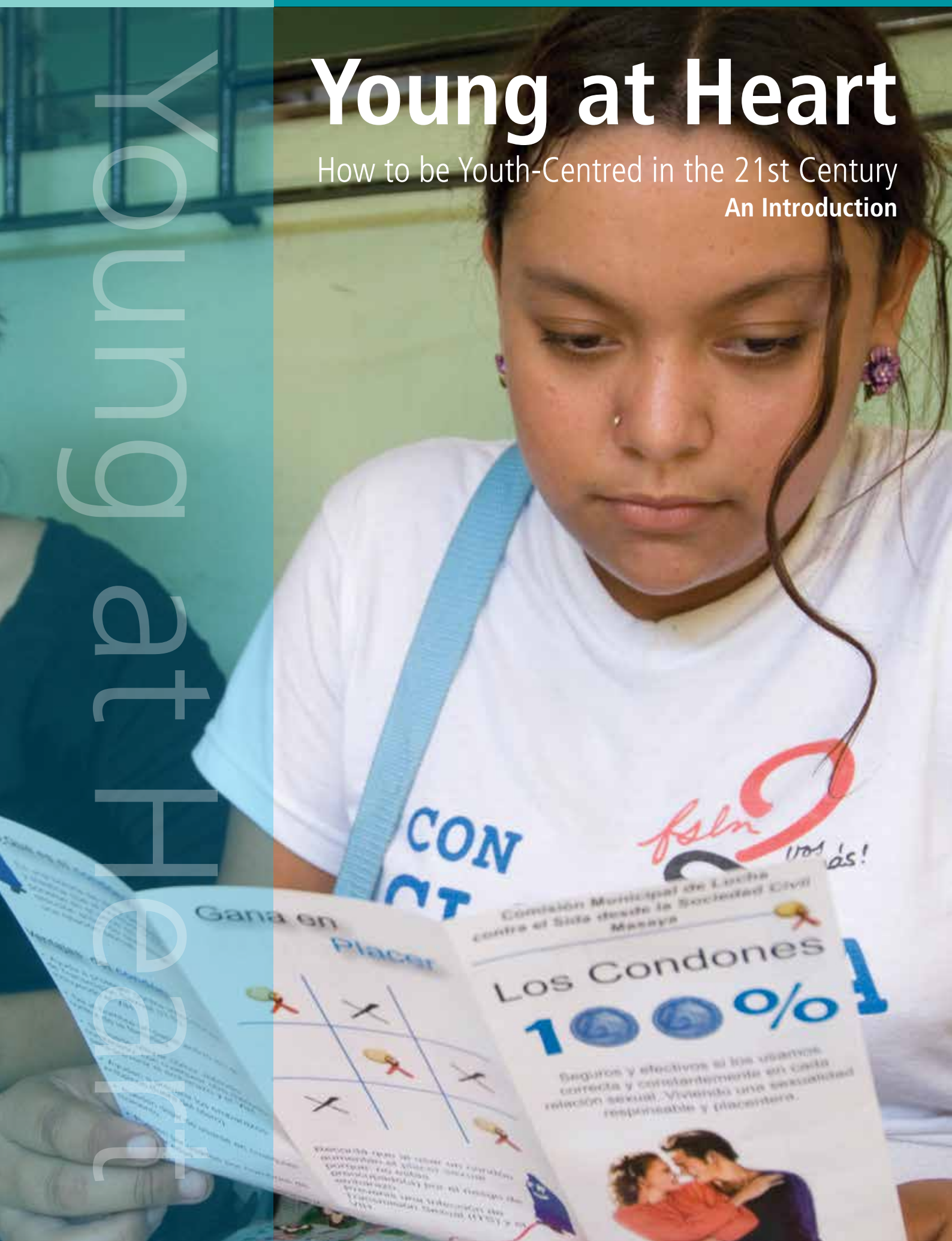


# Young at Heart

How to be Youth-Centred in the 21st Century  
An Introduction

Young at Heart



# Introduction

The world is home to the largest generation of young people in history. They are diverse, they have opportunities, but they also face immense obstacles in their lives. Young people and adolescents need to be able to make informed decisions and have access to sexual and reproductive health education, information and services.

IPPF's journey of youth services and participation is illustrated by the timeline of events on this page. Our approach has changed radically, from 'not turning young people away' to providing high quality, standardized youth-friendly programmes.

Our performance of the past decade tells a powerful story of this increasing commitment to young people. In 2005, 25% of our services were provided to young people, and since then the number of services provided to young people has grown steadily. Of the 86.9 million services provided by IPPF in 2013, almost every second one was to a young person.

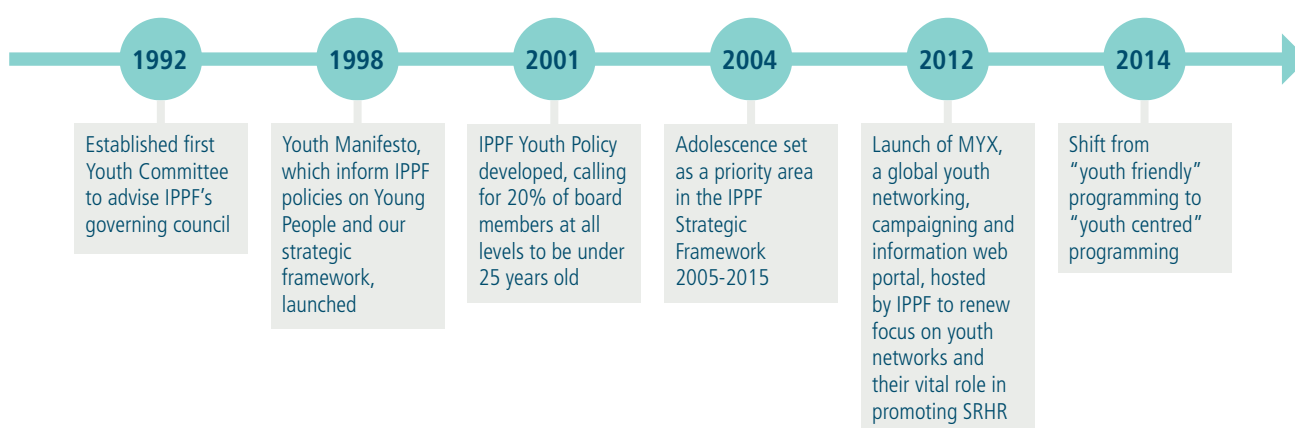
IPPF's new Strategic Framework (2016 -2022) shows how the Federation is embracing young people as partners and moving to a more youth-centred approach. By expanding our commitment to youth-friendliness and evolving to ensure that young people are truly at the centre of everything we do, IPPF will continue to set an example for meaningful youth involvement. By genuinely focusing on young people's lives and requirements, from their own perspectives, we can deliver services, programmes and interventions that are truly shaped by them, and thus relevant, inclusive and effective.

This document is an introduction for decision makers, service providers and youth leaders within the Federation on how IPPF can build on its legacy and transition to a youth-centred approach. It addresses the questions: what does this new thinking include? What does it mean in practice? How should we implement it? How should we measure progress?

Member Associations (MAs) are each unique and will make their own journeys towards being truly youth-centred. The new Youth-Centred Model is a flexible tool that can support MAs to respond to their changing contexts and speaks to their diverse challenges and strengths.

This document is based on extensive evaluations of IPPF programmes, including recent youth led assessment research led by the University of Brighton;; interviews with young volunteers and staff within IPPF and with other organizations (including UNFPA, WHO and Restless Development); a literature review by IPPF; and a literature review and series of discussions carried out with representatives from the Transforming Sexuality and Gender Research Cluster at the University of Brighton.

## *Youth Participation at IPPF:*



## Young at Heart:

### New conceptual thinking for putting youth at the centre

This new approach to youth programming emerged from our increasing awareness that although we have been providing services to more and more young people over the years, we have not done so well at achieving our goals related to empowering young people. This is because we have viewed young people through a needs-based perspective, without necessarily taking into account their capacities and rights, and without considering their individual choices.

A youth-centred approach can be a strategic vehicle to promote sexual rights as human rights, and empowerment is a crucial part of that. Youth programming should enhance understandings of respect, equity, solidarity, freedom of sexual expression, protection of bodily integrity and freedom from stigma and discrimination, not only among young people, but among their parents, other adults and the communities they live in. Promoting these values will enable young people to take action to secure their own wellbeing and happiness, as well as to show solidarity to those whose rights are being violated. By bringing clarity to the concept of sexual rights, demonstrating how sexual rights are violated, addressing vulnerabilities and recognizing the complexities of young people's lives, youth programmes can promote equality and rights, including among the most vulnerable young people.

Our new Youth-Centred Model will empower young people, enable them to realise their sexual rights, and strengthen their role in IPPF as agents of social change. It builds on our current three-pronged approach to youth sexual and reproductive health and rights, including: 1) youth-friendly services, 2) comprehensive sexuality education and 3) social and policy change. Being youth-centred is about encouraging young people to think, question, explore and search for answers, and in doing so they may be empowered to transform their lives and to influence the cultural context and local power dynamics that affect their lives.

#### Principles:

1. Young people are sexual beings and their sexuality should be a source of pleasure that contributes to their overall fulfilment and happiness
2. Young people are agents of change: they have the capacity and agency to fight for their own sexual rights and also the rights of others
3. Young people's experiences, perspectives, opinions and aspirations must be at the core of efforts to realise their sexual rights
4. Young people's rights and participation are central to all sexual and reproductive health programmes, service delivery, comprehensive sexuality education and policy making
5. Youth programming can support young people to feel empowered and to negotiate rewarding, safe and loving relationships
6. Young people's intra- and intergenerational relationships and transitions, in their unique cultural and political contexts, influence their sexual rights as they grow up and thus must be taken into account in youth programming

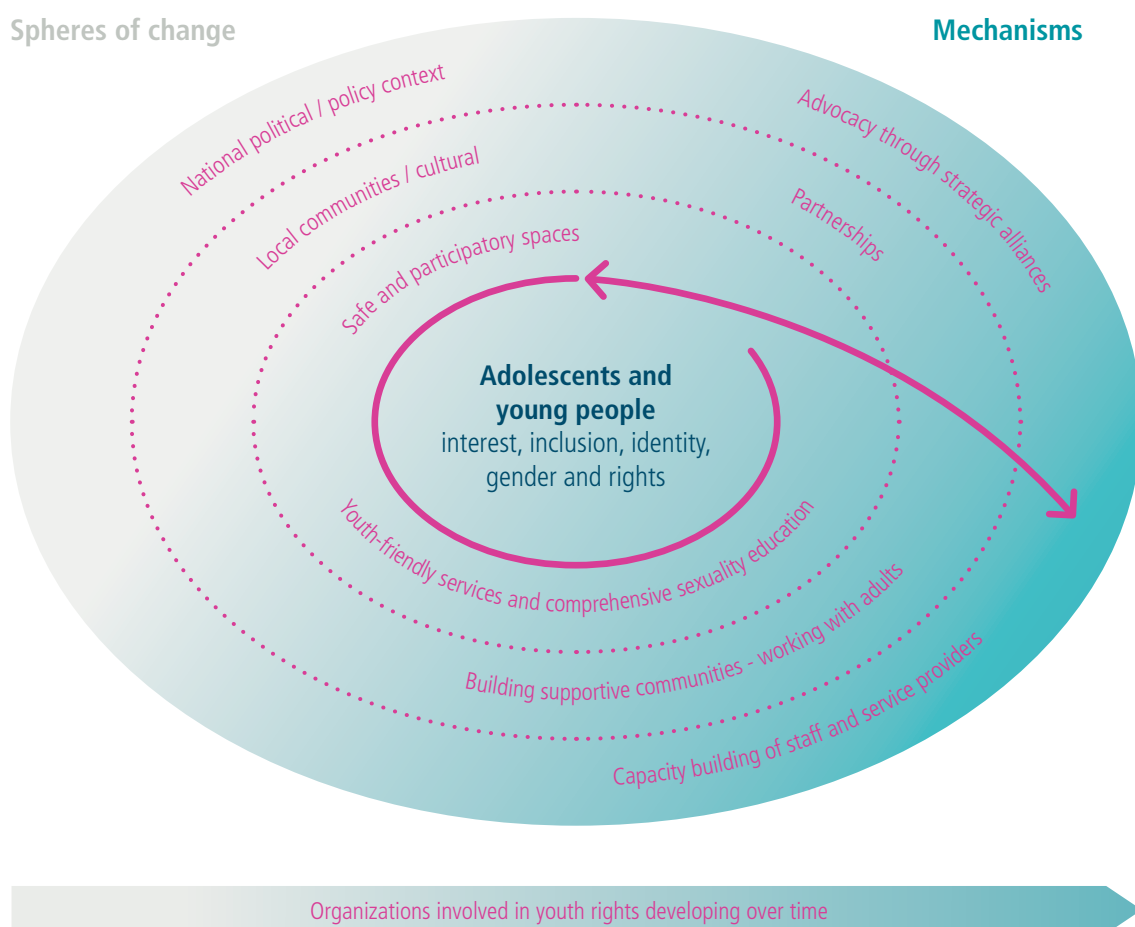
# The Youth-Centred Model

Our new Youth-Centred Model, illustrated below, lays out the mechanisms (see darker/right side) that must be developed and implemented in order for young people to realise their sexual rights. This is a socio-ecological model so it conceptualises young people within their environment (see lighter/left side), which has physical, cultural and geographical features, and is also characterised by social actors and institutions. The Youth-Centred Model suggests that we can promote young people's wellbeing and their ability to exercise their rights by delivering youth-centred programming that changes socio-ecological conditions and interactions.

*Socio-economic model - Young people as agents of change:*

*Based on Change-scape (Johnson 2011)*

*Johnson V. et al (2014)*



# What does the Youth-Centred Model look like in practice?

## Young People at the Centre

**Young people must be at the centre of decision-making and programming.** To do this effectively, adults must build trust with young people and be explicit about their aims and interests. In recruiting and working with young people, adults should make efforts to involve those who face barriers to participation. Adults must seek to understand youth starting points – their **interests**, identities, aspirations and factors that contribute to their exclusion, so that even the most marginalised young people **feel included**. Adults should support young people to voice their opinions and develop their identities. When young people see their opinions have been taken seriously in planning, they are more likely to participate in programme delivery, advocacy and evaluation. When young people see that their contributions are important, they are more likely to show interest in youth leadership and governance.

## Safe Spaces and Spheres of Change

A unique feature of the Model is that it recognizes that young people in different parts of the world experience growing up in different ways. Whatever the context, youth-centred programming means making sure that young people have **safe and participatory spaces** where they can interact with their peers and other people. Young people experience high levels of stigma, applied by others or to themselves, and this prevents them from seeking health services, feeling good about themselves, and asserting their rights. Safe spaces can support young people to (re)gain a sense of agency and identity, and can also enable others to feel more solidarity with youth.

The Model takes into account power relationships within and between generations and highlights the importance of understanding young people's transitions through the life course. Working with adults is thus key to **building supportive communities**. This may mean working with parents of peer educators and then reaching out to more adults. It involves working with influential religious and community leaders.

Understanding the **broader policy and political context** is necessary to youth-centred programming. This can help sustain progress by influencing local and national policies and laws to make them more supportive of young people's sexual rights.

## Mechanisms/Strategies in Programmes and Services

Youth-centred programming builds on the successful strategies that IPPF has been developing in funded programmes globally: **youth-friendly services, comprehensive sexuality education and advocacy for policy and social change**. What is new for these programmes is explicit recognition that they must be grounded and guided by **young people's own understandings and experiences** of sexual rights. To achieve this, programmes must promote **youth leadership** in all stages of programming. In addition, youth-centred programming will encourage us to stop viewing young people as 'clients', through a diagnostic lens, and instead to engage with them collaboratively, to understand the complexity of their lives and support them to make their own decisions.

The Youth-Centred Model will ensure that all services are welcoming for all young people, ensuring that they are youth-friendly, stigma-free and empowering, and that they are provided in the places where young people live their lives. The Model will also strengthen the content of comprehensive sexuality education. IPPF should be developing and implementing comprehensive sexuality education in schools and communities/informal settings that promotes **critical thinking and is sex positive**, is gender-transformative and promotes an understanding of the sexual rights of young people and social injustices.

In order to achieve youth-centred programming, staff and service providers often need **capacity building**. Programmes must also work through **strategic alliances and partnerships** with young people and adults, including other civil society, private and government institutions, and policy makers at all levels.

## Capacity Development of Organizations

Being youth-centred requires that organizations make an **institutional commitment** to include young people in governance and throughout the programming cycle, from planning to monitoring and evaluation. The Youth-Centred Model should be **mainstreamed across the organization**, and not just applied to youth projects.

To make and fulfil this commitment, organizations may need to **build capacity in youth-centred programming**. IPPF regions and MAs should share learning and experiences more continuously and rigorously to benefit from what has been done elsewhere and to support each other.

The next section will address measures of success for the Youth-Centred Model, which are essential to capture positive movement towards this goal and should be integrated into organizational systems for monitoring and evaluation.

# Markers of Progress

To successfully implement the Youth-Centred Model, organizations must commit to embark on a journey towards youth centeredness. Young people's empowerment – knowledge of their sexual rights and their capabilities to assert their own, informed choices – is the most critical aspect of youth-centred programming, and therefore there must be a shift in our understanding of what success looks like and how we measure it.

Previously, IPPF's theory of change was based on outputs – services delivered, number of young people who participated in comprehensive sexuality education, and advocacy achievements, such as policy changes or successful protection of supportive policy. New measures to assess progress focus on qualitative outcomes, such as changes in young people's lives. They are also aligned with the empowerment approach: they aim to capture aspects of fulfilment in emotional wellbeing and happiness, as well as improving or maintaining sexual and reproductive health. To develop familiarity and confidence with these new measures of success, staff, volunteers and service providers will need training and support, and in this section we have outlined some specific interventions and a number of progress markers that MAs could start with to move towards the Youth-Centred Model.

These progress markers and indicators have been developed using best practice from a range of research and organizational guidance, including: research on engaging children in research (University of Brighton, Johnson et al 2014); evaluations of child participation and empowerment published by a range of non-governmental organizations; and lessons on 'whole systems approaches' to health settings.

## 1. The governing board and management of the organization place young people into positions of governance.

### **Progress markers:**

- At least 20% young people on the governing board
- There is a youth focal point and this person is connected to the youth network
- Young people feel involved and empowered in decision-making processes

The indicator of youth representatives being included in governing bodies is a proven, successful indication that the organization is committed to youth participation. The additional progress markers will help to assess whether the youth participation is meaningful and has impact. One aspect of this is how young people associated with the organization feel involved in decision making.

## 2. Staff and service providers are trained in values, capabilities and skills relating to youth involvement and non-discrimination.

### **Progress markers:**

- All staff and volunteers in the organization, including management and governing board members, have received training on being youth-centred
- Service provider partners and partners involved in implementing programmes have received training on being youth-centred
- A diverse range of young people feel listened to and valued by the organization

Adults and professionals often make assumptions about what young people need and want, and sometimes youth participation is tokenistic: young people may be consulted, but adults do not really listen or take action on what they say. Adults and professionals often need support to partner young people effectively, and in particular to reach and work with marginalized young people. This is why efforts at being youth-centred must be evaluated with young people, to see whether they feel listened to and valued.

### 3. Situational analysis of youth sensitivity and involvement is applied across all programmes, at all stages of the programme cycle.

#### **Progress markers:**

- Programme staff and service providers demonstrate an understanding of the youth demographic, and youth marginalization, in their communities
- Programmes have an action plan for involving young people across programmes

Youth-led research, involving peer educators as investigators and informants (Johnson et al. 2013), is effective for revealing what it is like to be young in a particular cultural and political context, and how youth participate in their communities. This research is the starting point for youth-centred programming. It can inform organizational strategies and action plans for engaging young people in programmes more meaningfully.

### 4. The organization has in place ethical protocols for working with young people, including child protection policies, to protect staff and young people.

#### **Progress markers:**

- Staff and volunteers are trained and are implementing the child protection policy
- There is a clear procedure for reviewing the child protection policy periodically
- Young people know how to report abuse and where to go for help

Ethical protocols and processes for protecting children and young people are necessary to ensure that young people can participate safely while becoming autonomous rights holders<sup>1</sup>. Protection and autonomy are not opposing concepts but should be developed alongside each other so young people learn, from an early age, how to recognise harmful and abusive situations, how to communicate their experiences and how to get help.

### 5. Adults and young people have mutually respectful relationships, and young people are entrusted with substantive roles in programmatic work.

#### **Progress markers:**

- Young people (including through advisory groups or networks) participate in annual planning exercises, budgeting and evaluations
- Strategic and annual plans include youth issues as priorities
- Young people feel listened to and their recommendations are acted upon

---

1. See IPPF (2010) Understanding Young People's Right to Decide series, including on protection and autonomy



Treating young people as partners and realising sexual rights requires a commitment to developing relationships of trust and respect. In some cultural contexts there can be difficulty reconciling 'traditional' cultural norms and youth sexual rights. Here, organizations should maintain a rights based approach (see Exclaim! Young People's Guide to 'Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration')<sup>2</sup> which is sensitive to their context, but which respects young people as rights holders.

## 6. Young people can access programmes and services within safe and participatory spaces

### Progress markers:

- Young people can access services within integrated health or youth services
- Young people are consulted and involved in evaluation to ensure that the spaces where information and services are offered make them feel safe and comfortable
- Young people feel empowered by programmes and services

Young people access services for a variety of purposes, beyond quantifiable medical services, and offering a safe and comfortable place is essential. Young people may seek advice in order to prevent abuse, to establish respectful and loving relationships, and/or to feel comfortable in their developing sexual identities. Youth services may provide a space for young people to talk to each other about sensitive issues that they face at home, in their communities and relationships, or simply to build confidence.

## 7. The organization utilises contextually specific indicators that reflect local young people's vision of what it means to be youth-centred.

### Progress markers:

- MA staff and/or volunteers, including young people, have articulated a vision for being youth-centred in relation to different programmatic areas: comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly services, and advocacy
- MA staff and/or volunteers, including young people, have agreed a set of key indicators across programmes with mechanisms for monitoring and review
- Markers/indicators include qualitative measures of young people's wellbeing and experiences of sexual rights, including their interactions with services
- Monitoring and evaluation systems disaggregate data to understand the situation for marginalized young people

To realize youth sexual rights, young people in different global contexts need to be involved in creating a vision of what a society would look like in which their sexual rights are fulfilled. Indicators developed with young people should take into account emotional, social, physical and economic dimensions of change. Young people themselves should articulate how programmes could collect evidence that measures how they feel involved as agents of change, their freedom to be involved in happy healthy relationships, and their influence on households, communities and policy environments.

---

2. See IPPF (2009) Exclaim! [www.ippf.org/resource/Exclaim-Young-Peoples-Guide-Sexual-Rights-IPPF-declaration](http://www.ippf.org/resource/Exclaim-Young-Peoples-Guide-Sexual-Rights-IPPF-declaration)

Indicator examples that could be adapted to the local context (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Changes in young people's self-esteem and fulfilment in relationships
- Young people feel empowered: they are knowledgeable about their rights and able to confidently assert their choices
- Young people are given the space to (or are supported to) reflect on social injustice, gender inequality and discrimination
- Young people have the language and support to express abuse and issues of concern about their bodies and their sexuality
- Providers and young people are able to demonstrate and act on their empathy for marginalized and under-served individuals/groups
- Young people support their peers to express and be confident in their choices
- Young people have influence to change services

## 8. There is a youth-centred strategic business plan that integrates youth participation across the organization.

### **Progress markers:**

- The business plan incorporates social objectives, including programme elements
- Putting young people at the centre should not just be applied to separate youth projects, but should be mainstreamed across the organisation. It takes into account power relationships within and between generations and understanding transitions for young people through the life course as they grow up in varying cultural and political contexts. Realising youth sexual rights will also include working with adults and improving the overall context for delivering sexual and reproductive health services
- Young people helped develop and are implementing the business plan, including the progress markers and indicators

Strategic objectives should reflect young people's expressed needs and desires, and similarly, value for money should be assessed in terms of effectiveness in improving wellbeing, realising rights and achieving positive impact on young people's sexual identities and relationships, including marginalized youth. Sustainability is also a key component: the business plan may include objectives related to employment opportunities for youth and building strategic alliances and networks.

An important aspect of monitoring any youth-centred strategic plan will be to assess how young people have been involved in its development and ongoing implementation and assessment.

# Acknowledgements

This document was written by Dr Vicky Johnson from the College of Social Sciences at the University of Brighton and Doortje Braeken from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

## **Other people who contributed ideas and comments:**

IPPF Youth Secretariat: Manish Mitra, Karolien Dekkers, Juliette Faida Nsensele, Marissa Billowitz, Davina Isaac, Shadia Abdelrhim, Laura Hurley, Sophie Baumgartner, Kate Matheson.

Kat Watson

Editor: Rachel Wilder

Design: Peter Beatty

## **Thanks also to those in the Transforming Sexuality and Gender Research Cluster and College of Social Sciences at the University of Brighton who contributed ideas and discussion:**

Dr Nigel Sherriff, Dr Sara Bragg, Dr Katherine Johnson, Dr Lynda Measor, Professor Angie Hart and Dr Juliet Millican.

# References

- Johnson, V. (2011) 'Conditions for Change for Children and Young People's Participation in Evaluation: 'Change-scape', *Child Indicators Research*, 4 (4), pp 577-596.
- Johnson, V., Leach, B., Beardon, H., Covey, M., and Miskelly, C. Johnson V. (2013) *Love, Sexual Rights and Young People, learning from our peer educators how to be a youth-centred organisation*. Available at [www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_isr-yp\\_full\\_020813.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_isr-yp_full_020813.pdf) Accessed 20 April 2015.
- Johnson, V., Leach, B., Beardon, H., Miskelly, C., Warrington, S. (2013) 'Learning from our Peer Educators: A guide for integrating and reflecting participatory youth research in the A+ assessment country case studies', International Planned Parenthood Federation, London.
- Johnson, V., Hart, R. and Colwell, J. Eds. (2014), *Steps to Engaging Young Children in Research: The Guide and The Toolkit*, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague.

## **Other sources used:**

- IPPF (2014) 'Young at heart'; IPPF's roadmap, internal document
- IPPF (2009) *Youth Review 2006 - IPPF Midterm review*
- IPPF (2011) *Keys to Youth Friendly Services*. Available at [www.ippf.org/resources/publications/Keys-youth-friendly-services](http://www.ippf.org/resources/publications/Keys-youth-friendly-services) Accessed 20 April 2015.
- IPPF (2014) *Over-protected and Under-served: Legal Barriers to Young People's Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services*. Available at [www.ippf.org/resources/publications/Over-protected-and-under-served-Legal-barriers-young-people-s-access-sexual-a](http://www.ippf.org/resources/publications/Over-protected-and-under-served-Legal-barriers-young-people-s-access-sexual-a) Accessed 20 April 2015.
- IPPF (2010) *Young People: From Vulnerability to Resilience*. Available at [www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/young\\_people\\_from\\_vulnerability\\_to\\_resilience.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/young_people_from_vulnerability_to_resilience.pdf) Accessed 20 April 2015.
- IPPF (2012) *Understanding Young People's Right to Decide*. Available at <http://www.ippf.org/resources/publications/Understanding-Young-Peoples-Right-Decide> Accessed 20 April 2015.

# Young at Heart

International Planned Parenthood Federation  
4 Newhams Row  
London  
SE1 3UZ

[www.ippf.org](http://www.ippf.org)