

# LESSONS LEARNT FROM IPPF'S CHOICES PROGRAMME



*"Choices isn't an end:  
it's a beginning for us."*

Project coordinator,  
Family Planning Association of India

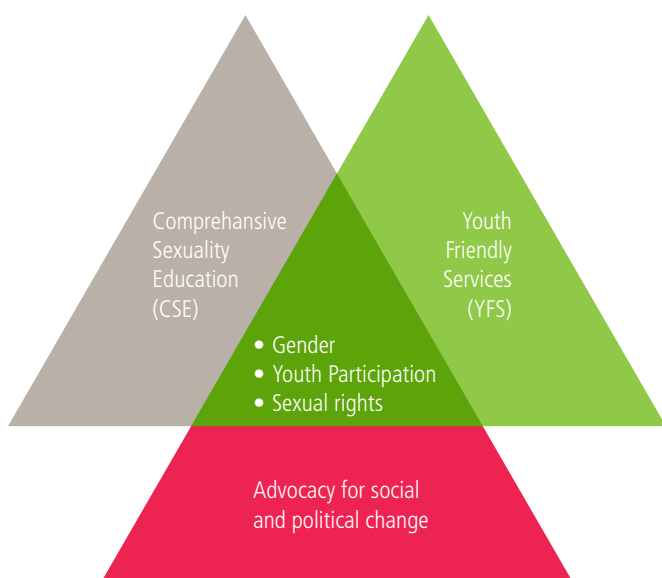


Young people aged 10-24 make up a quarter of the world's population. Yet young people are rarely given a chance to be fully involved in the decisions and programmes that affect their lives, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Adolescence is a pivotal life stage when individuals gain resilience, knowledge and skills for a healthy and productive life. Sexuality is a natural part of human development: young people are sexual beings, whether or not they are sexually active. Rather than simply considering young people's sexuality as a risk - a cause

of morbidity and mortality - we should embrace it as a source of happiness and fulfilment. A youth-centred model that values young people as partners enhances their well-being and ability to exercise their rights. IPPF's pioneering **Choices and Opportunities programme ("Choices")** clearly demonstrates the benefits of this fresh approach to young people's SRHR.

**Choices**, which was implemented from 2011 to 2015 with the support of the Dutch Government, has strengthened the capacity of 17 IPPF Member Associations (MAs) to advance young people's SRHR.



Choices is based on a triangular approach:

- youth-friendly services
- comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)
- advocacy for social and political change.

At the heart of this model are gender equity, youth participation and sexual rights. This approach has proved highly effective. Over a five-year period, in total, Choices MAs:

- provided **58.8 million** sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to young people
- delivered CSE to **820,625** young people in schools and to **555,148** young people out of school
- contributed to **14** positive national level policy changes that prioritized the SRHR needs of young people within national health and education systems and trained **16,759** young people as advocates for CSE.

This short document pulls together the main lessons learnt in implementing Choices. It reflects the rich diversity of programming in the areas of youth-friendly services, CSE and advocacy. By drawing on the learning and experiences of the Choices MAs, it seeks to answer key questions, such as how can we genuinely work in partnership with young people? How can we empower youth to make informed choices and reach their potential? Indeed, how can we measure



empowerment? In traditional and religious environments, how can we address sensitive issues such as young people's sexual rights? Crucially, given adolescents' high unmet need for contraception and the disproportionate burden of HIV and unsafe abortion, how can we deliver youth-friendly services and education to the places where young people live?

### CHOICES: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

The Choices programme has generated a wealth of learning and sharing of best practice. Some of the most valuable learning comes from understanding how the MAs have overcome the challenges they have encountered. Lessons learnt will be shared in three areas: increasing access to youth-friendly services; extending access to CSE and creating enabling environments.

### LESSONS LEARNT: INCREASING ACCESS TO YOUTH-FRIENDLY SERVICES CHOICES

MAs have extended the range of contraceptives available to youth, as well as invested in the quality of services. As a



result, uptake has risen significantly. While SRH programmes for young people are unique, and must be designed according to the local context, the following lessons learnt may be helpful:

- ✓ **Know the demographic.** This means clearly identifying groups of young people, collecting and analysing local data (qualitative and quantitative), and working with young people to understand their context, communities, aspirations and identities.
- ✓ **Build trust.** Listen to young people and the issues that affect them most. It is important to create "safe spaces" (including online) where young people can interact with their peers.
- ✓ **Define and ensure a minimum package of services.** IPPF has developed the Integrated Package of Essential Services (IPES)<sup>1</sup> which is being rolled out throughout the Federation. Ensuring linkages and referrals to services beyond health care, such as education and vocational programmes, is key.
- ✓ **Strengthen the capacity** of service providers to provide quality care. This entails task shifting and training so that staff can acquire the specific skills and attitudes

1. The Integrated Package of Essential Services (IPES) is designed to increase access to a broad range of quality SRH services, using a 'one-stop shop' model. IPES includes the following services: counselling; contraception; safe abortion care; sexually transmitted infections/reproductive tract infections; HIV; gynaecological; obstetric and gender-based violence services.

needed to uphold young people's rights to information, privacy, confidentiality and respect. Capacity building is not a one-off activity: service providers need ongoing training, supervision and support.

- ✓ **A wide range of service delivery models** is needed to reach young people, including marginalised young people. These models encompass the use of vouchers, community-based distribution, e-and mHealth, static and mobile clinics, outreach and social franchising. Peer- and web-based provision can expand access to SRH services and commodities.
- ✓ **Securing young people's input** is vital. **Peer educators** - often recruited from the under-served groups that the MAs want to reach - play a crucial role in delivering services, making referrals, quality control, CSE and advocacy.

## CASE STUDY



### DELIVERING YOUTH-FRIENDLY SERVICES TO MARGINALISED YOUNG PEOPLE IN KENYA

By placing young LGBTI people at the centre of their programme, Family Health Options Kenya (FHOK) has reinvigorated its service provision to LGBTI youth. Same-sex relations are not permitted by the Kenyan Government, and individuals often experience stigma and violence.

FHOK has raised awareness among LGBTI youth of their constitutional rights and increased the number of young LGBTI people accessing SRH services. FHOK trained its staff and governing body on LGBTI issues and service delivery, and gained their support in prioritising LGBTI-friendly services, including mobilising resources. FHOK expanded outreach services and the type of commodities (such as lubricants) available, and recruited young motivated LGBTI people. They were trained as peer educators, and are now training their peers. These young volunteers link LGBTI youth to health facilities and advocate for LGBTI rights in their communities. Safe spaces for LGBTI youth have been created within youth centres, and demand for services has grown.

Engaging young LGBTI people early on sustained the project and drove demand. Young LGBTI volunteers have been supported to guide programme development and take some credit for its success.



## REACHING MARGINALISED YOUNG PEOPLE

Reaching marginalised young people, including young people who are out of school, young people living with HIV, young sex workers, LGBTI youth, young people in humanitarian settings and young people living with disabilities, is a major challenge. SRHR programmes should not only aim to provide under-served young people with access to services, but also enable them to feel in control of their lives. Empowerment is a key concept with regard to young people's SRHR programming, especially in relation to vulnerable youth. Building trust, understanding young people's interests and listening to them can help the most marginalised young people feel included. As such, they are more likely to participate in programme delivery, advocacy, evaluation, youth leadership and governance.

Choices has transformed MAs' approach to sexuality education, both inside and outside the school setting. Choices MAs are now developing content which is more attuned to young people's needs, using the 'Inside & Out' tool.<sup>2</sup> CSE content has been broadened to cover positive aspects of sexuality, including relationships, pleasure and

2. Inside & Out is an interactive CSE assessment tool, developed by IPPF and UNESCO, to support MAs in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their CSE activities, both inside and outside the school setting. Available at: <http://www.ippf.org/resource/inside-and-out-comprehensive-sexuality-education-cse-assessment-tool>

diversity, as well as rights, gender and life skills. Nevertheless, organisations face a number of challenges in securing support for CSE. Lessons learnt include:

- ✓ **Ensure that the content of CSE is tailored to diverse groups of young people.** Choices MAs have found that preparing guidelines for facilitators to address different participants' needs is essential. Involving groups of young people in developing CSE content and obtaining their feedback is also important, as is regularly refreshing teaching materials.
- ✓ **Build the capacity of educators to deliver rights-based CSE.** This entails training educators to address all elements of CSE, including rights, gender and abortion. It also means supporting educators to adopt new participatory approaches to learning which can spark critical thinking in students. Educators may need support in creating safe spaces in which young people can discuss sexuality.
- ✓ **Work in partnership** with parents, schools, communities, decision-makers and religious organisations to gain community acceptance and generate demand for CSE. This helps counter negative attitudes, for example, a belief that CSE promotes sexual activity.

- ✓ **To reach marginalised young people** who are not in school, CSE can be delivered in a range of non-formal settings, including clinics, youth and community centres, through drama and the use of **new technology**, such as interactive apps and online CSE curricula.
- ✓ **Measuring and evaluating CSE** is vital so that organisations can demonstrate its impact, thereby sustaining CSE and driving demand. Setting clear objectives is key. Assessment tools, such as Inside & Out, help ensure the quality of CSE. To elicit feedback from young people, questions should be asked in open-ended ways.
- ✓ Choices MAs have invested in training young **peer educators** to provide CSE. This approach has proved highly effective. Recognising that retaining peer educators is a challenge, MAs have implemented creative retention strategies: offering different types of incentives, such as bicycles or payment for transport.



## CASE STUDY



### PEER EDUCATORS SCALE UP ACCESS TO CSE IN PAKISTAN

Through Choices, IPPF MA in Pakistan, Rahnuma FPAP, has developed tailored CSE resources for peer educators, including a CSE training manual in English and Urdu, a toolkit on the provision of youth-friendly services and short docudrama videos on various CSE components.

Regular CSE training is conducted by the MA for peer educators who are also supported to provide information to out-of-school youth. Under the Choices project, the MA has established 15 Youth Resource Centres, managed by peer educators who conduct monthly CSE sessions. The centres act as referral points to the MA's services. Peer educators reach out to young girls who are confined to their homes and lack information about SRHR.

FPAP's robust training programme for peer educators includes: training as peer providers, specifically as counsellors; as street theatre performers on CSE issues in the community; on engaging boys and men as partners in addressing sexual-and gender-based violence; and in CSE advocacy. Peer educators are members of youth networks of like-minded organisations that raise community awareness of issues such as early marriage. The involvement of youth is integral to the programme's success: this boosts ownership, empowerment and motivation.

## LESSONS LEARNT: CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

Significant legal, social and cultural barriers limit young people's access to a full range of SRH services and education. Advocacy to influence policies, mobilise support for young people's sexual rights and change mindsets within communities is critical. Choices demonstrates that young people, when trained and supported by adults, are the most effective advocates for their rights. Lessons learnt in advocacy include:

- ✓ **Analyse and understand the policy and political context** - those laws and policies that are supportive and those that hinder young people's SRHR - and design advocacy efforts in collaboration with youth.
- ✓ Monitor relevant laws and policies and **hold government to account** for their implementation. Involving young people is essential for success.
- ✓ **Build relationships with the media.** The media can be a powerful tool to change public perceptions of young people's SRHR. Respond to falsehoods in the media by providing accurate information, supported by evidence.
- ✓ **Language matters.** Choices MAs found that the use of familiar, broader terminology around CSE can serve as an entry point for advocacy to increase access to CSE. In Ethiopia, for example, Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia uses the term "comprehensive family life and SRH education" rather than CSE.
- ✓ **Win support from influential decision-makers** beyond SRHR, including community leaders, famous patrons, religious scholars and school principals. This can foster support and acceptance of CSE at the national level.
- ✓ **Engaging young people in advocacy** is vital. This requires strengthening young people's capacity to design, implement and evaluate advocacy, through training and mentoring. It is crucial to nurture young emerging leaders and champions, especially young women.
- ✓ **Strategic partnerships** with vibrant youth organisations and national, local and/or district authorities are necessary to reach young people and boost support for young people's SRHR.
- ✓ **Collaborate with religious communities** on shared goals related to young people's well-being. This entails identifying religious leaders, engaging in discussions on values and SRHR, seeking common ground, and showing how religious teaching can be reconciled with SRHR, not just for beneficiaries but also for religious service providers.



## CASE STUDY

### YOUTH-LED ADVOCACY ON ABORTION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

In the Dominican Republic, IPPF MA, Profamilia, trained youth leaders in advocacy with a focus on abortion rights. They supported a national campaign on sexual rights that began in 2013 and continued throughout 2014. Young people led regional conferences to sensitise lawyers and journalists around abortion issues - actions that are radical in a country with one of the most conservative laws on abortion in Latin America. Young people and other advocates from the MA applied significant pressure on the government, as well as implementing targeted advocacy aimed at changing public opinion. These advocacy initiatives finally resulted in the decriminalisation of abortion at the end of 2014.



## SUSTAINABILITY: THE PROFOUND IMPACT OF CHOICES

Sustainability is incorporated in the design and implementation of the Choices programme. Looking at CSE, for instance, Choices MAs have trained teachers, peer educators, parents and service providers to deliver rights-based CSE which recognises sexuality as a positive aspect in life. Partnerships with parents and schools to generate support for CSE have created a sense of ownership among parents, who will continue to collaborate beyond Choices. Peer educators have taken the lead and will advance the objectives of the Choices programme, ensuring sustainability.

Choices has informed and sharpened IPPF's approach to youth programming. The youth-centred model and the skills, tools, guides, policies and protocols developed through Choices are not limited to the Choices MAs: they have shaped the entire Federation. The comprehensive youth-centred approach is at the heart of IPPF's new Strategic Framework (2016-2022). This provides an opportunity for IPPF to institutionalise its commitment to young people, and sustain the impact of youth programmes. The rights-based

approach will benefit all clients, not just young people, thereby amplifying the results of Choices. The youth-centred model, based on the experiences of Choices, also serves as a valuable resource for other organisations undertaking youth programming.

## WORKING TOWARDS A NEW GENERATION OF YOUTH PROGRAMMING

The success of Choices clearly illustrates the value of a youth-centred approach: a holistic, integrated strategy linking youth-friendly services, CSE and advocacy. Fundamental to this approach is a genuine focus on empowerment (crucial for girls and under-served young people) and meaningful youth participation and leadership. The greatest impact arises from all these components being carried out simultaneously. Given power dynamics between generations, building supportive communities is vital. This entails expanding partnerships and alliances with parents, teachers, educators, religious and community leaders. To address adolescent SRHR comprehensively and improve young people's well-being, IPPF and other organisations must urgently scale up this model.

Choices shows that we should not only focus on serving young people, but on strengthening their involvement as partners and agents of change. This approach will benefit young people, the adults they work with and further the programme objectives, which is vital for sustainable change. A youth-centred approach means that we are less likely to consider young people as “clients” and more likely to consider them as partners. With support and capacity building, young people can and should play a key role from the onset in every aspect of SRHR youth programming (service delivery, CSE and advocacy): designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation. Engaging young people can often be tokenistic. That’s why young people must be given the opportunity to evaluate youth-centred initiatives: to indicate whether adults have heard what they have to say and have acted on it.

Involving youth not only makes programming more effective, it can also reinforce empowerment. Empowerment is about supporting young people to understand and claim their (sexual) rights, gain confidence in developing their identities and make informed choices. It is a process in which a young person develops the capacity to see themselves as the central actor in their lives. Tracking the journey from disempowered to empowered requires measuring and documentation. New indicators are needed to assess empowerment, and capture qualitative aspects of fulfilment in emotional well-being and happiness, such as changes in young people’s lives and awareness of their sexual rights.<sup>3</sup> This can also enhance accountability to the people who are intended to benefit.

To make youth-centred programming a reality for IPPF and other organisations committed to young people, a fundamental shift is required in approach, resources (both financial and human) and capacity. Investing in young people requires continuous support, management and supervision. The benefits are, however, immense. When young people are listened to, trusted, empowered, and given training and support, they are a powerful force for positive change.

3. IPPF (2015), “Young at Heart: how to be youth-centred in the 21st century”. Available at [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_youngatheart\\_english.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_youngatheart_english.pdf)

