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Netherlands

The Knowledge Platform on
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights



YOUTH LEADERSHIP, MOVEMENT BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Facilitator: **Fanuel Getachew**, Youth Engagement Coordinator at TaYa.

Speakers:

Eka Purni, Youth Country Coordinator, Get Up Speak Out

Judy Amina, Youth Country Coordinator, SRHR Alliance Kenya, Yes I Do Alliance

INTRODUCTION

This session included a panel discussion of youth country coordinators from Indonesia and Kenya. The session looked at the challenges faced and the experiences of young people in the SRHR alliances. It also looked at best practices which we can use in future to ensure the inclusion of young people in leadership roles in SRHR programmes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION

WHAT ARE CHALLENGES IN THE PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO THE TOPIC?

- Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) is not the same in every organisation. MYP should be considered as a spectrum and should be implemented step by step.
- The main challenge that was experienced by the speakers was that sometimes, adults did not fully grasp the concept of adult-youth partnerships. Eka shared that she experienced discrimination, even from government officials, as they question whether young people are best placed and experienced enough to be bringing issues forward.
- Cultural norms was another challenge which was experienced. At the beginning of the Yes I Do programme men did not allow young girls to speak about SRHR. It took time for the communities to understand that young people know best how to talk about their own issues. It took time for the adult-youth partnerships to develop.
- Lack of confidence that young people had in themselves was yet another challenge. Many young people did not realise that speaking out about their issues was their right.

WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES USED IN THE PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO THE TOPIC?

- Most SRHR programmes use trainers and professionals who are already knowledgeable on SRHR. But in the Yes I Do programme, young people were trained as peer educators. This was a good strategy as the programme empowered young people who previously had no SRHR knowledge.
- The Get Up Speak Out (GUSO) programme was also very deliberate on the role of young people in their programme and it took quite a while to build the confidence of young people. However, after the MYP training, it helped to shape opinions and reflect on the assumptions that adults have about young people and vice versa.
- Working with peer educators was also a good strategy in the partnerships as it resulted in more young people being aware of SRHR. The peer educators worked in communities and villages (at grass-roots level) and these are also the areas where much discrimination is found. However, the utilisation of peer educators meant that young people eventually warmed up and wanted to learn about SRHR.
- Working with a youth council was also an effective strategy in the partnerships. It was shared that the existence of this council resulted in it being easier and more comfortable for young people to come up with youth-led ideas.
- Engagement with country assemblies was a good strategy to connect young people and policymakers. Governments can be closed and intimidating to young people. However, it was observed during the country assemblies that the policymakers took the voices of young people seriously and even included budget in their policies and plans to address issues which the young people raised.

- GUSO provided several capacity building trainings to young people to make them more confident to speak out. Judy shared that she received this and feels empowered as a result. Providing training shows that instilling trust in young people empowers them greatly.

WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED IN THE PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO THE TOPIC?

- For youth leaders to be representative of a diverse group of young people, they need to ensure that they include the different perspectives of the young people they are representing. This empowers both the youth leader and the young people who are relying on them to voice the issues they are all facing.
- It is important to get support from the national programme coordinator – so that this person can bring the youth perspective forward.
- Having youth as leaders in the SRHR programmes is incredibly important and also effective in empowering them. Having young people as leaders allows them to have a direct link to presidential staff resulting in young people having direct access to the leaders of the country. By being in these positions, the young leaders can be the reference for the country and encourage the normalisation of youth leadership.
- The visibility that young people experienced during the programmes resulted in energy, freedom and flexibility. In the Kenya SRHR alliance case, young people requested budget for communication. They have initiated a lot of social media communication of their own volition, because they felt the ability to do so.
- A lesson learned from the alliances is that building the capacities of a youth leader needs to be followed by creating a safe space.
- For Judy, the main takeaway from GUSO was that we need to continue building youth capacity and involving youth in programmes in a meaningful way.

