



Building a better world, partnering with youth

Education on Sexual and Reproductive Health Building partnerships with and for youth

Interview with UNFPA

‘Lack of effective curricula and learning/teaching materials on comprehensive sexuality education’ - This has been identified as one of the primary challenges when it comes to youth and education on sexual and reproductive health based on preliminary results coming into the United Nations survey on the development of a System Wide Action Plan on Youth.

Education on sexual and reproductive health has been identified as key priority for the Secretary-General in the development of a System Wide Action Plan on Youth. With the survey still open (see how you can participate below), we took a moment to sit down with UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) to learn more about how the UN and other stakeholders can partner with and for young people in overcoming challenges in this area.

After reading the interview, why not take a moment to sit down and take our survey on the development of the Plan:

<http://social.un.org/index/Home/tabid/40/news/295/Default.aspx>

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14. What are the most important challenges/issues related to youth and education on sexual and reproductive health?

Lack of effective curricula and learning/teaching materials on comprehensive sexuality education.		59.7%
Lack of information about available health services.		41.1%
Teachers and health care workers are not adequately trained to deliver comprehensive sexuality education towards youth.		56.5%

Above, some preliminary responses on the key challenges in the area of youth and education on sexual and reproductive health, as identified in the ongoing survey on the development of a System Wide Action Plan on Youth.



Interview

What are the key issues in the area of education on sexual and reproductive health with regard to youth?

The most effective programmes in education on sexual and reproductive health are those that help to reduce misinformation and provide correct information, to clarify values and reinforce positive attitudes, and to strengthen decision-making and communication skills. Evaluation research has further confirmed that education on sexual and reproductive health does not lead to increased sexual activity.

One challenge to education on sexual and reproductive health is its limited reach to out-of-schools youth and other groups of marginalized young people. Many young people most in need of information and education are not enrolled in any educational programmes, especially girls and young women, who often drop out of school at an early age due to various social and economical factors. Therefore, it is important that education on sexual and reproductive health begin at a young age and continue through adolescence to reinforce messages over time with age-appropriate content and methodology.

Pedagogical research, including theories and standards backed by evidence, is needed to inform the development of curricula. Norms around gender and sexuality, equality, empowerment, non-discrimination and respect for diversity are scarcely addressed in curricula of educational programmes on sexual and reproductive health. Yet programmes that take gender and power relations into account have been shown to positively impact health-related behaviours (e.g. use of condoms and contraception, number of sexual partners), health outcomes (e.g. lower rates of sexually transmitted infections) and non-health outcomes (e.g. student performance, parenting and critical thinking skills). Additionally, many programmes do not provide scientifically accurate information about relevant psychosocial and health topics. Nor do they invest in visually engaging materials that provide young people with such information in ways that are age-appropriate.

Another challenge to implementing curricula is a lack of teachers who possess the necessary knowledge and training to teach appropriate and correct information on sexual and reproductive health. Additional barriers include opposition from cultural and religious leaders in some communities, as well as the absent or inadequate linkages between sexual and reproductive health education and general health or other relevant services.

How can partnerships with and for youth help to overcome these challenges?

Partnering with young people and fostering youth leadership and participation are of great importance. Consulting with and involving young people from the outset of



educational initiatives and developing trust and alliances across generations will help to overcome some of the challenges mentioned above. Efforts to build young people's capacities in advocacy, communication and peer education on sexual and reproductive health - among other issues – are also important and effective approaches to ensuring education on sexual and reproductive health.

Youth networks and youth organizations can serve as trainers in these areas, and many work at community/municipal levels in that capacity using various media, such as radio, video, writing and theatre. Partnerships that train peer educators can expand the reach of education on sexual and reproductive health to young people out of school. The establishment of clubs for discussing and providing peer education in primary and secondary schools can also help to overcome the above challenges.

Can you provide an example of how your entity is partnering with youth on this issue?

In 2008, young people in Nepal, with the support of UNFPA and other stakeholders, developed a multi-faceted advocacy campaign - referred to by two names "Health Population and Environment" or "Health and Physical Education" - to make education on sexual and reproductive health mandatory in their country's schools. They worked with teachers, parents and policymakers and used mass media extensively to disseminate their message. Young people were involved in all aspects of the work, including: research to build the evidence base for the programme; the training of educators; and the development of materials; media and community education campaigns; and advocacy work with policymakers.

The effective mobilization of youth and other stakeholders had multiple positive outcomes. Comprehensive sexuality education is now compulsory in grades 6 to 8 in Nepal and human sexuality is a mandatory course in the Masters in Education and Masters in Population programmes at Nepal's largest and most established university. A training manual and reference materials have been developed, and more than 75 master trainers have been trained. Many policymakers are now aware of sexual and reproductive health issues and are supportive of comprehensive education in the field. Moreover, the leadership capacity of young people has been strengthened through their active participation in every aspect of the campaign.

Can you share any lessons learned or good practices in building partnerships with youth in this area?

The importance of building support at the local level among parents, teachers and community leaders cannot be emphasized enough when working with youth to address this issue. Additionally, on-going advocacy, technical and financial support, and capacity-building of government bodies in charge of educational curricula, teachers, youth networks and youth-led organizations, is critical for sustainability.



Have your say!

Contribute to our Survey

<http://social.un.org/index/Home/tabid/40/news/295/Default.aspx>

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10th August at 14:00, Eastern Standard Time.

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