, some trainings played a crucial role in boosting their activism. Trainings in advocacy and civic engagement were highlighted as more important than others. As a young person noted, “Social advocacy training gave us knowledge and skills to freely communicate with state and other organizations” (FG, Kakheti).

Young people’s increased activism resulted in more frequent contact with local government and school administration. Importantly, many students report that their first contact with municipality representatives happened within this project. Most young people evaluate the experience of cooperation with local government very positively, highlighting openness and readiness of municipality representatives to support youth in their initiatives. As one young person stated, “LG staff are people, who are always ready to support us and I cannot recall any case when we went to the municipality with any project and they did not support our initiative” (FG, Samtkhe Javakheti). Another noted, “In case of any problem, any time Gori municipality is always supportive. They always meet you with smile and offer cooperation. We don’t have a feeling anymore that we go there, they just listen to us and we come back without any result” (FG, Shida Kartli). However, tests of the proxy for increased value by local government of students show a non-significant 0.69 point difference between the participating students and comparison young people on a 18-point scale (mean treated: 10.77; mean control: 10.07).²¹ Moreover, the interaction between the program and student engagement in local government activities does not show a significant interaction.²² This model should, however, be interpreted with caution as the program was expected to affect both the dependent variable and the other independent variable in the model – engagement in local government activities.

Increased trust from school teachers, as a result of student activism, is also reported by youth in the qualitative data. As a student noted, “They saw that we have a power and not only adults, but we also can do things. They saw this power and they support us actively” (FG, Samtskhe Javakheti). The school representatives also highlight that they now trust the young people more than before. Since they have seen that the youth is capable of doing things independently, they have more faith in them. As a principal noted, “We now believe in our students. We are now aware of their abilities...Before we believed that they cannot do anything without us...We now believe that they can do certain things independently” (Interview with School principal, Kakheti). Although the project expected that school leadership would value the students more as a result of the project, the proxy in student attitudes does not show a significant increase. Results show a non-significant change of – 0.3 on a 21 point scale (mean treatment: 15.26; mean control: 15.56).²³ To further explore this hypothesis, a regression model was used to look at whether the interaction between the program and student activism had a significant effect on the student attitude proxy for respect. The model shows no significant interaction effect between the treatment and student engagement on the proxy of school leadership valuing youth.²⁴ This model should, however, be interpreted with caution as the treatment variable contained within the interaction term is expected dependent on both the independent and dependent variables in the model.

²¹ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=0.69190$, $SE=0.60300$, $p=0.2512$. The index contained questions 13.7;13.8; 13.9; 15.1;15.2;15.3.

²² Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta= 0.24007$, $SE= 0.30869$, $p=0.4367$. The index for local government valuing youth contained questions q12.1; q12.2; q12.3; and q12.4.

²³ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=-0.30097$, $SE=0.65161$, $p=0.6442$. The index contained questions: q13.1; q13.2; q13.3; q13.5; q28.1; q28.2; q28.3.

²⁴ Results come from OLS regression. For the first index: $\beta= 0.22749$, $SE=0.22131$, $p=0.3040$. Questions in the first index include q10.1; q10.2; q10.3; and q10.4. For the second index: $\beta= -0.10871$, $SE=0.115104$, $p=0.34493$. Questions in the second index include: q20.1 20.2; 20.3; 20.4; 20.5; 20.6; 20.7; 20.8; and 20.9.

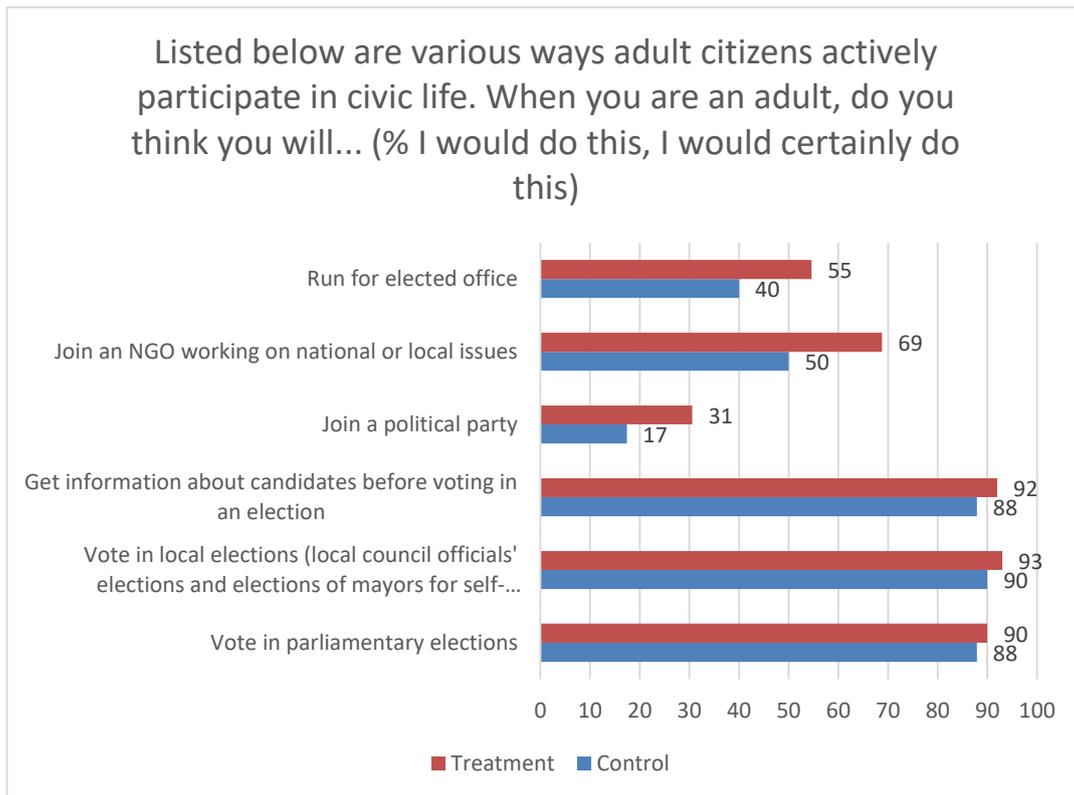
However, there appears to be no one-way relationship between increased youth activism and municipality/school representatives valuing youth as suggested by the theory of action. Rather this relationship seems to be mutual: students report that realizing that local government takes youth seriously and is interested in their needs and activities, made them more motivated and more active. As one student reported, “Last year a representative of the municipality visited our school several times and asked us what we needed from them. This was a huge motivation for us. Because they were so attentive to us, we became more active and arranged several meetings with them afterwards” (FG, Imereti). By discovering that municipality staff are people who can be easily accessed by youth and they actually listen and support them, youth became even more active than before.

The mutual respect is evidenced in young people’s attitudes towards their own futures. Students who participated in SYNCS report that as an adult, they will engage in political activities or work for an NGO significantly more often than young people in the control group. On an 18-point scale, young people that participated in the program had an average score (12.01) 1.2 points higher than in the comparison group (10.82), an 11% effect.²⁵ While positive responses were more common among the participating students, the clearest differences were in students reporting that they might run for elected office, join an NGO working on national or local issues, or join a political party. This evidence suggests that students who engaged in the project, through considering the professions of those they engaged with, likely increased their respect towards those people. While there was a significant increase in the number of students interested in taking up these careers, there is no significant change in the chance that students would contact or visit someone in government; contact a media outlet; or sign a petition after leaving school when indexed.²⁶ Nor is there a significant change in the chance that a student thinks they will volunteer to help someone in need; become involved in issues like health or safety that affect their community; or work with a group to resolve a problem in the community where students live after high school, when the three variables are indexed.²⁷

²⁵ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=1.19196$, $SE=0.54374$, $p=0.02837$. The questions contained in the index include q17.1; q17.2; q17.3; q17.4; q17.5; q17.6.

²⁶ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=0.60764$, $SE=0.49367$, $p=0.2184$. The index include the following questions: q23.1; q23.2; q23.3.

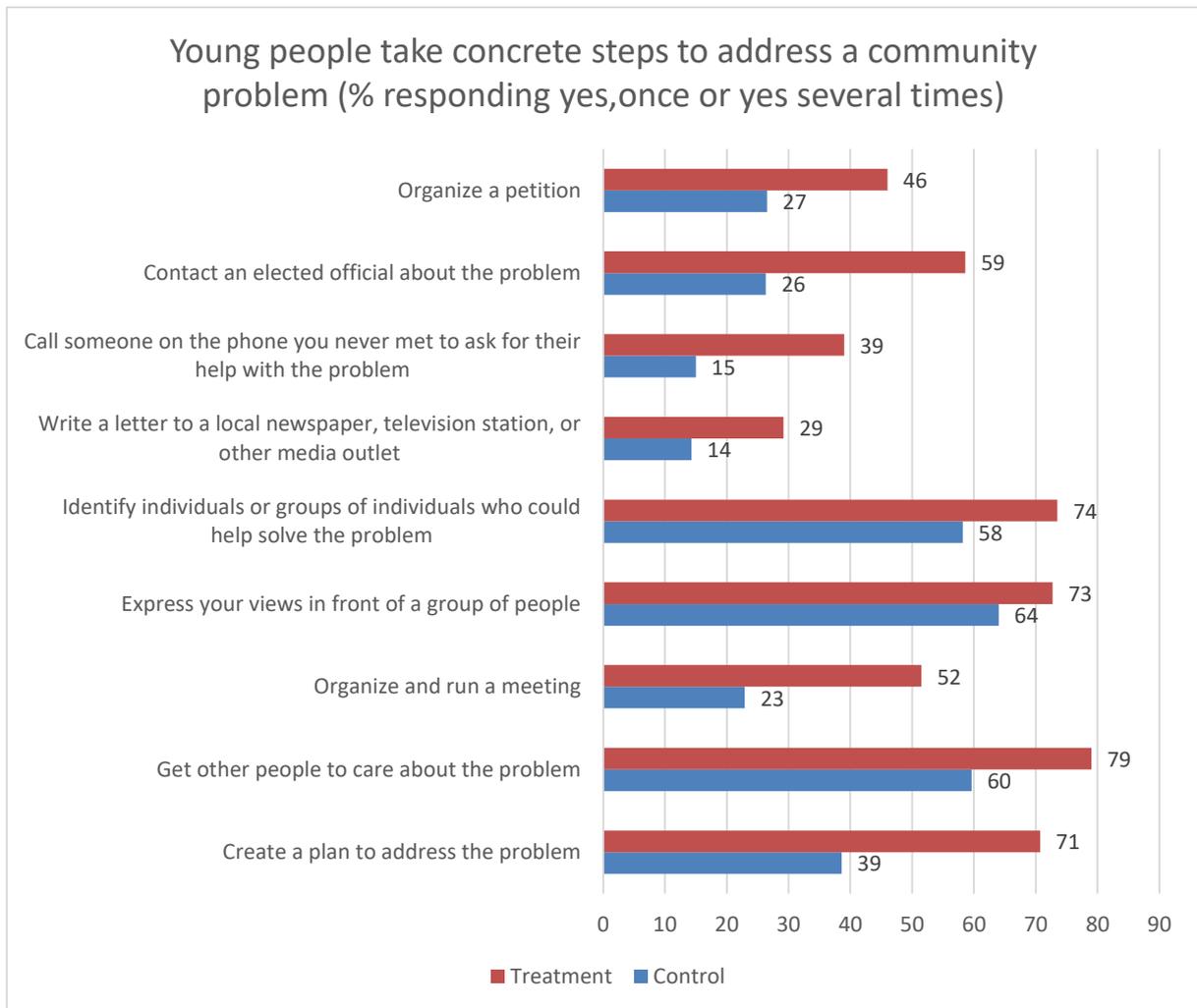
²⁷ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=0.44261$, $SE=0.29914$, $p=0.139$. The index include the following questions: q24.1; q24.2; q24.3.



The mutual relationship described above was mediated by one important factor: adults noticing tangible benefits brought by youth activism. In other words, increased trust of municipality and school representatives towards youth can be attributed to youth showing tangible results. As reported by students in Imereti, sceptical attitudes among local government representatives changed after several presentations students gave. The same is true for school teachers and principals. As students say, at the beginning school teachers and administration were quite sceptical toward the project and even warned children not to get involved in these trainings, as they thought it was a waste of time. However, when they saw real things done by children within the school, they changed their attitudes and at the end some projects were even funded through school budgets. As one student noted, “They (school administration) did not trust students and personally me. They even were aggressive some times. But after I participated in this project and implemented my own and equipped the school with new resources, the trust towards children increased. Now they even ask us to be more active and do more projects” (FG, Shida Kartli).

Overall, the mutual relationship appears to have led to a positive feedback loop, with young people engaging more in activism, having more contact with local government and school leaders as a result, thus leading to greater value and respect between the parties, in turn supporting greater activism. The outcome of this process is demonstrated by the increased levels of activism the participants of the program engaged in. On average, participants in the program were 3.4 points higher on an 18-point scale measuring whether young people took concrete steps to address a community problem (average score treatment group: 7.73; control: 4.28).²⁸ This represents an 80% increase which is attributable to the program. The differences between student engagement per activity is provided in the chart below, and shows that in general, participants were more likely to take a concrete step to address a problem their community faced than young people who were otherwise similar but not engaged in the project.

²⁸ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=3.44625$, $SE=0.92630$, $p=0.0001989$. The questions contained in the index include q20.1 20.2; 20.3; 20.4; 20.5; 20.6; 20.7; 20.8; and 20.9.



Besides the above, another factor that seems to be contributing to the municipality and school representatives' increased trust towards youth is WVG's reputation. Municipality, school representatives, and students all highlighted that trust in WVG, was an important factor for teachers' increased trust. As students noted, if the school administration trusts the NGO, which has a training or other activity with children, then they trust the children too. The trust in the NGO was determined by two factors: personal ties (e.g. school director knows someone in the NGO) or prior experience (if they see that the NGO does something good for their school, they trust it).

Overall, there is clear evidence for hypothesis one. As a result of project activities, students were significantly more likely to engage in activism. In turn, school administrations and local government officials report they increased their valuations of young people, according the qualitative data. Although the basic hypothesis is supported, several important steps stand between increased youth activism and LG and school leadership's increased valuation of young people. First, mutual respect between young people, local government, and school leaderships supported increased activism and increased activism supported greater value among LG and school administrations of young people. Second, within this loop of increasing valuations, young people's creation of tangible results was critical to the increasing levels of value that local government and school leadership placed in young people. Third, WVG's positive reputation was a critical enabling factor to the theory of action being successful.

Hypothesis 2

The project's second hypothesis was that increased capacity of local government in youth work would lead to increased value of youth among local government and school leaders. To increase capacity of LG in youth work WVG offered trainings, workshops and study tours to local government representatives. The evidence building exercise suggests that this did in fact take place, but that it was facilitated by precedents of successful collaboration rather than trainings alone. Although, evidence is found that the increased capacity of local government in youth work facilitated increased value of youth among local government, it is unclear how school administration's capacity would increase as a result of local government receiving training in youth work.

Hypothesis 2: Increased capacity of LG in youth work, leads to increased value of youth among school leadership and LG.



Rather than having direct indicators of increased value in the quantitative component, only a student survey was carried out. Hence, the project team uses a proxy to measure the presence of local government valuing youth. Specifically, the project team suggests that if students report that their opinions are taken into account by local government,²⁹ this suggests increased value among local government. To gather direct evidence of the anticipated outcome, qualitative data is used to understand school leader and local government attitudes. To understand the views of young people on these issues, focus group data is also considered.

The project appears to have increased local government capacity, with all interviewed municipality representatives reporting better skills in youth work as a result of the project:

The program of youth work was a real novelty for us. We learnt new approaches, started looking for new methods, and started working on youth (Interview with municipality representative, Shida Kartli).

We got new skills that are needed in order to work efficiently... communication skills... of course, we used to communicate with youth before, but now we have a much closer relationship with them (Interview with municipality representative, Kakheti).

Importantly, rather than testing for increased capacity among local government officials, the project is relying on self-reported data. This in turn means that the data is only suggestive rather than definitive in this regard.

It is important to remember that local government gained significant experience working with youth through the project. This experience seems to be highly influential in terms of changing attitudes towards and the practice of youth work rather than the trainings alone. As a municipality representative stated, SYNCS activities were an eye-opening experience for them:

²⁹ Local government officials encourage young people to make up their own minds; local government officials encourage young people to express their opinions; local government officials take young people's views into account when making policies; students are able to participate in monitoring of implementation of community projects; my local government takes the views of young people into account when conducting community projects; My local government takes the views of young people into account when making community development plans.

The best thing they (WVG) have done related to municipalities is opening our eyes. I might have seen before, but only what happened within a meter from me. WVG did an eye-opening surgery and we (LG staff and youth) saw more distant things, we saw details, other factors, issues, possibilities and goals that we did not know before” (Interview with municipality representative, Shida Kartli).

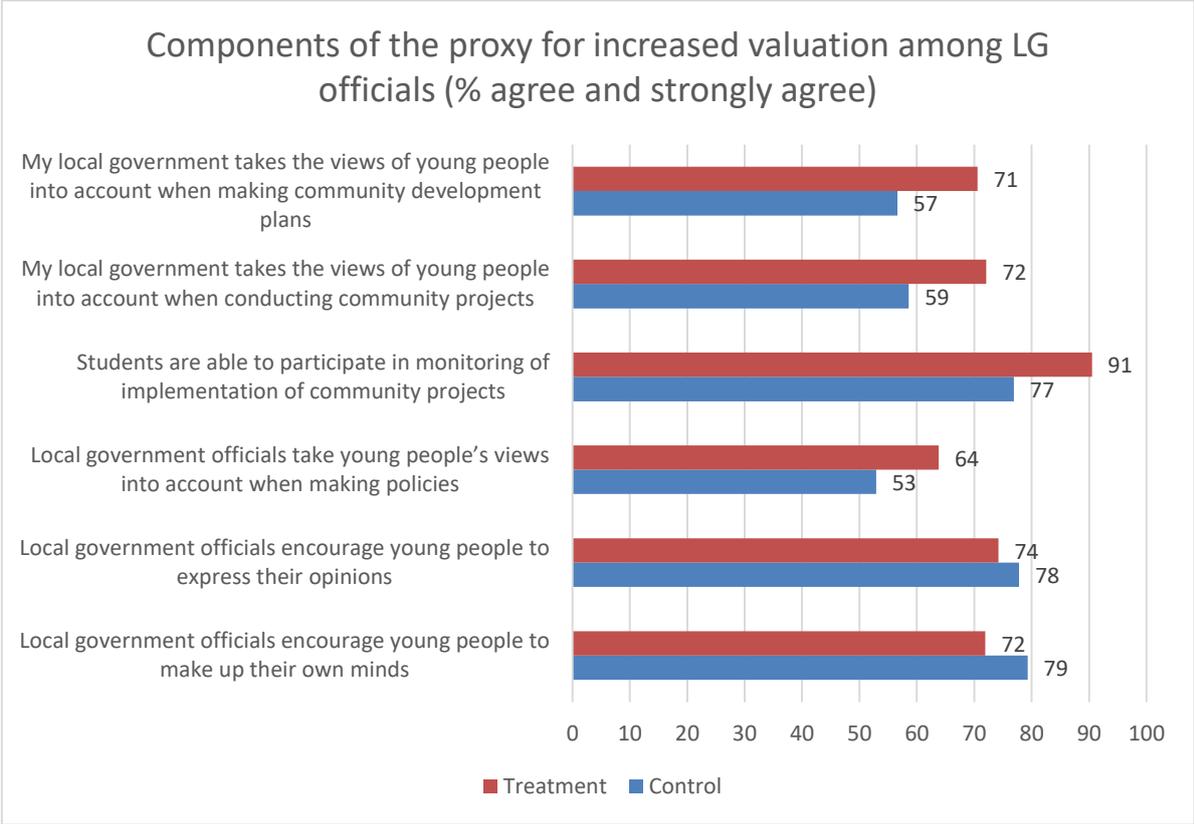
For most youth, their first contact with municipalities happened within the framework of this project, so they cannot compare municipality representative attitudes towards them before and after the project. Still, they do talk about their previous negative impressions of municipality representatives and their actual, positive experience with them:

Before (SYNCS) there were stereotypes that municipality staff were guys who work from a glass castle and meeting with them is a serious problem. One day we discovered that children aged 14-15 can go to a mayor, offer him a well-written and effective project and this project can be funded and implemented by them. This is very important (Focus group with WVG targeted youth, Samtskhe Javakheti).

Students that participated in qualitative interviews believe that thanks to the training they received within the framework of SYNCS project, they were able to prove their abilities to municipality and school representatives. They recall some cases when their effective presentation and project proposal persuaded municipality representatives to change their skeptical attitude towards them. Youth believe that because they demonstrated their skills and abilities, municipality representatives are now more likely to cooperate with them on different occasions. As noted above, local government officials also suggest that students’ skill sets increased their valuations of young people.

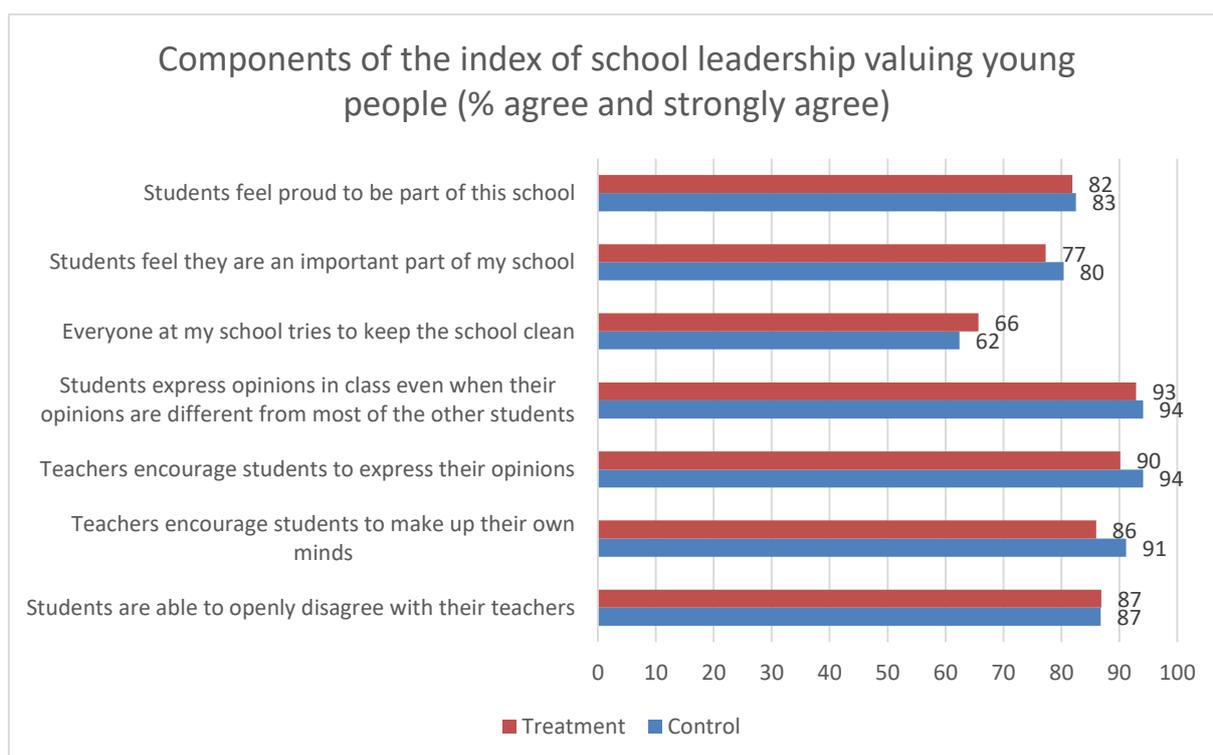
Although the local government officials valued the trainings and students in qualitative fieldwork suggest that they felt more valued by the local government, the proxy in student attitudes for local government respecting young people’s opinions does not show a significant increase. Results show only a non-significant 0.69 point difference between the participating students and comparison young people on a 18 point scale (mean treated: 10.77 ; mean control: 10.07).³⁰

³⁰ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=0.69190$, $SE=0.60300$, $p=0.2512$. The index contained questions 13.7;13.8; 13.9; 15.1;15.2;15.3.



As a result of local government's increased capacity, the project also expected to increase school leaderships' valuation of young people. The causal pathway through which this would take place is not entirely clear, because no activities to raise school leadership capacity for youth work were implemented within the project. There does not appear to have actually been an increase in valuation among school officials. The proxy indicator for this does not suggest any increase just as in the case of the local government officials.³¹ Results of regression show a non-significant change of -0.3 on a 21 point scale (mean treatment: 15.26; mean control: 15.56).

³¹ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta = -0.30097$, $SE = 0.65161$, $p = 0.6442$. The index contained questions: q13.1; q13.2; q13.3; q13.5; q28.1; q28.2; q28.3.



However, as with local government officials, teachers and school principals reported changing their attitudes towards their students as a result of realizing their potential and abilities through their experiences within the project:

We now believe in our students. We are now aware of their abilities...Before we believed that they cannot do anything without us...We now believe that they can do certain things independently (Interview with school principal, Kakheti).

Before the school administration and also the local government thought that students do not know anything, that students had no ideas and that their ideas could be taken into consideration...but now they see that students can do much more [than they expected from them]. I support these youth (Interview with school principal, Samtskhe-Javakheti).

From the interviews and focus groups conducted with youth, municipality and school representatives increased capacity in youth work and increased value of youth for school leadership seem not directly related to each other. Rather it is increased youth activism that achieved specific, tangible results (sometimes with the help of municipalities) that increased the value of youth for school administration.

In general, youth activism seems to be greatly influenced by the attitudes of adults. As highlighted by all stakeholders, most young people remain inactive. This inactivity is partially explained by their parents/families focusing on formal education and academic achievements of their children, while other activities (such as participation in trainings organized by NGO's, extracurricular activities in the schools, etc.) are considered a waste of time.

Adults, and family members and teachers in particular, can play an important role in making youth more active. As one student noted, "When your family members told you that what is good to do or how one should not behave, and teachers at the school tell you the same, you learn all these and your mindset is formed" (FG, Kakheti). This quote highlights the importance of a complex approach for achieving youth activism. Another example that demonstrates how adults' attitudes can hinder youth activism is related to school staff. One student noted, "Teachers are sceptical towards our opinions. My post was about same-sex marriage, and this became subject of serious criticism in my school. I was

told that the school principal might call me in her/his office” (FG, Shida Kartli). Of course this type of reaction from adults can greatly discourage youth from similar activism in the future. This discouragement is also suggested by the quantitative data. To test for a relationship, a regression was run with the outcome variable being whether students took some concrete step to address a community problem, and the predictor variable being how much students agree or disagree with the statements that “I talk with my family members about social issues,” and “Family members want to hear my opinions about social issues, even if their views are different from mine.” The index was interacted with the treatment instrument in order to control for World Vision’s intervention. The results suggest that the more students disagree with the statements that their parents would support talking with them about social issues, the less likely they are to take concrete steps towards solving a community issue (OLS: $\beta = -0.86$, $SE = 0.27327$, $p = 0.001735$). Moreover, the interaction term between the parental support index and the treatment status is also negative, though slightly higher than the conventional threshold for significance (OLS: $\beta = -0.88590$, $SE = 0.49968$, $p = 0.076242$). These findings suggest that not only was this an issue, but the intervention **may** have made the situation worse with regards to a lack of parental support leading to lower levels of civic engagement as a result of the treatment. The same analysis was carried out for whether a student participated in a community organization to further test the above relationship, and the results are broadly similar (OLS: $\beta = -0.48412$, $SE = 0.23973$, $p = 0.04344$), although the interaction term is no longer significant.

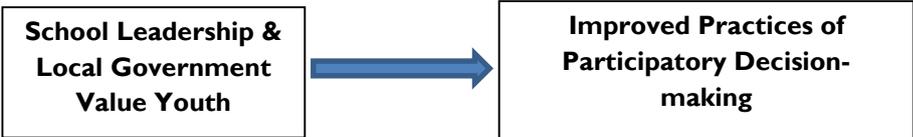
WVG invested much in capacity building of youth and municipality staff, but little in other community adults. As a result of both sides being ready and prepared for cooperation, cooperation between youth and municipalities went more smoothly, but other adults (parents, teachers) whose capacities were not strengthened so much within the framework of SYNCs, became barriers for increasing youth activism. Thus for WVG’s future programming related to school-aged children, the power of parents and teachers over young people should be taken into account.

Overall, local government officials increased capacity in youth work appears to have prepared them for successful collaboration with youth, however it does not appear that it was a critical factor in the success of the project. Rather, interviews and focus groups conducted with different stakeholder show that as a result of increased capacity of LG representatives and increased capacity of youth, several precedents of successful collaboration emerged, which positively affected youth activism and community adults’ trust in them. Hence, the evidence for hypothesis 2 is relatively weak when it comes to training increasing local government capacity alone. At the same time no evidence is found that training local government resulted in increases in valuing young people among school administrations.

Hypothesis 3

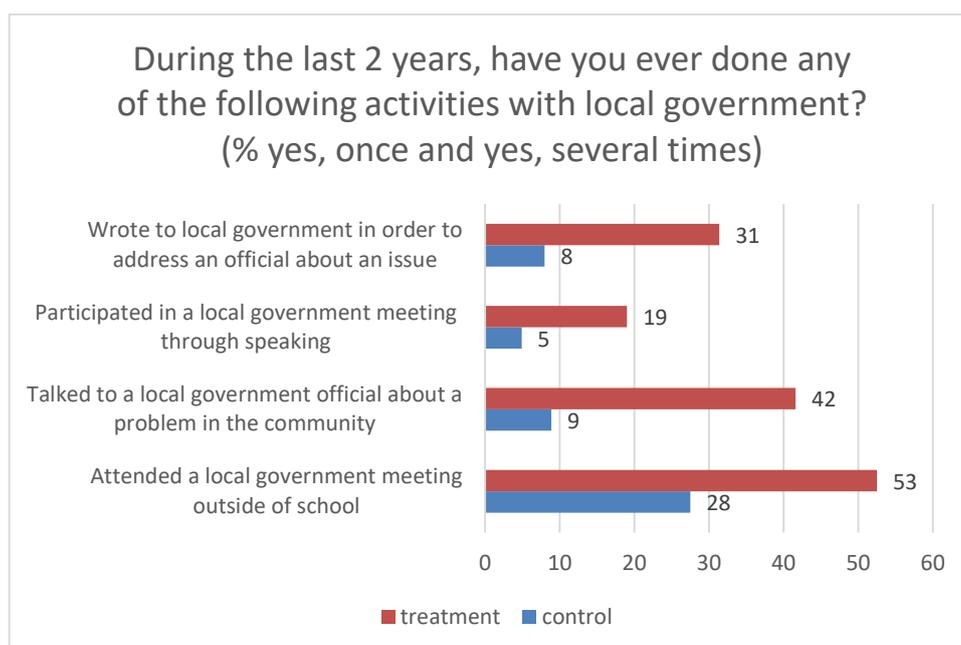
The third hypothesis within the project suggested that increased value of youth by school leadership and local government would lead to improved practices of participatory decision-making. For the purposes of this evidence building exercise, the project team considers greater levels of young people’s participation in decision-making as well as qualitative reports of positive outcomes through decision-making as improved practices. Overall, the evidence building exercise finds strong support for hypothesis 3, although several additional factors mediate the causal pathway to improved practices of participatory decision-making. The hypothesis as originally envisioned is presented in the diagram below:

Hypothesis 3: Increased value of youth among school leadership and LG leads to greater levels of participatory decision-making.



There is strong evidence that as a result of the project, young people became more engaged in school and local government level decision-making. When it comes to local government, young people who participated in the project scored 1.4 points higher on an eight point scale measuring their engagement with local government decision-making, a 214% increase that is attributable to the project (mean treated: 2.1 mean control: 0.66).³² The graph below shows the relative levels of engagement on four activities that young people reported engaging in. As the graph shows, young people who engaged in the project were more likely to write to a local government official to address an issue; participate in a local government meeting through speaking at the event; to directly talk to a local government official about a problem in the community; and to attend a local government meeting outside of school. As noted in the previous section, the proxy for local government valuing youth does not exhibit significant increases as a result of the project.

³² Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=1.42708$ SE=0.36983 O=0.000114.



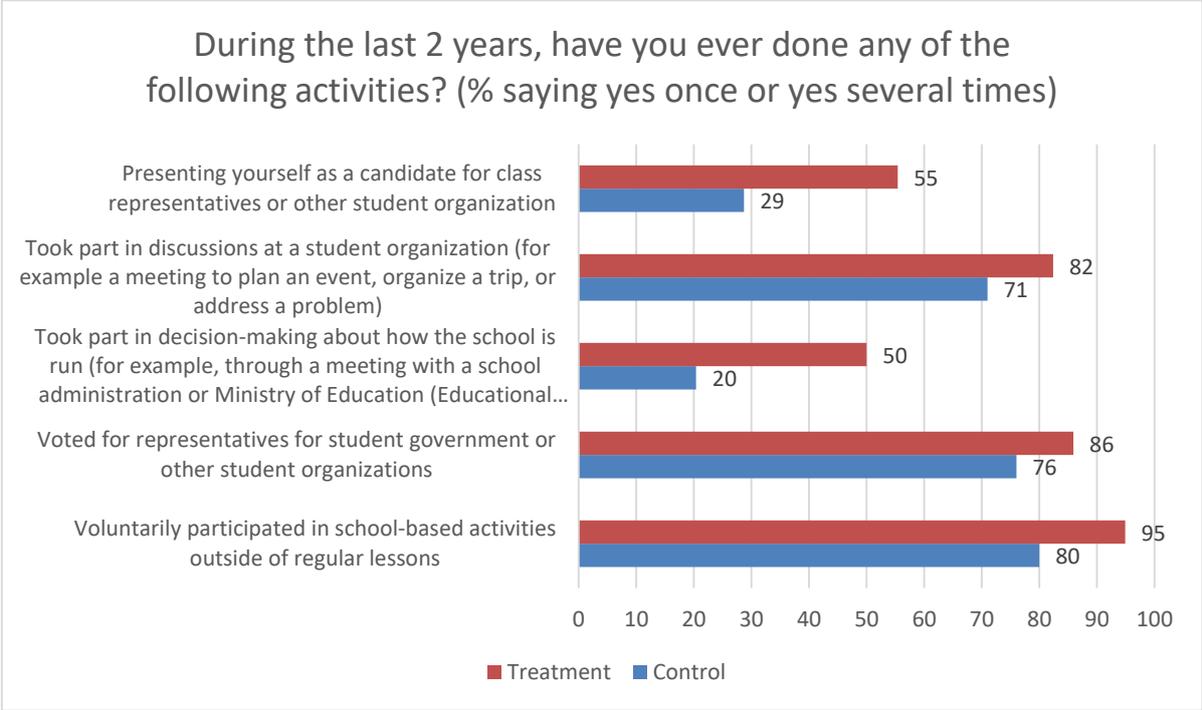
To test whether increased value of youth among local government was associated with increased engagement with LG, a regression model was run, with the above index as the outcome variable, and the treatment interacted with the proxy of local government respecting youth. The analysis suggests that an interaction may be present, but in the present case falls below the conventional level of statistical significance (OLS: $\beta=0.183684$, $SE=0.104835$, $p=0.079751$). A plot of the predicted responses of the interaction also suggests an increase, but with high levels of error due to few responses covering the distribution of potential responses within the treatment group. This suggests the need for further research into the hypothesis, though providing some weak evidence in support of it. Indeed, the present research design was not originally intended to test the above hypothesis using interaction terms, but rather the use the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data due to the fact that mutual causation is potentially present between the variables on the left and right side of the equation used to make the above estimation.

Besides the above activities, in three regions (Shida Kartli, Kakheti and Samtskhe Javakheti) youth participation in budget distribution and planning processes was reported by youth and local government representatives. Youth involvement in working on youth policy document in Kakheti is another example of their participation in decision-making processes. Within this process, local government officials started viewing youth as resources rather than problems and started actively utilizing them as such. As one official noted, “It was before when people were thinking that teens were a problem, now they are a resource for us, for the municipality as well” (Interview with municipality representative, Samtskhe Javakheti).

Young people that participated in the project were also significantly more likely to engage in decision-making at the school level as a result of the project. On a ten point index, students that participated in the project had an average score 1.6 points higher than in comparison schools, a 35% increase attributable to the program (mean treatment: 6.23; mean control: 4.62).³³ In the graph below, the different activities that students reported participating in are presented. Overall, the graph suggests that as a result of the project, young people were significantly more likely to present themselves as a candidate for class representative or another student organization; to take part in discussions at a

³³ Result comes from OLS regression: $\beta=1.60792$, $SE=0.44198$, $p=0.0002747$. The index included the following questions: q11.1; q11.2; q11.3; q11.4; and q11.5.

student organization; to take part in decision-making about how their school is run; to vote in school elections; and to voluntarily participate in a school-based activity outside school. As noted in the previous section, the proxy for schools valuing youth does not exhibit significant increases as a result of the project.



To test whether increased value of youth among school leadership was associated with increased participation in school level decision-making, a regression model was run, with the above index as the outcome variable, and the treatment interacted with the proxy of school leadership respecting youth. The analysis suggests that no interaction is present (OLS: $\beta=0.11874$, $SE=0.11499$, $p=0.303$). This finding should, however, be interpreted with caution, since the present research design was not originally intended to test the above hypothesis using interaction terms, but rather the use the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data due to the fact that mutual causation is potentially present between the variables on the left and right side of the equation used to make the above estimation.

School representatives also talk about students’ involvement in some decision-making processes initiated by the youth themselves. As a school principal noted, “In the school, we try to support the young people’s initiatives, in every way we can...Lately they had an initiative about the New Year’s event and we sat down and talked and I had no objections. We try to support...” (Interview with a school principal, Samegrelo).

Youth also report increased cases of their participation in decision-making processes. Some examples are an MP asking their opinion about arranging a library, participation in defining problems when the budget is being created (such as work on an abandoned park, maintaining roads etc.), and organizing advocacy campaigns from the municipal budget, among other activities.

One important factor that several stakeholders noted had positively affected community adults’ trust towards youth and increased the chances of participatory decision-making at schools and municipalities, is the involvement and views of senior managers (Gamgebelis and school principals). As some respondents highlighted, how the Gamgebeli or school principal views youth activism very much affects whether or not other staff value youth and their activism.

The attitude of the senior level staff towards a specific issue is very important. If s/he is interested in youth affairs and support department working on youth issues, the department is active and youth are satisfied. When the senior level staff is not interested and has no clue about youth, then things go wrong (Interview with municipality representative, Shida Kartli).

Program staff and regional coordinators also highlighted the importance of central government involvement. On the one hand, central government has the potential to encourage participatory decision-making processes and speed up some processes. On the other hand, central government involvement was important for sustainability and generalization of good practices across the country.

Importantly, departments working on youth issues in local governments served to link youth and senior management in municipalities. They informed their managers about youth's needs and wishes and laid the ground for their meeting and future cooperation. Youth Council in Telavi and the Leaders' League in Gori, which were jointly established by municipalities and youth serve as a link between youth and municipalities and represent a factor contributing to the sustainability and development of participatory decision-making practices:

The Youth Council is now the Gamgebeli's discussion place, where youth gather from time-to-time and present their point of view about budget planning, explain what and why they need something (for example, why they need a stadium). If reasons are valid, it is very realistic to consider it in the budget of 2018 (Interview with municipality representative, Kakheti).

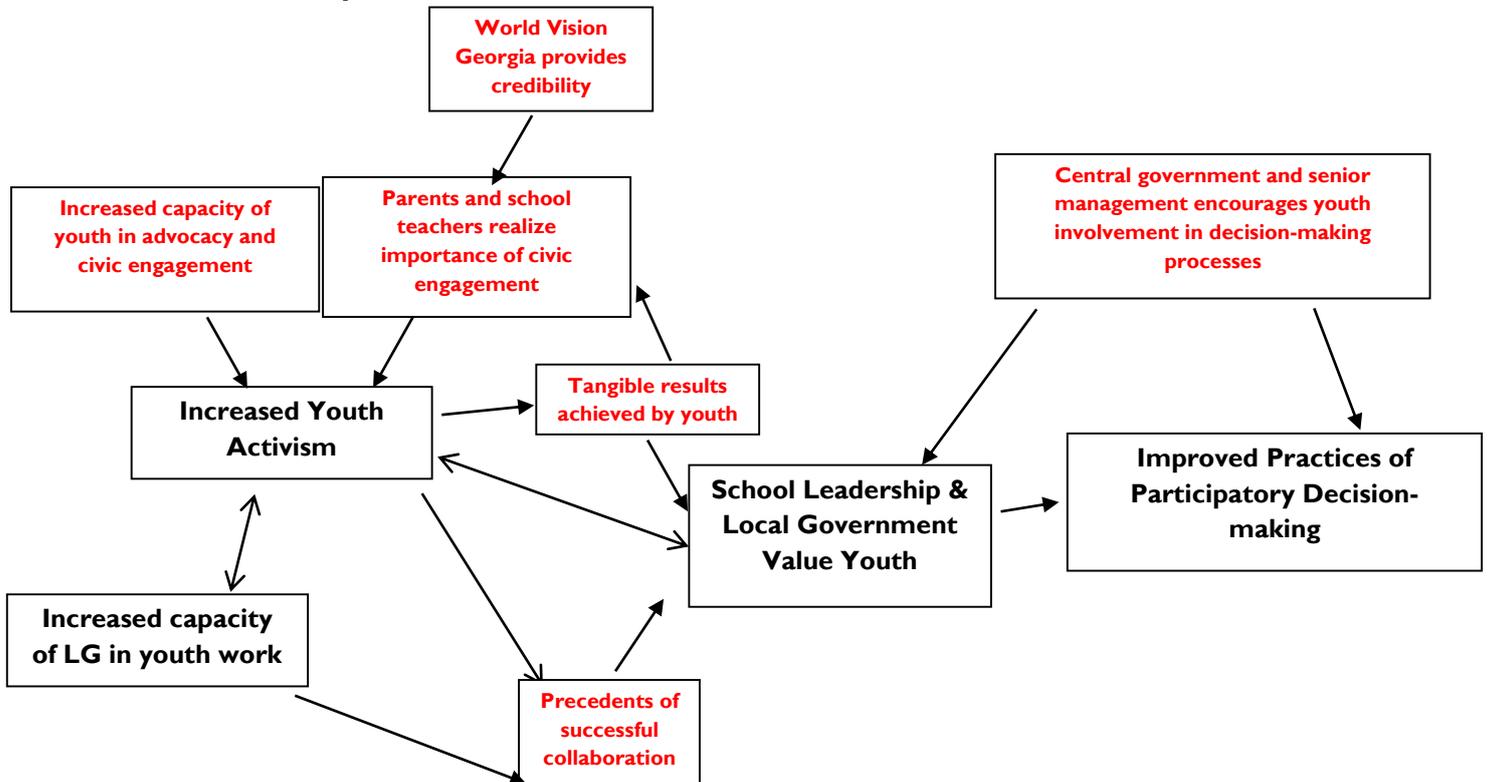
Thus, increased trust of school and municipality representatives resulted into some participatory decision-making processes. However, these processes exhibited better outcomes and local officials were more positive in their attitudes towards youth when appropriate signals were given from senior level staff and the central government encouraging youth involvement in decision-making processes.

Overall, the available evidence provides quite strong support for hypothesis 3. Increased valuing of young people by school administrations as well as local government officials did lead to increased levels of young people participating in participatory decision-making processes as well as higher quality processes. This is evidenced by the increases in young people's participation that is attributable to the project. The schools and local governments that participated in the project asking young people to participate and become more active also appears to be a result of the project.

Discussion and Conclusions

The data collected within this evidence building exercise shows that there was a clear impact of the project. While the project’s initial theory of action captured the overall picture, a number of important intermediary steps are present as the above findings suggest. In the flow-chart below, a revised theory of action is presented:

Revised Theory of Action



Hypothesis one proposed that increased youth activism would lead to school leadership and local government valuing youth more than they did. This hypothesis was confirmed. However, the results of evidence building exercise suggest that there were two prerequisites and an additional intermediary step needed for this result. The first prerequisite was increased capacity among youth to advocate and civically engage. This prerequisite was achieved through the project’s training component. The second prerequisite was that parents and school teachers realized the importance of civic engagement. As noted above, many teachers and parents actively discouraged young people’s engagement in the project. In cases where this requisite for the success of the project was not immediately present, the project was able to overcome prejudices about civic engagement through demonstration effects. While at first some teachers and principals were skeptical, they became supportive after seeing the tangible results that young people created. Moreover, the trust in World Vision was another important enabling factor in overcoming scepticism.

Young people achieving tangible results was a critical intermediate step in the pathway towards school leadership and local government valuing youth. As noted in the previous paragraph, parents and teachers who had been skeptical changed their attitudes in response to seeing tangible results. This process in turn lead to a positive feedback loop, with school leadership and local government valuing youth more, encouraging them to carry out their initiatives more to the point that schools, which have extremely limited budgets particularly in rural areas in Georgia, dedicated their own funds to student-

initiated projects. Young people, in response to the encouragement as well as the sense of accomplishment they achieved through producing tangible improvements in their communities, further engaged in activism. This positive feedback loop was critical in increasing young people's activism.

Hypothesis two suggested that increased capacity among local government to engage in youth work would lead to increased value among local government and school leadership of young people. This hypothesis, insofar as it references the training component of the project, was found to be relatively weak. It appears that the training component was an enabling factor, because it prepared local government for collaboration. However, the experiential learning that took place within the project for local government officials appears to be more important in leading to increased value among officials. Hence, the training component of the project can be said to have facilitated increased value among local government of youth. However, the experience of successful collaboration, which in turn served as a precedent for students engaging local government on further issues, was critical to the increased value local government placed on youth. Moreover, just as with school administration, the increase in valuation was not a one-way process. Rather young people developed more positive attitudes towards local government within the project. This in turn facilitated greater levels of young people's activism which again lead to positive feedback loops.

Hypothesis three, that local government and school administration increasing the value they place on youth would in turn increase and improve participatory decision-making, was supported by the evidence collected within the evidence building exercise. In general, through the increased value and trust that all parties in the project gained through the implementation process, young people were significantly more likely to participate in both local government and school level decision-making processes. As both local government officials and school leadership report now collaborating with youth more often, because it provides better results, the quality of participatory decision-making as well as the quantity of it has also appeared to increase as a result of the first two chains in the process. However, the role of senior managers in the process was found to mediate the success of participatory decision-making. While in areas where senior management clearly signaled their support for youth engagement, the process was successful, it was less so in areas without clear support from management.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

The above findings suggest a number of recommendations and lessons learnt for different stakeholders, including other organizations working with young people on civic engagement and World Vision Georgia.

World Vision made significant efforts within the project to raise students' capacities as well as that of local government officials. Both these efforts were critical to project success. However, the negative attitudes towards student civic engagement among teachers and parents inhibited project implementation and discouraged more youth from engaging. In this regard, it is recommended that:

- Future projects place equal emphasis on enabling all adults in children's lives for their engagement in civic activities.

In this regard, training may be an important part of leading to an enabling environment for adult-youth collaboration. However, the findings of this study suggest that training likely only facilitated engagement; what galvanized it was the experiential learning that took place through the project. Notably, as the evaluation document emphasizes, this was true for all parties involved in the project. Hence, it is recommended that:

- Trainings be complemented with experiential components whenever possible.

Aside from the above, in general the theory of action posited one-way relationships between students engaging in more activism, which in turn would lead to local government and school leadership valuing youth. However, this study has demonstrated that the relationship was mutual, with a positive feedback loop between adults increasingly showing trust in young people, and in turn young people reciprocating. This positive feedback loop was critical to increasing participatory decision-making. In this regard, an important lesson learnt is that:

- Creating the conditions for increases in mutual levels of esteem are crucial to encouraging continued engagement of all parties engaged.

Although the program successfully engaged with local government officials, the success varied across different regions. In this regard, the mediating factor was whether senior managers signalled their approval of young people's engagement in participatory decision-making processes. In this regard, it is recommended that future programs aiming to engage young people in participatory decision-making processes:

- Bring senior management on board, and ask them to signal their support throughout their organization.

Aside from bringing on senior managers, the role of central government in the process was incredibly important for achieving a number of the project's outcomes particularly as relates local government. In this regard, it is recommended that:

- Central government's buy in to projects should be sought out at project start up, particularly if local government actors will engage in the project.

Finally, the project took a largely bottom up approach, working with relevant stakeholders rather than through empowering only one actor, based on the assumption that empowered individuals would bring about change. While this approach is likely to bring about systemic change in long-term projects, large-scale projects, it is unlikely to achieve the same in the short term due to staff turnover in local

government, and the migration of young people as they move to urban areas for education, among a wide range of other factors. Hence, for shorter term, smaller scale projects, it is recommended that:

- Projects use a combination of bottom up and top down approaches to ensure the sustainability of short term interventions.
- Projects should attempt to ensure the sustainability of best practices through working with central government to enable their institutionalization and thus sustainability.

Appendix I: Terms of Reference and Project Logical Framework



SYNCS Evaluation
Terms of Reference.doc



Logical
Framework.doc

Appendix 2: Evidence Building Exercise Design Document



Evaluation Design
Document.doc

Appendix 3: Survey Questionnaire, Focus Group, and Key Informant Interview Guides



KII guide
general.docx



KII Guide
Georgian.docx



KII Guide Project
Staff.docx



Focus Group
Guide.docx



Focus Group Guide
Georgian.docx

Appendix 4: Documents Reviewed

Within the scope of the evaluation, the following documents were reviewed:

1. SYNCS Monitoring Report - 24.03.17
2. Interim Narrative Report 371284 World Vision
3. 1st Quarterly Report Feb-Apr 2016
4. SYNCS III Quarterly Report August-November 2016
5. SYNCS quarterly report August-October 2017
6. SYNCS quarterly report May-July 2017
7. SYNCS Quarterly Report February-April 2017
8. Terms of Reference for the SYNCS Evaluation and Evidence Building Activity
9. Baseline Report for the SYNCS Project

Appendix 5: Descriptive Statistics for the Evidence Building Exercise Survey, including gender disaggregated data



Descriptive
Statistics.docx

Appendix 6: Project Evaluation



SYNCS Project
Evaluation

Appendix 7: Balance statistics



Match Balance at the School Level.pdf



Match Balance at the Individual Level