



## Online SRHR needs more moderation

***The Network of Adolescents and Youth of Africa (NAYA) uses radio, newspapers and new media to inform 16 to 24-year olds about sexual and reproductive health issues. NAYA assessed how Facebook, Twitter and Google+ influence young people's access to SRH information in a rural community in Migori County in Western Kenya.***

Mobile technology is generally considered cost-efficient, on-demand—anywhere and anytime—and based on personal preferences. Moreover, online information on sexuality ensures confidentiality and gives the option to remain anonymous. These characteristics motivate young people and help them openly discuss sensitive topics like sexuality.

### **Facebook and smart phones**

Young people use social media to ask about a range of sexuality topics like puberty, reproduction, sex and relationships; suitable contraceptives and the correct use of condoms; STIs and HIV; how to deal with sexual abuse and peer pressure; (post) abortion; drug abuse; and cervical cancer screening. Young people also use social media to learn about the range of services available at health facilities.

Most youth prefer text messages to receive information. Radio is also still widely used due to the lack of stable internet connection and the right phones. Facebook was by far the most popular online website. Social media was mostly accessed via smart phones, mainly because of its interactive nature: questions are answered almost immediately by others online. Google is also used to find information on sexual health. However, it is difficult to get reliable and adequate answers, because of a lack of expert advice. That is why digital platforms are mostly used to complement information obtained elsewhere. In Siaya and Migori, NAYA organises quarterly youth meetings to follow-up of the online discussion and inform and discuss more about SRH issues.

### **Parents and school restrict access**

Despite improved access to internet and a growing use of smart phones, young people experience barriers when looking for information on SRH issues online. Practical issues include the lack of a mobile phone or internet connectivity and the costs of a smart phone and charging it. However, parental restrictions on access to phones and what their children can access on their phones and computers is the most striking feature: *“The problem is that parents are very protective of their children—especially younger adolescents—and are keen to know whatever information they access via their phones.”* (Male participant of a focus group discussion for 10 to 14-year olds)

### **Facts about the research**

#### **Where?**

Migori County, Western Kenya

#### **By whom?**

Network of Adolescents and Youth of Africa (NAYA)

#### **For whom?**

Young people (10-24 years) who have access to the internet and mobile phones.

#### **Scope of the research**

Young people and research assistants conducted a desk study, 6 Focus Group Discussions with young people (10-24 years) and 2 Focus Group Discussions with NAYA youth advocates.

Restrictions imposed by schools—like limited access to phones during school hours—further reduce students’ opportunities to obtain SRH information online.

### Recommendations

- Ensure good moderation. In terms of expert information, skilled staff—possibly trained on using mobile technology and social media—should disseminate information and raise new topics for discussion. In terms of pace, responding to questions quickly is highly motivational for users and one of the advantages of social media.
- Make the available information attractive for users. Studies on the effectiveness of web-based programmes show that youth spent little time on health-related sites compared to viewing entertainment sites or accessing e-mail. The use of peer-educational materials (e.g. blogs) and educating in a fun and entertaining way (i.e. edutainment) can help attract their attention, and make them enjoy their time on the platform.
- Drive traffic to digital platforms or social media accounts. For example, NAYA trained 120 youth advocates in engaging other youth to like or follow online discussions. NAYA’s Facebook account has around 2,000 visitors each month.

