

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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.

These principles are fully articulated in AYA's Youth Participation Strategy documents, developed with youth input to guide the involvement of young people at international, national and district levels. To date, young people have participated in the design of specific AYA projects and in selected project management meetings and events. Young people participated and contributed in different ways, as AYA country teams adopted different methods and strategies to ensure their involvement.

## Botswana

A Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), as a coordinating mechanism, has developed youth participation guidelines and ensures that participation modalities are operationalized at all levels. In 2003, the YAC will develop a youth directory in all districts.

Based on these guidelines, district and village adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) committees have been established and are charged with maximizing youth input and participation in the planning of community ASRH activities. These committees are comprised of 65-75% youth. These youth representatives (staff of youth organizations implementing AYA activities) incorporate their organizational work plans into district and village ASRH activities, paying particular attention to the sequencing of activities and identifying synergies.

Youth involvement in program implementation has included young people as counselors, service providers, educators, advocates and performers in education activities.

Young people have actively participated in monitoring and evaluation activities. In quantitative (KABP and in-school) and qualitative (PLA) surveys, young people were data collectors, translators and interviewers. For the qualitative surveys, young people were actually team leaders and conducted all report-back sessions. A new addition to their responsibilities in 2003 is the documentation and reporting of implementing partners' activities.

**A**YA believes the full, active and voluntary participation of young people is key to developing successful and sustainable youth programs. Working in partnership with young people, however, is often a challenge for traditional adult program managers. Not only do program managers often believe they are more experienced and thereby more suited to decision-making than young people, they must also contend with a situation — working with young people as equal partners — that runs counter to typical adult-child dynamics in most settings. Even with these significant challenges, AYA believes that youth participation can significantly increase project effectiveness and sustainability, positively benefit those youth directly involved in program development, and increase the impact on young people in the project areas. AYA uses participatory and sustainable program design and implementation approaches in all program areas to achieve the following crosscutting objectives —

- ▶ Establish internal and external **partnerships** for effective and integrated program design and implementation.
- ▶ Maintain active **participation of youth** in program design and implementation.
- ▶ Design AYA programs to reflect and address issues of **gender and sexuality**.
- ▶ Increase **sustainability** of adolescent sexual and reproductive health programs.
- ▶ Increase number of youth reached in a broader geographic area by institutionalizing effective programs and **scaling up**.



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## Ghana

A Youth Advisory Board was inaugurated to not only advise the country team, but also to initiate innovative ways to reach young people. The Board has nine members selected to represent a cross-section of the program's target group. Activities scheduled for 2003 focus on creative uses of special days. Examples include Mothers' Day, for which an adult-youth forum will look at issues affecting relationships between young people and adults and how to improve them. On Valentine's Day, a large abstinence and safer sex campaign will be launched among young people. Of keen interest is the formation of a National Youth Parliament. The Board is currently developing this proposal with the National Youth Council.

The Media and Communication Advocacy Network, inaugurated at the same time as the Board, will champion AYA advocacy issues in the mass media while also publicizing AYA activities. It is expected to give prominence in the media to youth and youth-related issues, programs and interventions. The Network is made up of young and youth-friendly journalists (a member of the Board is also in the network).

AYA Ghana is currently supporting young people as resource persons to NGOs, international agencies and the Ministry of Health, to provide input on the delivery of youth-friendly ASRH services in training programs for doctors and other health professionals.

## Tanzania

At a 2002 workshop involving young people and AYA implementing partners, a Youth Involvement and Participation Framework was developed to ensure —

- each program objective addresses issues identified by youth as being most important
- youth are involved in the program from which they are to benefit
- youth will monitor and evaluate program activities to determine if the program is adequately meeting their needs
- young people will advise on how best to improve the program

The Framework will serve as a management tool to guide youth participation in AYA activities. Using the Framework and working with the youth members of AYA implementing partners (IPs) and IP Project Officers, agreement was reached on —

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- the role of the Framework in achieving each program objective
  - activities to enhance these roles
  - how the Framework will be monitored
- To overcome the challenge of traditional attitudes to young people, the Framework will be disseminated and its use promoted.

Young people actively participated in program implementation as peer educators, enter-educate performers and as members of community and youth sensitization teams. In 2003, it is intended that young people shall also participate in advocacy activities which include formation of youth advocate groups, the integration of advocacy into youth economic group activities, the formation of school advocacy clubs and capacity building in advocacy, lobbying and leadership skills.

## Uganda

In program design and planning, young people were identified as the key stakeholder group and participated fully in workshops for strategic planning, orientation at national and district levels, and curricula development.

Young people participated in program implementation as peer providers (guidance and counseling) and as team members in mobilization and sensitization of their parents and communities. Through AYA-supported implementing partners, the youth took active part in ASRH information dissemination by designing messages for the print media. Young people were also involved in advocacy and negotiations with PTAs, school administration boards, local council leaders and health facility managers. AYA also directly supported a young people-managed communication change initiative.

To ensure youth participation in program oversight and governance, there are youth representatives on the national project committee, youth officers for each sub-project and youth officers in the district gender and community development offices.

A key role of young people has been in monitoring and evaluation, for which they provided input and participated in assessments, analyses and baselines during protocol development, data collection and dissemination of findings.

## AYA HQ

AYA recognizes that if youth are truly considered assets, it is essential that they receive the skills and exposure needed to

effectively engage and partner with adults and to be leaders and role models to their peers and their communities. In 2003, at the Annual Review and Planning Meeting, young people identified those skills required to enable them to participate effectively, such as improved communication skills and self-esteem, leadership skills and experience, self-discipline and time management, program planning and implementation.

AYA HQ worked to build the capacity of young people in several ways —

- a video documentation project was initiated. The first set of videos are intended as a visual baseline in which young people interview their peers and capture their hopes, aspirations, concerns and fears. Thirty-two young people were trained in the four countries in video use and interviewing techniques. In total, one hundred interviews were conducted with a range of young people from each country. During the life of the project, young people will document on film how their lives, values and attitudes have been impacted by the program.
- AYA sponsored young people from each country to the International HIV/AIDS Conference in Barcelona. As members of the Barcelona Youth Force, they were actively involved in networking, visibility campaigns, press conferences and youth panels. Youth-to-Youth partnerships were forged and AYA attendees have resolved to not only share information and knowledge learned in Barcelona, but to integrate this in their program activities. They are expected to report at the next annual AYA meeting how this involvement has affected their program activities.
- young people have participated in both Annual Review and Planning Meetings to ensure that the program is paying attention to their priorities, and that their input is incorporated in program work plans. Their participation this year was an improvement on last year's, as attention was paid to their feedback (gathered through evaluations from the first annual meeting). During the first week, they made presentations on their Barcelona experience and demonstrated the various ways they are reaching fellow youth in their countries. For the second week, they were engaged in various skills-building activities and visited program sites that exemplified meaningful youth involvement. (Adult AYA participants also took part in role-

plays designed to enhance their understanding of the dynamics of adult-youth partnerships). Youth evaluations highlighted how educative and meaningful the experience was, the value of interacting with fellow youth and learning from other experiences, their increased sense of empowerment and the need for sustained capacity building.

Youth involvement is advocated by most major international agencies; however, little evaluation has been designed to link youth participation with improved program outcomes (even though its advantages are intuitively plausible). In partnership with a research organization, AYA will assess —

- the level of youth participation and the role of young people as partners in the development and implementation of programs
- the level of support provided by AYA and other implementing partners that provide opportunities for youth participation and capacity building
- the effectiveness of youth participation guidelines and the level of fidelity to implementation, using indicators developed by youth members

Communication mechanisms have been designed and their content based on youth-identified issues. The website and internal newsletter are intended to be youth-friendly and meaningfully address issues that are important to young people. Assessment of these mechanisms by young people will highlight how well they have served to communicate young people's issues.

### The African Youth Alliance

AYA is a collaborative program between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Pathfinder International. Their commitment is to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections and improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda. AYA reaches young people between the ages of 10 and 24, with an emphasis on 10- to 19-year-olds. AYA is funded by a visionary grant from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the US Committee for the UN Population Fund.

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