



Youth enriches SRHR interventions—*Youth Participation in Ethiopia*

Young co-researchers in Ethiopia interviewed young and adult staff of SRHR organisations about youth participation. They found out that young people who participate in SRHR initiatives in Ethiopia build leadership skills and contribute to the successful implementation of SRHR interventions. The researchers also provide recommendations on how best to support young people's involvement. Organisations and programmes could benefit from involving young people in decision-making too, for instance on research, design, planning and evaluation.

Youth mainly involved in implementation

The programme seeks to fully involve young people, but currently youth are mainly involved in the implementation: they mobilise peers and raise awareness on SRHR-issues. This is most likely the case because adults see mobilisation and awareness as the main added value of youth involvement. None of the interviewees seem to believe that young men and women could be leaders. On the other hand, most adults indicate they are willing to involve youth because they feel it helps them to improve young people's skills. Only one adult mentioned meaningful youth participation as a right. From this, the researchers conclude that actual meaningful youth participation—improving the quality and decision-making power of youth involvement—starts with understanding the need and recognising the added value of this group.

The benefits of youth participation

Young volunteers benefited the most from participation because working in organisations, in teams and with peers enhances their social network and is a learning opportunity. The programme helped them to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy: they had become confident and assertive enough to talk in meetings. Some young volunteers even took the discussion home: *“At home we could not talk about sexuality or condoms [with] our parents. Now we discuss about safe sex in my family”*. Some noticed their attitude had changed for better; they felt free to make use of SRH services themselves and were more motivated to support others with SRHR information.

Youth participation had several other positive effects. Youth involvement in SRH interventions has enabled greater outreach towards youth and more open discussions. For example, the successful edutainment approach uses dance and drama to inform about and discuss SRHR and HIV related issues. Moreover, some youth clubs are now linked to (youth-friendly) health centres, which allows

Facts - ASK programme in Ethiopia

Where?

Addis Ababa, Dessie, North Shoa, Hawassa

By whom?

- Amref Health Africa
- Chilanchil
- Dance4Life
- Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia (FGAE)
- Talent Youth Association (TaYA)
- Wise Youth Action Movement for Health (WYAMH)
- Youth Network for Sustainable Development (YNSD)

For whom?

Women of reproductive age (15-49); in-school and out-of-school youth; and health workers; TBAs, and traditional leaders.

Scope of the research

Four young co-researchers and a principal researcher held 11 focus group discussion involving 68 young people and 8 adults and 10 In-depth interviews with young people and 20 with adult staff, among all ASK implementing partners.

referral to SRH service providers. And advocacy efforts made government institutions decide to recruit four young health development agents and train 30 health workers in youth-friendly services.

Recommendations

- Accomplish meaningful youth participation through: 1) recognising young people's rights to participate and lead; 2) understanding the need and importance of meaningful youth involvement; and 3) having an organisational policy or a programme mandate. Many Ethiopian partners had a policy to hire between twenty and seventy per cent of their staff under the ages of 25 or 29.
- Work together with young people, based on a complete and comprehensive understanding of the programme by all involved. Work *with* youth and not just *for* them by enabling young people's meaningful involvement at all levels, e.g. in advocacy activities and international conferences. Youth participation improves youth-oriented programmes, because they themselves know best what is needed.
- Support youth with training, internships, mentoring and a platform to discuss as equals (e.g. quarterly review meetings where challenges and solutions can be discussed) for youth to grow their knowledge on SRHR issues and their leadership or management skills as peer educators.

