

AFRICAN YOUTH ALLIANCE (AYA) PROGRAM PROFILE 2003

What is AYA?

The African Youth Alliance is a collaborative program between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), and Pathfinder International (PI). These three expert development groups have come together to form a unique and significant alliance for an extensive five-year effort in Africa. Their commitment is to reduce the incidence and spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and improve overall adolescent reproductive health in Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda. By partnering with governments, other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based and youth-serving groups, the AYA program plans to make a big difference in young people's lives by getting them directly involved in the work, and by providing resources and support to those who encourage their healthy behavior. AYA is funded by a visionary grant from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the US Committee for the United Nations Population Fund.

AYA reaches young people between the ages of 10 and 24, with an emphasis on 10-19-year-olds. Its goal is to help the four program countries:

- reduce rates of HIV/AIDS, other STIs, and pregnancy among young people
- promote the delay of sexual debut, and among already sexually active youth, the use of condoms and other contraceptives
- eliminate harmful traditional practices, and forced and coerced sex

Each country has its own local priorities and context, but AYA sets a technical standard using six major strategies for achieving its goals:

- Create supportive community and political environments through policy and advocacy efforts at both national and community levels, and improve communication between young people and the adults in their lives.
- Develop and expand behavior change communication through interpersonal communication; folk and mass media, including drama; life planning skills programs for youth; peer education and counseling; and social marketing campaigns.

- Improve young people's access to—and the quality of—reproductive health services by developing, expanding and institutionalizing youth-friendly services in a variety of settings.
- Integrate sexual and reproductive health into existing livelihood skills development and training programs for youth.
- Build the institutional capacity of the country-level partners so they can better plan, implement, manage, and sustain programs and services.
- Foster coordination and information sharing of program activities, lessons learned and best practices.

When designing and implementing projects and specific interventions, AYA helps adolescents develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to avoid risky behaviors and to practice healthy ones. AYA also addresses various environmental factors that prevent young people from achieving healthy lives, including issues of gender and sexuality.

The partners recognize that in order to improve the health and well-being of young people, it is also essential to reach the adults who influence them. These adults include those who come in direct contact with young people, such as health services providers, teachers, organization staff, parents and other adult family members. They also include adults who, through the nature of their work or position in society, influence the nations and communities in which young people live, such as government officials, community and religious leaders, journalists and other members of the media. AYA develops specific activities for these adults to help them ensure that young people live in a supportive environment and receive the programs and services to which they are entitled.

How does AYA work?

First and foremost, AYA believes that the full, active and voluntary participation of young people is key to successful and sustainable youth programs. To date, young people have participated in the design of specific AYA projects, and in selected project management meetings. AYA is dedicated to continually

increasing and improving young people's participation in all aspects of the program, including working with local organizations and institutions to develop sustainable systems for youth participation at regional, national, district and community levels.

AYA's work is conducted as a collaborative and equal partnership because the group believes that collaboration between sectors and program synergies is the key to achieving great impact and sustainable benefits. The three AYA founding partners – UNFPA, PATH and Pathfinder – have well established track records and complementary technical expertise in adolescent reproductive health programming and work hard together to create lasting and positive change.

Building on local partners' strengths and experiences, AYA expands, improves and scales up existing projects that constitute best (or promising and innovative) practices in order to reach large numbers of young people. The AYA partners collaborate with each other and with governments to ensure that necessary synergies among program areas are maximized. For

example, program behavior change communication strategies and activities are developed in close conjunction with advocacy strategies and service activities, since an individual's behavior is closely associated with and influenced by their surroundings.

AYA also works to enhance impact and sustainability by building capacity of its implementing partners. Capacity-building efforts focus on an organization's management capacity, such as improving financial and information systems, as well as on technical capacity, such as expanding knowledge and skills in the area of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. In all of its work, AYA is dedicated to achieving results and practicing results-oriented management.

AYA's program design is closely related to monitoring and evaluation results. Making decisions based on substantive data, the project is able to make an ambitious impact on young people. By demonstrating and sharing its results-based best practices and lessons learned, AYA contributes to a global understanding of what works in youth development programming.

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