

CASE STUDY

Changing young people's lives for the better

The best spokespersons for youth empowerment are young people themselves. Thanks to an IPPF interregional initiative entitled 'Joining Forces: Youth Advocates for SRHR in development', young people in Africa and Europe have become effective and prominent advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights in development aid policies and programmes.

The project has enabled future generations to be heard in international arenas where policies are decided. Since 2006, a group of young advocates from Latvia, Ireland, Poland, the Netherlands, all part of YSAFE (IPPF EN youth network) have joined forces with IPPF's Youth Action Movement (YAM) in Africa to sustain a visible and credible presence at the Joint Parliamentary Assemblies (JPAs) of the ACP and EU, which brings together Members of the European Parliament and Members of Parliament from African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries twice a year to discuss European Commission development aid programmes and funding in these countries.

These youth advocates have acquired the necessary advocacy skills to articulate technical arguments in favour of SRHR for young people. They are confident to approach parliamentarians to explain the importance of targeting youth in SRHR programmes and to advocate for youth-friendly SRHR policies, including increased funding. At the JPAs, the youth team hosts information stands, networks with parliamentarians, links up with other civil society organisations, engages with the media, and holds demonstrations. In March 2008, the young advocates, for the first time, hosted an official side event on youth SRHR and youth participation at the Slovenian JPA.

With the outspoken support of African and European MPs, including the co-chair of the JPA, the young people have gained a reputation as key partners in international youth advocacy. They continue to receive numerous invitations to speak at other high-level fora, including at the WHO, the German Ministry for Development Cooperation, the European Commission, and at international conferences and events. Speaking about their participation, young advocates express their gratitude for having the opportunity to build their skills. As one youth advocate expressed it: "Joining Forces has changed my life".

An equally important aspect of the work has been to sensitise adults to work with young people as equal partners. In 2006, IPPF EN organised a Youth-Adult Partnership Training for 24 adults and young people representing 16 European countries.

Increasing access to comprehensive, youth friendly sexuality education and to a broad range of youth-friendly services

IPPF Member Associations continue to introduce innovative approaches to reach young people and address their needs. Building on an exter-

nal evaluation of youth friendly services in Poland, Albania, Armenia and Estonia in 2004, Member Associations were supported to strengthen their outreach efforts. Since 2005, 90% of all Associations have consistently provided youth friendly SRHR services and information, education and communications (IEC). These services range from SRHR counselling (via hotlines, email and face to face), provision of contraceptives, STI testing and treatment, voluntary HIV testing and counselling, and abortion related counselling. Moreover, young people are increasingly participating in the development, implementation and evaluation of youth services. All sexuality

education and outreach activities include referral to youth friendly services, even where these are not directly provided by the Member Association.

Member Associations are delivering an exciting array of initiatives in sexuality education across the European region. In Moldova, teachers, parents and religious leaders are active in introducing a Life Skills course and textbook in schools, while in Slovakia efforts are underway to engage with Roma parents and families. The Bosnian and Herzegovinian Member Association is also targeting information at those who are least likely to have



access to sexuality education, including young men in prison, prison guards and young girls vulnerable to trafficking.

Strengthening commitment to and support for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents

IPPF European Network implemented a major project in partnership with the European Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the University of Lund (Sweden) to promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights of youth, funded by the European Commission. "Sexual Awareness for Europe: A European partnership to promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights of youth" (SAFE), provides an overall picture of the patterns and trends across the region in order to develop new and innovative ways to reach young people with SRHR information and services, and to inform, support and advance policy development. The findings and recommendations of the project were lauded by the Commission as "valuable input into policy formulation at the EU level and a good example

of how to deliver constructive input with restricted resources".

Within the framework of the SAFE project, the European Network developed several important resources for policymakers and practitioners on the topic of youth SRHR. These included a Guide for developing policies on SRHR of young people in Europe, a Reference Guide on Sexuality Education in Europe, and a series of factsheets on good practice relating to SRHR approaches for young people. Young people from 26 Member Associations within the EU were involved in the design and implementation of the project from the beginning, and participated in high level meetings with senior health officials. As a direct result of the SAFE project, the European Commission invited IPPF EN to help draft a strategy on the sexual health of young people and has approved the continuation of the work under SAFE II.

Over the past five years, close partnerships have also been forged with regional youth organisations and platforms such as the European Youth Forum (EYF), YouAct and the World Association of Girl Guides and Scouts (WAGGS). Successful col-

laborations have included a hearing at the European Parliament, advocacy training workshops and the development of a Charter on SRHR of Young People. Building on these initiatives, IPPF European Network is spearheading a European youth movement around SRHR that is increasingly visible and vocal (see case study).

The way forward

There remains considerable work to be done to win the support of teachers, parents and caregivers and religious and faith-based organisations to improving SRHR among young people. In particular, Member Associations need increased support in advocating for the inclusion of high quality sexuality education in schools, and to ensure access to youth friendly services.

Huge strides have been made in building an active and diverse youth wing of IPPF European Network. Supporting this strong and vibrant European youth movement around SRHR and ensuring that young people are represented in governance structures will remain the key tasks of Member Associations in years to come.

