

## **THE VOICE AND THE SWORD**

### *Case Study of Young People's Radio*

#### **ISSUE**

For many generations past, young people in the African sub-region have been facing enormous challenges. One main aspect has been the prohibition of the open discussion of issues relating to their sexual and reproductive health. With the emergence of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) – including the dreaded HIV/AIDS, the rise in teenage pregnancy and other related complications – civil society and non-governmental organisations have realized a vital need to break the silence on Sexually Transmitted Infections on this continent. However, the difficulty as to how to effectively reach the masses with the message stares us all in the face. Compromising the reproductive health of young people is compromising the development of the future world.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

The paper portrays radio as an effective tool for advocacy and sensitization. It looks at how a group of young people in Ghana, working with the UNFPA, are making progress in adequately informing young people about their sexual and reproductive health, and generating discussion among the populace to put pressure on government and policy makers for policy change to create a favourable working environment for young people.

The paper presents the methodologies used to interact with these young people on hitherto 'no go' areas, and how through advocacy it has won most state serving people who were seen to be irrevocably stuck to the socialization in which they were brought up. It presents some of the success stories and best practices of this rather unique way of getting people to accept change.

#### **LESSONS LEARNED**

Radio, if presented properly, can be an effective tool through which we can reach young people with the right information and also get policy makers' attention on issues they would normally not want to respond to, thereby creating change.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Radio is an essential tool for reaching policy makers, and most importantly young people, and can be the way of getting information on sexual and reproductive health across to them.

Sydney Tetteh Hushie, age 21

Ghana

[sydneyhushie@youthaidscoalition.org](mailto:sydneyhushie@youthaidscoalition.org)

## PRESENTATION

### BACKGROUND

It has been the norm in the traditional African society for generations that where adults are gathered, a child or young person should *'be seen but not heard.'* This culture has over the years had a great impact on the African youth — their dreams, aspirations, joys, thoughts, ideas and progress have all been inhibited. The inability of members of the older generation to effectively communicate with their children due to the kind of socialization they also had still continues to create problems for children and young people, including its dire sexual and reproductive health consequences.

Against this background, and in belief in the principle that when young people are given the chance they can contribute to solutions to their problems, YOUTH IN BROADCASTING – CURIOUS MINDS was formed nine (9) years ago as a youth media advocacy group through which radio would seek to address the needs of young people from their own point of view, while also exploring partnership opportunities with adults.

YOUTH IN BROADCASTING – CURIOUS MINDS is a youth media advocacy group with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. For nine years the group has advocated the rights of young people with emphasis on reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS. The group is made up of young people from 8–24 years. These young people run the entire project with the support of an adult coordinator.

The main target of advocacy is to encourage policy makers to look at policy review, harmonization and formulation.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Radio**

- Young people run three very active and vibrant radio shows on national radio and one on private radio from the capital. Policy makers including Parliamentarians, ministers, religious leaders, chiefs, and others, are invited to discuss policy issues as well as create a forum for interaction through phone-in programmes.
- Five out of the ten regions of Ghana have young people running the same shows for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV/AIDS advocacy.
- Two of the radio shows are in local language; one targets the fishing community and the other the farming communities.
- In all, the group has three hours of radio airtime managed by young people for SRH and HIV/AIDS advocacy campaigns.
- Members of the organisation also feature on other radio stations to discuss SRH and HIV/AIDS issues.
- The radio shows are presented, produced and directed by young people. The entire planning is handled by young people.

#### **Television**

- The group currently runs a 30-minute weekly show on HIV/AIDS. This show, like the radio shows, has young people running the entire programme.
- The group also produces documentaries on target SRH and HIV/AIDS issues for NGOs.

### ***Print***

- CURIOUS MINDS assists UNFPA with a quarterly newsletter for young people on SRH issues and HIV/AIDS.
- On very regular basis, the young people write articles on target advocacy issues for various newspapers.

### ***Community Outreach***

- The young people organize bi-monthly Outside Broadcasting radio programmes. Here, radio programmes are broadcast directly from the communities, to build familiarization with radio and build a sense of ownership of the programmes. This is one big programme.
- YOUTH IN BROADCASTING-CURIOUS MINDS has an adopted village a few kilometers from the capital where sensitisation campaigns are carried out.
- The group has in-school peer clubs used as sensitisation points for students.

### ***Capacity Building***

- CURIOUS MINDS trains other young people on radio broadcasting at the community level so they may start their own radio shows.
- CURIOUS MINDS also trains others on advocacy skills and SRH rights.
- Presently, CURIOUS MINDS is running trainings for adult professionals working for young people on the said topic.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- CURIOUS MINDS trained 120 young people in media advocacy last year in the central region of Ghana and is currently training 160 young people in media and community advocacy in the central and eastern regions of Ghana who are running community sensitisation campaigns and radio programmes *themselves*.
- CURIOUS MINDS has organized staff trainings on youth rights and SRH sensitisation and advocacy to enable the organisation to run as a youth-friendly one.
- CURIOUS MINDS currently has four radio shows in the capital reaching all listeners, and five shows running in five other regions. These shows are entirely run by young people. This is to us a big achievement.
- CURIOUS MINDS was part of the youth evaluation and monitoring of the AYA/UNFPA project.
- CURIOUS MINDS prides itself as the first young people's group to organize an Outside Broadcasting radio programme in Ghana.
- CURIOUS MINDS works with UNFPA as a youth media group in a media advocacy network of the U NFPA.

### **LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATION**

In a continent like ours where the voice of the youth is shelved, it has become very necessary to give hope to the deprived youth. The Curious Minds project has proven beyond all reasonable doubt that when young people are given the opportunity we can make a difference. Curious Minds now has a good partnership with professional adults including parliamentarians, ministers, religious leaders, etc. This is all the effort of young people. Young people can manage our own affairs including finances when given the chance. The Curious Minds project has proved this.

It is also worthy of note that partnering with adults is not as easy as it sounds. It takes tact and careful advocacy. Partnering with the UNFPA is a big achievement for us in reproductive health and HIV/AIDS advocacy.

Radio is a strong tool for advocacy. This tool has been of great help in the SRH and HIV/AIDS advocacy campaign being carried out by Curious Minds. It has wide coverage and listenership, and can be the biggest asset in advocacy when used properly.

Sydney Tetteh Hushie, age 21  
Youth In Broadcasting – Curious Minds