



**MMS Bulletin #170**

*Innovationen, die das Leben junger Menschen nachhaltig verändern*

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***Picture of the context in which programming for youth SRHR takes place***

**What we have learnt on delivering systematic and comprehensive youth SRHR interventions**

Von Tayson Mudarikiri

*Often, as organisations working with young people, we talk of the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of this group as if it is one challenge that could be addressed through a 'magic bullet' solution. Yet, in addition to consisting of plethora of issues such as STIs, HIV and teenage pregnancy, among other issues, the SRHR of young people intertwine with other complex determinant factors such as economic empowerment and life skills. Against this background, in a sector where resources are scarce and challenges are often complex, it is not difficult to see why development actors are often called to be innovative in their approach. In this article, terre des hommes schweiz distils some innovations and lessons learnt from implementing projects for young people in southern Africa.*



*Activity with youth, where they tackle various topics with the young people in a playful way. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz / Sheila Glasz*

## **Context for organisations working on the SRHR of young people**

The lessons we have learnt, as an organization, over the years are better understood in the context of the countries we work in and the nature of challenges that confront our local implementing partners. As such, before delving into the innovations and lessons learnt, it is important to paint a picture of the context in which programming for youth SRHR takes place in the countries of our operation. Here are a few main issues:

### **Limited resources**

As already suggested in the introduction to this article, the major push for innovation in the sector is the scarcity of resources – due to several factors, organisations working on SRHR, and young people face significant funding constraints. Addressing the SRHR of young people, despite remaining a key issue in the development discourse, is only one of the many issues requiring funding. Funders are having to grapple with setting priorities and as new issues such as climate change and other humanitarian disasters emerge, SRHR issues affecting people keep slipping down the list. However, the emergence of new issues does not make the impact of the existing SRHR challenges less potent. Rather, as we have seen, the emerging issues are

complicating and exacerbating the SRHR challenges of young people. Yet, funding and other resources remain limited. Without innovative programming approaches, organisations working with young people would not cope.

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Activity with youth, where they tackle various topics with the young people in a playful way. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz / Sheila Glasz

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### **Constrained capacity of local actors**

The local organisations that are closer to the young people, due to limited resources and other factors, often tend to have constrained capacity to comprehensively address the challenges that young people face. In our experience, while many of the local organisations are effective in supporting youth at the community level, they do not have reach and recognition at the higher levels to influence the policy discourse which is an important determinant factor for youth health. Ironically, it is such organisations that have a legitimate and genuine voice needed to drive policy reform. Without innovation they remain without influence, a situation that limits their impact in promoting the rights of young people when it comes to sexual and reproductive health.

### **Complexity and compounding factors for SRHR**

The reality for many young people is that they do not experience SRHR challenges in isolation. Often such challenges as high rates of teenage pregnancy and vulnerability to HIV, for example, are either fueled or compounded by other issues that this demographic face such as poverty, climate change and poor life skills among other factors. Additionally, youth SRHR is complex with barriers for young people accessing services going beyond the individual youth level to involving challenges at the levels of parents, communities and the policy environment.

The situation in this regard calls for actors in the youth sector to consider interventions that address the existential challenges of SRHR while at the same time providing solutions to the intersecting issues in order to allow sustainable solutions. Moreover, interventions for youth SRHR need to act concurrently and simultaneously at the parents, communities and policy levels to create a supportive environment for youth to access important health services. Against this background, to balance the required comprehensiveness with prudent use of scarce resources brings another dimension to the need for innovation.

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*Session at community level with parents. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz / Sheila Glasz*

## ***Innovations: Lessons learnt from our work***

Driven by the principles of decolonization, we have trusted our local partners to guide us on what innovations work in the context of the various challenges discussed above. Moving forward, the most important innovations from our partnerships have been consolidated to inform our programming with young people on SRHR.

The following innovations are key:

### **Create a supporting environment for youth SRHR**

Most organisations working with young people believe that the youth enjoy better SRHR outcomes when interventions target them with knowledge and skills needed to access services. As a result, they tend to focus on working exclusively with the youth. Yet, long standing evidence indicates that youth tend to access SRHR services when they have the knowledge and skills as well as a supporting environment in which peers, families, communities and the policy environment align to promote such access. As a result, all interventions of *terre des hommes schweiz* partners are predicated on the socio-ecological model, designing activities for the various levels of the youth's ecology including the individual, relationship, community and societal levels. Through such systematic and comprehensive support, we have seen increased and sustained access to key SRHR services by young people.

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*Session at community level with parents. Photo: © terre des hommes schweiz / Sheila Glasz*

### **Address intersecting issues**

With the SRHR of young people intersecting with several factors which tend to both drive and compound the same, SRHR projects may no longer need to merely address the health aspects but also to seek ways of addressing such issues as poverty and personal development needs of the youth. Our experience is that projects that work at the intersection of several issues are not only systematic and comprehensive but also make best use of limited resources.

*So how can local organisations working with young people on SRHR manage to be systematic and comprehensive in the face of resource constraints?*

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### **Facilitate platforms for joint work: the ultimate solution**

The two innovations addressed already give the impression that local actors working in the field of SRHR need to have unlimited resources and capacity. Yet contextual analysis has already proved otherwise. So how can local organisations working with young people on SRHR manage to be systematic and comprehensive in the face of resource constraints? Our experience has taught us that it is important to facilitate platforms of joint work where different partners bring together their resources and expertise without putting pressure on one single organisation to do everything.

The conclusion, therefore is, that this is the ultimate innovation – when organisations work together, they are able to rely on their individual strengths to layer various interventions for young people to ensure that the complex and systemic challenges relating to the SRHR of young people are systematically addressed. Additionally, working jointly strengthens civil society in the Global South and increases influence around advocacy.

**terre des hommes schweiz** is a middle-sized youth-serving international NGO headquartered in Switzerland. As an organisation, through funding and capacity strengthening, we support local organisations in nine countries in Africa and Latin America to implement projects that tackle violence and promote good health and sustainable livelihoods. In southern Africa we work in four countries including Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania.



**Tayson Mudarikiri** is co-Desk for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and co-Programme Coordinator for Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique at terre des hommes schweiz. He is based in Zimbabwe. He has been working with terre des hommes schweiz for the past 10 years and has over 16 years' experience working with youth on various areas of youth development. He holds a Masters in Public Sector Management and an MSc. Public Health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. E-Mail

## Kontakt

### Deutschschweiz

Medicus Mundi Schweiz  
Murbacherstrasse 34  
CH-4056 Basel  
Tel. +41 61 383 18 10

### Suisse romande

Medicus Mundi Suisse  
Rue de Varembe I  
CH-1202 Genève  
Tél. +41 22 920 08 08

### Bankverbindung

Basler Kantonalbank, Aeschen, 4002 Basel  
Medicus Mundi Schweiz, 4056 Basel  
IBAN: CH40 0077 0016 0516 9903 5  
BIC: BKBBCHBBXXX

