

Youth Work during the RHSC General membership Meeting in Seattle 2016

Outcomes

Looking back

At the Coalition's last general membership meeting in Oslo, the call from a group of young advocates to address young people's RH supply needs—which often extend beyond contraception alone—drew enthusiastic support from members. Immediately after we started to answer this call, put the spotlight on youth RH supplies, and begin addressing outstanding supply challenges facing young people, such as access to long-acting and reversible methods, and access to menstrual health products.

Earlier this year, we commissioned a survey and literature review that dug deeper into the barriers young people face in accessing RH services and, armed with this knowledge, we established a Youth Discussion Group, providing a platform for young members and youth experts to share knowledge and best practices. More than 85 members from 55 organizations meet monthly to exchange ideas on a dedicated listserv. As a bonus, the Coalition's Francophone regional network SECONAF has established its own Youth Subgroup, with growing research and activities.

Over the last year, we have seen time and again that when provided with a platform, young people are eager to make their voices heard and join the RH supplies dialogue. We have witnessed this when 25 youth leaders voiced their concerns and hopes at the Coalition's first youth consultation in Kampala, Uganda, and then again at the second youth consultation at the Bali International Conference on Family Planning.

At the Women Deliver Conference earlier this year in Copenhagen, just minutes before the closing ceremony, 50 young people from around the world came together in a rousing flash mob, wearing bright yellow T-shirts that demanded: "Which part of My Right to Contraception do you not understand?" It is a slogan that needs to be repeated and repeated, until we are sure that every young person, in every town and village, can boldly and unashamedly seek, and receive, the contraceptive method of their choice.

The findings from these rich discussions informed the development of a call for applications to a special, youth-targeted round of Innovation Fund grants. Four wonderfully promising ideas have won Innovation Fund support this year, ideas that aim to harness mobile technology in Argentina, change hospital practices in China, teach pharmacists how to be friendly and supportive of young people in Malawi, and strengthen the distribution of the new and innovative menstrual cup to communities in need in Uganda.

Specific attention for youth during the RHSC GMM in Seattle

1) Youth participation

Thanks to financial support from Women Deliver for 3 of their Young Leaders, we were joined by 11 youth representatives at the RHSC GMM in Seattle. The group was a combination of active a

non-active members in the youth group, Women Deliver representatives and Innovation Fund grantees.

- Amadi Jennifer Chinoye (AfrYPoD & Women Deliver Young Leader, Nigeria)
- Bryony Thorpe (MSI China)
- Randrianandrasana Aurélien Raphael (PSI Madagascar)
- Annick Thiombiano (Women Deliver Young Leader, Burkina Faso)
- Génesis Luigi (IPPF & Women Deliver Young Leader, Venezuela)
- Laura Hytti (WoMena, Uganda)
- Melina Masnatta (Fundacion Hespued, Argentina)
- Morillio Erwin Williams (Simavi, the Netherlands)
- Stephan Nna (SECONAF, Senegal)
- S M Shaikat (SERAC Bangladesh & alumni Women Deliver Young Leader)
- William Otuku (Young and Alive Initiative & Women Deliver Young Leader, Tanzania)

All these young people were asked to join the youth-related meetings and pick some of the other meetings that they thought were interested to represent the youth-voice in the room. They will be working with the Coalition in the coming months to take all the great ideas that came out of the meeting forward.

Their blogs on how they experienced the meeting can be found [here](#).

2) Youth on the agenda

Youth Discussion group meeting (Wednesday the 12th 15:30-17:30)

The idea behind this meeting was to showcase the Youth work done so far and start the integration of the youth work in the other working groups.

Agenda can be found [here](#).

Presentations can be found [here](#).

Outcomes of “Blue Sky thinking with other working groups” can be found in Annex 1.

Youth Plenary (Friday the 14th 12:00-13:30)

The youth plenary started with a panel discussion to set the scene about the unique barriers young people face and the opportunities they see. Afterwards all the participants of the RHSC General Membership Meeting went into small groups for a picnic discussion around the needs of young people and the role the Coalition can play.

Agenda can be found [here](#).

Outcomes of the meeting can be found in Annex 2.

Activities identified to take forward up until the RHSc GMM in October 2017

Based on the outcomes of the discussions in Seattle the youth representatives present at the meeting agreed on a short list of priority activities that they are all willing to help taking forward in the coming months. This list will be discussed during the next Youth Discussion Group call to have more people involved.

Here are the proposed activities:

1. Explore the possibility to have a young person in the open chair at the RHSC Executive Committee (EC)
2. After positive interaction with the other RHSC Working Groups around youth, starting the process to become a formal Youth Caucus
3. Develop key messages on youth and reproductive health supplies
4. Guarantee meaningful youth participation in RHSC GMM in October 2017 via a mentorship system
5. Data collection on youth and what products they want
6. Follow closely the work done in the youth IF programs (see [this document](#) for details on the projects)
7. Search for youth specific funding
8. Use technology, strong and adapted communication and new media to inform young people about reproductive health products and points of delivery

Annex 1: Outcomes of the Blue Sky thinking session with other Working Groups

1) Looking in – How can youth be stronger integrated in the RHSC structure in general?

- When chairs elections are organized for an RHSC implementing mechanism, age should be taken into account as a separate criteria (i.e. switching candidates from the North and the global South) (3)
- Every Working Group appoints a young co-chair (9)
- Providing youth specific financial support (19)
- Key messages document for others to use (6)
- Abortion and the link with maternal health should be a priority on the youth agenda (10)
- Organize mentorship opportunities (20)
- A Youth Chair on the RHSC Executive Board or on the Chair's Council (16)
- A youth session in every RHSC general members meeting plenary (1)
- Recruitment of new youth members/organizations (4)
- Look at future: aim for Youth Caucus or integrate youth in all working group agenda's? (4)
- Encourage members to hire young people (1)
- Help to overcome legal barriers for young people
- Call for more young people in politics (2)

2) Advocacy and Accountability Working Group

- Advocate for more data on the needs and barriers of young people when accessing reproductive health supplies (8)
- Convince political leaders and health workers that long term methods are safe to use for young people (3)
- Youth mainstreamed in all AAWG work & have young people help shape the agendas of calls and meetings (13)
- Capacity building for young people on advocacy for reproductive health supplies and give them a space to learn and make mistakes (11)
- Engage celebrity ambassadors who make the case (4)

3) System Strengthening Working Group

- Collect data on youth-friendly delivery points and make deliverers accountable (3)
- Provide services in the places where young people are (youth clubs, homes, universities, high schools) (20)
- Identify, train and certify youth cadres and communities (4)
- Work with social enterprises that work with young people for distribution of the products in innovative ways (i.e. a youth caravan between countries, automatic distributors) (5)
- Engage young people in the discussions, the programmatic work, the product design and the demand creation (12)

4) Market Development Approach Working Group

- Work around youth in collaboration with the private sector, as a main provider for young people their data this is crucial (6)
- Collect data around market challenges and young people as consumers (1)
- Use technology to increase outreach (6)
- Use internet to educate/inform youth clients about the available products, so that they go well prepared to the provider and reduce bias (5)
- Talk about the products in different languages (7)

Annex 2: Outcomes of Youth picnic

A. Unique reproductive health supplies needs of young people

1. Full method mix (29)

Young people have the right to access a full method mix and make their own contraceptive choice but often only a small selection is actually offered. There is special attention needed to make some products more available for this group: Long term methods, emergency contraception, dual protection,...

Products should be adapted more to the needs of young people to make the full method mix also attractive for young people (e.g. appropriate methods for unpredictable and infrequent sex, discreet methods they can control...).

Young people don't see reproductive health supplies as something separate from other sexual health related issues like menstrual health, STIs and HIV. It is important to take these issues also into account when looking at young people's reproductive health supplies needs.

2. Disaggregated data on young people (21)

There is a huge need for better and more accessible disaggregated data about young people and reproductive health supplies. What are young people's unique reproductive health supplies needs? What products do they use? What is their method preference? How does their ideal product look like? What are the long-term effects of contraceptive use on adolescents?

All this data should be disaggregated to reflect the variation among young people. This could be by marital status and other types of relationships, training level, level of urbanization, social-economic class, vulnerability & marginalization, age, gender, etc. Because young people cannot be reduced to one homogeneous group, they should be shown in all their diversity.

3. Comprehensive and accurate information (19)

Young people call for more trusted and easy to understand information and awareness around reproductive health supplies, this includes information about the full range of product options available, points of access, guidelines to use a product but also knowledge about their own bodies (e.g. understanding your cycle) and sexuality.

Awareness and education around reproductive and maternal health should be given not only to the young women but also to young men, parents and teachers since family and friends have proven to be the main source of information around these issues. It is important to address misinformation (e.g. regarding effects of products on future fertility) and create understanding and support among parents and in educational settings.

4. Non-stigmatization (17)

Young people often experience stigma when they try to access reproductive health supplies. This can come from their parents, teachers or biased health providers who try to judge someone on his/her sexual activity. Stigma is a critical barrier to information, products and services and is often based on power dynamics which makes it difficult for young people to react to it.

It is important to increase health workers knowledge, change their attitudes and train them to decrease stigma and ensure young people can look for advice, talk about products and buy them (especially looking at access to long term methods).

5. Confidentiality and privacy (16)

Young people are not always seen as independent and autonomous individuals, which can imply a lack of privacy, confidentiality and discretion. Young people should be empowered to make their own decisions in respect to their sexuality and gain confidence and have safe spaces where they can openly and in all anonymity talk about reproductive health supplies and ask questions honestly.

6. Youth-friendly delivery channels (12)

Young people want safe and anonymous distribution points in all facilities (e.g. youth friendly corners in health facilities but also outside of the medical environment like schools) that provide the full range of available methods through youth-friendly services. Access should be easy and discrete and located in a convenient place.

7. Affordable products (12)

Young people face specific cost barriers because they often don't have the financial means yet themselves to buy the product of their preference. They therefore need low cost or even free access to reproductive health supplies, in order to truly have a full method choice.

8. Supportive policies (6)

Certain policies or cultural norms can hinder or restrict access to reproductive health supplies for young people. It is important that policies are non-discriminatory regarding age or marital status.

9. Use positive and youthful language (5)

It is important to use the correct language when talking about sex to young people. It should be youth-friendly and rather talk about pleasurable sex instead of sexuality. The term 'Family Planning' creates a distance with young people since most of them are not planning a family.

B. Proposed solutions

1. Advocate for supportive policies and changing social norms (28)

More advocacy needs to be done to secure supportive policies and social norms for young people's access to reproductive health supplies to create an enabling environment and overcome legal and cultural barriers. This will need to be done at different levels and towards different thematic areas (including the Minister of Education, Health, Budget, Youth...) according to the context analyses.

Some examples of advocacy asks:

- Develop a Country Youth Strategies around reproductive health, including access to supplies and youth-friendly services

- Address social norms (e.g. those that pressure early pregnancy when married, perception that access to contraceptives is encouraging sex, IUDs impact future fertility...)
- Provide guidelines for all health facilities to use when providing supplies to young people, including for specific situations such as humanitarian settings.
- Remove legal barriers that limit access (e.g. abortion restrictions, age of consent to access products...) and develop policies that strengthen access (e.g. Comprehensive Sexuality Education)
- Have young people around the table at all levels when youth related policies are being discussed
- Affordable/free contraceptives for all young people
- Ensure youth trainings are included in educational programs for health workers, teachers and other professionals who work with young people

2. Identify Champions and set up mentorship systems (14)

Appropriate role models could help to bring young people's access to reproductive health supplies issues more in the picture but could also help to make young people more confident about asking specific products or services. Champions could be identified among religious leaders, celebrities, politicians and medical staff.

Besides that a mentorship system where young people's capacity is built through training and they are linked with more senior experts for personal support, could definitely help to introduce these young people more quickly to the key stakeholders in the field and elevate the voices of these young people. There was even the idea for a mentorship challenge to make it more competitive and fun.

3. Research to collect more data (22)

To fill the gap of information on young people's preferences when it comes to accessing reproductive health supplies, more research and disaggregated data collection needs to be done.

Example topics:

- Gather specific youth data through Health Management Information System (HMIS), the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and FP2020
- The unmet youth needs around reproductive health supplies
- Data on the very young, starting from 10 years old
- Comparison between young people and adults more comprehensively
- Data on unmarried women
- Effective interventions
- Compare distribution channels (Delivery controlled vs. over-the-counter)
- What methods do young people find appropriate?
- What cost structures help us to reach young people?

Young people need to be involved in this data collection, to increase involvement and interest among young people in this data.

Annual reporting could be done by FP2020 and others.

4. Increase attractive methods for young people (15)

We need to stimulate the introduction and development of youth friendly methods. This could include new contraceptive technologies that are specifically formulated for adolescent bodies and their hormone levels and fluctuations or just focus on repositioning existing methods to make them respond better to young people's sexual habits and needs.

This should consider specific questions like:

- What is the effect of hormones on young people's body in the long term (i.e. depression)?
- How important is dual protection for young people, to prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and pregnancies?
- Can Long Acting Methods help young women to delay the first child?
- Are young men more willing to take hormonal contraceptives than older men?
- Can we find more sustainable products that have smaller waste impact on the environment?

5. Engage youth at all levels (8)

Young people should be engaged and participate at all levels (policy, planning and implementation). Young people themselves are best placed to identify barriers and solutions and roll out country-level work with young people. They can support in collecting data, delivering supplies, advocate, develop products and tracking stock outs.

Therefore young people should be part of boards of organizations, national Commodity Security meetings and have managing roles in projects.

6. Youth specific distribution channels (24)

In order to reach more young people it is important to set up confidential youth friendly and youth-led health settings who deliver youth-centered services.

This should not only be done through the traditional youth friendly corners in the public health facilities but also include 'new' places that are more likely for young people to attend (schools, private sector facilities, pharmacies,...). It is important to think creatively about these areas.

Some ideas:

- Dispensing machines for condoms & emergency contraceptives
- Trained young peer provide contraceptives in the community
- Phone application that collects reviews and feedback on points of delivery, product information and rates providers (i.e 'Yelp for contraceptives')
- Use mystery clients to check youth-friendly services
- Work closely with the private sector as a primary access point for a lot of young people
- Work with manufacturers to bring down costs for youth preferred methods in these youth-friendly delivery points

7. Provider training (9)

To ensure unbiased and willing providers it is needed to organize trainings for providers to make them better understand young people as well as make counseling more effective. Telephone applications could help to keep them updated after a training.

We need to set standards for manufacturers, pharmaceuticals and service providers in country.

8. Tailored marketing (15)

In order to make the products more attractive to young people it is necessary to brand the products and do tailored marketing based on inputs from young people.

Some ideas:

- Make the packaging more attractive and look fun
- Include clear information on the package
- Do tailored marketing (e.g focus on the fact that you are not having your period anymore when using the product)
- Targeted communication around the product
- Engage the manufacturers to realize the well marketed products (e.g. 'Dignity packs', 'Group 27')
- Co-packaging with other attractive youth products

9. Information sharing (28)

Product information should be made much more appealing (i.e. use videos instead of documents and chat function for Q&A) and accessible (i.e. via phone applications, technology, (social) media, life skills at school,...) for young people.

Within our sector the sharing of best practices, lessons, experiences and success stories is key. This will build young people's skills, it will avoid people reinvent the wheel and will start to change the negative mind set on young people and sex. It can be interesting to look beyond the sexual and reproductive health sector for these best practices (e.g. HIV, education, etc...) and search for integration possibilities.

Information sharing should also be done among parents and men to involve them in the issue.

C. What can the Coalition do?

1. Formalize youth representation in the RHSC structure (38)

The Youth Group as well as youth representatives could be more formally included in the structure of the RHSC to ensure young people's reproductive health needs are taken into account across the work of the Coalition and young people can actually influence the decisions made within the Coalition.

Some ideas:

- Use the open chair at the RHSC Executive Committee for a youth representative (11)
- Have a youth focal point in all of the Working Groups who can be the watchdog to ensure youth issues are taken into account (5)
- Once the youth work is more integrated in the different Working Groups, consider to make the youth Group into a Youth Caucus and have the Chair take place in the Chair's Council (11)
- Set up a Youth Advisory Council to inform all decisions made within the Coalition (1)
- Encouraging youth-lead organizations and networks to become a network and make sure the registration documents include an option to mention this, in order to take keep track (9)

- Every member organization to appoint a young person as a liaison with RHSC for everything related to youth (3)
- Develop an RHSC Corporate Youth Responsibility Strategy

2. Develop clear asks and action points

It is important to know exactly what needs to be done to increase access to contraceptives for young people. Therefore the Coalition should leverage its expertise to define concrete asks and actions points that should guide the youth work next year.

It can be interesting to organize this per Working Group and/or per pillar of the Coalition.

3. Targeted financial support for youth work

The Coalition needs to look for youth specific funding to organize more Youth Innovation Fund calls, as they did earlier in 2016. Also in the more general calls of the Innovation Fund, the importance of integrating a youth aspect in your proposal should be encouraged. (15)

A webinar should be organized to inform youth-led organizations about funding opportunities in our sector. Especially funding for youth specific research to increase data availability, is needed. (2)

The financial support for young attendants at the RHSC General Members Meeting is evaluated very positively by the members and should be repeated next year to also give other young people the chance to attend the meeting and speak to their expertise. (5)

4. Youth participation in the RHSC General Members Meetings (34)

From now on youth issues and young speakers should be standard on the agenda of the RHSC General Members meetings. Member organizations should also be encouraged to send young colleagues to the meeting to ensure a diverse representation of young people.

This can be done through:

- Prioritize financial support for young participants who send in an abstract to present at the meeting
- Organizations who bring a colleague that is under 30 get a reduction or a reward (4)
- Have at least one young person presenting in every panel to create opportunities for the young to shout their voices (4)
- Organize a youth pre-conference (3)
- Organizing more youth picnics
- Have more youth topics on the agenda (2)
- Let the meeting be co-facilitated by a young person (1)
- Make sure the meeting also includes a part that focuses on fun through music, dancing, games, etc. to attract young people
- Make this meeting into an opportunity for youth to share ideas and learn from each other, to make it especially interesting to attend.
- Make sure the youth delegates represent well the different age, sex and countries
- Try to have member's take back the youth voice into their day to day work at home and continue the work in between meetings.

5. Set up a mentorship program (5)

To encourage young people to come to the RHSC General Members Meetings and make it as fruitful as possible, it would be an idea to set up a mentor/mentee system where the young person is linked to a more senior person who can introduce the young person to relevant people or give answers on specific questions. This will help the young person to integrate easier into the structure and topics of the Coalition and update the more senior people on youth needs.

6. Capacity building both ways (9)

The Coalition can help to build the capacity of its members when it comes to youth issues, for young people as well as for more senior people.

The later need to be taught on the unique needs of young people, what they want and how best to reach them. Learn to see young people's creativity and technical strengths.

Young people can learn about the historic and programmatic background of the Coalition, build capacity to speak RHSC language and learn about how to translate ideas into action by increasing their ability to challenges and change culture.

It is important to keep training young people and lower the age, so that new young people are ready to stand up when others get older.

7. Communications (7)

In order to reach more young people, the RHSC communication should ensure clear and simple messages with tailored language (i.e. don't use 'family planning' when related to young people since most of them are not planning a family yet'; focus on delaying pregnancies).

Spreading of the news through social media is crucial in order to maximize the reach of young people. Infographics can help to explain things in an easier way and they are great to share on social media.

8. Advocacy

The RHSC Advocacy and Accountability Working Group should use its knowledge and structure to advocate for young people's needs and funding where relevant (See ideas in punt 1 under "Proposed solution" above)

9. Marketing of specific youth products (5)

It is important to be looking at all the reproductive health supplies available and see how the products can be more tailored to young people's needs and interest. This can be done through marketing (i.e. design of the package), the communication around the product (easy and correct language), a stronger total market approach for distribution (since young people tend to go to the private sector for products), and impact of the product on the environment (work with manufacturers to find more sustainable solutions).

Young people represent a huge share of the market and therefore not only deserve to have more tailored products to their needs, they are also economically interesting to give some more attention to.

10. Supply Chain

Young people should be involved at all levels of the supply chain, but it is not always clear how that can be done. RHSC should organize a webinar to demystify the supply chain and give some more clarity on how young people can be involved.

It will be important to gather more data about youth entry points. This could be done through applications and social media (i.e. Youth Innovation Fund grantee in Argentina CEDES) and a stronger involvement of providers in the Coalition.

11. RHSC convening power

The Coalition can definitely use its convening power to make sure everyone keeps talking about youth and create a safe space where discussions can be held, even when the topic is sensitive (i.e safe abortion).

