

ADVANCING YOUTH PARTNERSHIP IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR)

A Position Paper

WHY YOUTH PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

Young people want and deserve the power to make decisions about their bodies, lives, and futures. The largest generation of adolescents and young people in history exists in the world today. Adolescents and youth need information about their health and rights and tools and support to make the best decisions for themselves and their circumstances. Making this happen requires youth participation and leadership at every level of adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming—from ideation to implementation.

Adolescent and youth SRHR must transform from a field for young people to one with young people. Not only are young people the best experts in their own lives, but they are also capable and creative contributors to social change. They bring unique and valuable perspectives, resources, and solutions to youth SRHR efforts. Leveraging this vast potential through a shift to full youth participation is critical to accelerating progress toward our desired outcomes—including the Sustainable Development Goals. YIELD Hub's¹ findings show that when young people are authentic partners in developing and delivering SRHR solutions, and when adults work alongside them, programs are more efficient and effective, and young people embark on a leadership path that can last a lifetime. To address the critical issues surrounding youth partnership in SRHR, we have identified five priority themes that demand urgent attention and comprehensive action. In the subsequent sections, we will discuss each theme, presenting relevant data and outlining a compelling case for change.

1. More Diversity in Youth Participation

The data from YIELD Project Research (2019)² underscores a growing demand for increased diversity in youth participation. Recognising the rich tapestry of experiences among the youth, including voices from various backgrounds, cultures, and identities, is imperative. Diversifying participation enhances the relevance and effectiveness of SRHR programs, fostering a more comprehensive and equitable approach and crafting genuinely inclusive and effective policies.

2. Fair Compensation

Youth engagement should not be perceived as an uncompensated service but rather as a valuable contribution. Adequate compensation is essential, reflecting young individuals' time and expertise, as well as physical and intellectual labour. This practice ensures sustainability and encourages more inclusive and accessible youth participation that values their contributions and fosters equitable representation in SRHR decision-making processes.

¹ The YIELD Hub improves young people's partnership in Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) by facilitating action learning processes and influencing norm change. | <https://yieldhub.global/>

² Young People Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health: Toward a New Normal | Executive Summary | June 2019 | yieldproject.org

3. Plans For “Ageing Up” and Not “Ageing Out”

The Dutch Global Health Strategy should include provisions for mentoring and capacity-building programs to facilitate the seamless transition of youth from being recipients of health services to active contributors. “Ageing up and not out” ensures continuous and dynamic youth involvement, fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability in the initiatives they champion.

4. Measure Youth Partnerships to Show Impact

To strengthen the case for youth participation, systematically measuring and documenting the impact of youth partnerships is imperative. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks will provide evidence of their contributions and guide continuous improvement in the effectiveness of SRHR policies and programs. YIELD Hub and its Action Learning Cycle 2 Members (a group of 6 international organisations) have created a resourceful guide focusing on Measuring Youth Partnerships. It provides a structured approach for organisations to assess and improve their engagement with youth. It includes self-assessment tools, recommendations, and activities designed to help organisations at different levels of youth engagement; please check it out here: <https://yieldhub.global/resources/guide-to-measuring-youth-partnership/>.

5. Intersectionality is Key!

Recognising and addressing intersectionality within youth populations is paramount. The Global Health and SRHR strategy should acknowledge and accommodate the unique challenges faced by individuals and marginalised groups at the intersection of various identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, to ensure that no one is left behind. Tailoring programs to address these diverse needs ensures inclusivity and equity.

CALL TO ACTION: SUSTAINABLE FINANCING AND COLLABORATION

It’s time to mainstream meaningful adolescent and youth participation, and leadership development. Young people can and should play a part in all aspects of SRHR efforts that impact them, not only because it is their right but also because it improves the quality and responsiveness of health programs. To realise the full potential of youth partnership in SRHR in the Dutch Global Health Strategy 2023-2030, we call on government and SRHR Stakeholders to:

1. **Work with youth as partners.** Leverage their ideas and experiences and work alongside them to achieve their goals for SRHR and beyond.
2. **Collaborate with others, advancing youth participation and leadership in SRHR.** Coordinate to reduce field-wide fragmentation and to share learnings.
3. **Establish a shared vision.** Work with young people to create a shared agenda for the field. Build measurable milestones and accountability mechanisms and complete resource implementation. Ensuring their active involvement in program design, implementation, and evaluation.
4. **Allocate dedicated funds for youth-led and youth-serving initiatives within the SRHR sector.**
5. **Foster collaboration** between the Ministries of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and Health, Welfare, and Sport, promoting a cross-sectoral approach for comprehensive SRHR strategies.
6. **Encourage private sector involvement to enhance the financial sustainability of youth-led initiatives.**

In conclusion, youth partnership is not a choice; it is necessary for the success of the Dutch Global Health Strategy 2023-2030. By recognising, respecting, investing, and actively building partnerships with youth in SRHR, we pave the way for a healthier, more inclusive, and sustainable future for all.