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Youth-Led Digital Solutions to Advance CSE and Adolescent and Youth Friendly Services

A learning brief

Overview

Commonly dubbed “the digital generation”, young people are driving innovative digital solutions to lead critical conversations related to sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice (SRHRJ). These solutions do not come easy, as many young people still feel the brunt of the gender digital divide which further marginalises women, girls, and gender expansive people. Young people also face challenges in navigating social media platforms whose content moderation policies increase censorship on content related to SRHRJ, particularly comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)¹.

Navigating this, young content creators have created new slangs and euphemisms that help convey their messages without experiencing the impact of censorship². They also use a range of platforms to build and sustain communities of practice that enable knowledge sharing, solidarity, and best practices for delivering CSE and promoting youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in hostile contexts.

Youth Day 2024 honours the resilience of young people who are creating digital pathways for sustainable development. The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) has partnered with several UN agencies to highlight the role of young people in driving change. Actions like these are critical to affirming the power of young people who are collectively working to overcome the barriers they face daily, to increase access to information for all.

It is no secret that young people, across various cultural and social contexts, are demanding comprehensive sexuality education and SRH services. Research has also shown that CSE is important for developing young people particularly in creating positive identities and sense of self and wellness, increased knowledge of their rights, and decision making.^{3,4,5} Globally, CSE is not delivered in its entirety as some topics are seen as taboo.

To challenge this, youth-led organisations, inclusive of regional youth networks of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, are producing innovative digital solutions to meet their needs. From social media advocacy campaigns to virtual out-of-school CSE delivery, they are filling the gaps to improve the quality of learning for youth and ensuring that no one is left behind.

"Delivering CSE in digital spaces is beneficial as it helps to foster transnational solidarity while also demonstrating the similarities in contexts and realities. More importantly, it can create a safer space to ask questions without the fear of being judged. These solutions are becoming increasingly important as across several contexts, the classroom is an unsafe space for learners, particularly of those who have been historically marginalised; LGBTQIA+ learners, learners with disabilities, and racialised people. While there are several concerns of the replacement of digital tools for real life educators, there is significant opportunity to use these tools to ensure a holistic and safe experience for learners, adequately meeting their needs and countering the spread of misinformation and disinformation." - Ashlee Burnett, Global Lead, CSE

1 <https://www.devex.com/news/how-social-media-censorship-is-impacting-sexual-health-101949>

2 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/digitalage/cfis/tech-standards/subm-standard-setting-digital-space-new-technologies-csos-choice-rnw-media-3-input-part-2.pdf>

3 <https://www.unesco.org/en/health-education/cse>

4 <https://rutgers.international/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Knowledgefile-CSE.pdf>

5 https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_framework_for_comprehensive_sexuality_education.pdf

This learning brief provides an overview of the work led by youth and for youth to engage in digital advocacy and delivery of CSE in their contexts. It shows strategies for using digital solutions as a supportive tool for diverse types of CSE delivery, displaying the power of innovative digital solutions in further advancing CSE. It offers a list of five recommendations of best practices to ensure successful efforts and five case studies across four regions.

Best Practices: What works?

Promoting SRHR content on digital platforms is becoming increasingly difficult as online content moderation policies are becoming more common. One of the largest social media platforms, Meta outlines in its Ad Standard policy that posts promoting SRH services and products can only be targeted to people over the age of 18 and cannot be pleasure-based.⁶ Compounding this, is the ambiguity of community guidelines and social media regulations which enables the miscategorisation of advertisements and social media posts. Overcoming these obstacles require robust research and knowledge sharing in determining how organisations and activists can skillfully navigate these structures.

Here are some best practices shared by young people from the Member Associations highlighted in this brief:

- **Digital Safety and Security:** Digital platforms can pose several risks and dangers as technology becomes more complex with its rapid expansion. In many countries, there are not adequate policies and legislation to guide the responsible use of digital platforms and to respond to the threats posed. Some digital platforms, particularly video conferencing, instant messaging, and social media platforms are owned by private companies (big tech) that are able to dictate their own rules and regulations. Organisations must pressure governments and big tech to enact inclusive and safe policies that enable them to effectively deliver digital health interventions and SRH public education campaigns without barriers. Organisations should also invest in the development of digital safety and safeguarding policies that include social media usage guidelines in order to protect users, particularly young people from data mining, surveillance, and doxxing.⁷

6 <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/ad-standards/content-specific-restrictions/adult-products-or-services/>

7 <https://www.accessnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MENA-report.pdf>

- **Co-design and Co-creation of Content:** Young people are experts of their own realities and their needs, and are therefore equipped to articulate what strategies are most efficient when addressing SRH issues. Digital content teams should ensure that they engage in inclusive processes that centre a diverse group of adolescents and young people. This should be done at every stage, from the inception of digital interventions for SRH as co-designers and co-creators to ensure that the interventions are tailored to their needs and preferences. Digital interventions should also be optimised to cater to accessibility needs.
- **Continuous Feedback and Assessment:** Digital content should be routinely assessed to determine what works and what does not work in order to remain effective. This assessment should include feedback from audiences, supported by frequent auditing of digital platforms to determine action plans. Teams working on digital platform content development should also stay up-to-date on policy and platform changes to ensure that they are able to adapt when needed.
- **Inclusive Language:** Language plays an important role in accurately and safely conveying messages to your audience. As such, if content is executed without extensive assessment of the language used, it causes harm. When creating messaging for digital platforms, always use accessible and inclusive language to ensure that your audience feels represented and seen. Here is a [resource](#) by Engender Health that you can use.
- **Digital Platform Monitoring:** Despite the endless possibilities of digital spaces, it can also be a space for the spread of misinformation and disinformation from anti-rights organisations and activists. As such, digital platform monitoring provides an opportunity to assess trends and engage in forecasting that can contribute to effective strategies for digital content creation. Additionally, it allows organisations and activists to adequately respond and put the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure that their audience and clients are able to access their information and health care services safely.
- **Capacity Strengthening:** Effectively developing innovative digital solutions requires consistent capacity strengthening that enables young people to feel confident and well equipped to lead. Organisations must invest in capacity strengthening and mentorship opportunities so that adolescents and young people develop and improve on the necessary skills required for their work. It also positions them to be up to date on technological developments and how they can best adapt. These opportunities should include training on digital literacy, advocacy, and project management.



From Clicks to Progress: Documenting Youth-Led Digital Solutions to Advance CSE

Case Studies

YSAFE

Youth Sexual Awareness for Europe (YSAFE) is a network of young people under the age of 25 from Member Associations across Europe and Central Asia working to ensure that young people everywhere are able to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). YSAFE believes that all young people should have the right to decide about their own bodies and to be able to express their gender and sexual identities without fear of discrimination or violence. YSafe leads innovative digital solutions to advance SRHR by leveraging digital platforms to deliver impactful CSE content, engage with youth globally, and foster a supportive online community. One of their key initiatives involves creating engaging multimedia content: podcasts, social media campaigns, and interactive workshops, all designed to resonate with and educate young people.

Sex PositivTEA Podcast

This podcast is an initiative co-funded by the European Union which provides young people with accurate and relatable information about SRHR. The podcast covers a range of topics including consent, contraception, STI prevention, healthy relationships, and guidance on how to safely and responsibly navigate digital spaces. Since 2020, YSAFE has published over 25 episodes bringing together a diverse range of key actors inclusive of LGBTQIA+ activists, abortion activists, religious leaders, and sex workers. This type of engagement is critical as it contributes to the development of positive messaging and public education on sexuality education, providing safer spaces to learn and be represented.

Learn more about the podcast [here](#).



Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana- Yenkasa Contact Center

Planned Parenthood Association Ghana (PPAG) provides sexual and reproductive health services to people across Ghana. With a focus on a diverse population, inclusive of young people, PPAG has a strong Youth Action Movement of 810 young people. Their commitment to empowering young people is reflected in its innovative health interventions designed to address this demographic's unique needs and challenges. One of the cornerstone initiatives of PPAG is the Yenkasa Contact Center.

Yenkasa Contact Center

The Yenkasa Contact Center is a confidential and supportive platform for young individuals to seek information and counselling services on sexual and reproductive health. Yenkasa was co-developed with young people to provide age-appropriate and medically accurate advice for adolescents and young people in need of youth-friendly SRH services. The center is operated by trained, young call-center agents who are trained to provide accurate information, self-care tips, and referrals. Key partners of the Yenkasa Contact Center include medical service providers, government and private hospitals, and local pharmacies. The center has reached over 300 young girls supporting access to abortion self-care services among other SRH services.

To learn more about the Yenkasa Contact Center, check out this case study.



Welcome to
Yenkasa
help you can trust!

The trusted source for sexual and reproductive health counselling, information and services for Young People

toll free

WhatsApp Only

Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria

PPFN is a national healthcare provider and a leading advocate of sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Nigeria. Founded in 1958 in response to pressing reproductive-related problems, such as unwanted pregnancies, child abandonment, and unsafe abortion. PPFN has evolved to a broader, more comprehensive mission focused on adolescent reproductive health (ARH), the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Nutrition, malaria prevention, cervical cancer preventive therapy, and meeting the health needs of people affected by natural disasters or conflicts.

The Youth Action Movement (YAM) is the youth wing of PPFN. It is a grassroots movement by young people, for young people, aged 10-24 years. YAM advocates for the sexual and reproductive health rights of young Nigerians and addresses other challenges faced by the youth. It collaborates with other youth groups and organizations to promote social progress and healthy lifestyles. YAM's mission includes enhancing youth participation in PPFN governance, sharing best practices on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and developing a strong network of young people to support PPFN's strategic goals. It also aims to remove socio-economic, political, and cultural barriers that hinder youth development and to advocate for policies that create a conducive environment for young people's progress.

Youth Connect- Talk to Ivy AI Chatbot

In 2018, with funding support from IPPF, PPFN YAM launched the Youth Connect (<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/2aBxdqP5Jya5ztWL/>) network, a digital (web-based application and social media) platforms to enable young people have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. This initiative was led and coordinated by a YAM member. A One-stop-shop youth-friendly blogsite was one of the result-oriented multifaceted strategies the Youth Connect deployed to reach young people with counseling services by a trained provider and not just a peer counselor.

Youth Connect- Talk to Ivy AI Chatbot (cont'd)

The blog site provides multiple opportunities to a young person once he/she is connected, these include, chatting with a trained provider, access to a list of walk-in nearby health facilities, an easy platform to register and join YAM, and accessible FAQs.

The FAQs are currently being integrated into AI-powered WhatsApp Chabot (Talk to Ivy) to enable young people to have access to real-time SRHR information on the go.

This has been tested awaiting Meta approval for full-scale deployment. The Talk to Ivy was an initiative generated by young people during a focus group discussion with some secondary school students in Ibadan. The Youth Connect blog site is currently being expanded to include a self-learning module for the delivery of Comprehensive Life Skills and Health Education (CLHE). CLHE is an adapted version of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum. When deployed, young people will have access to a self-paced.

Learn about PPFN's Youth Connect [here](#).



Family Planning Organisation of the Philippines (FPOP): RH Tambayan Talks

FPOP is a service-oriented organisation working to promote sexual and reproductive health services across 12 chapters, with 18 community health care clinics in 10 regions of the Philippines. These SRH services include family planning counselling (mental health, children's health, and medical support), women's and men's reproductive screenings, sexually transmitted infections and diseases testing, and youth-friendly services. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, FPOP made significant adjustments and recalibrations to ensure that sexual and reproductive health services could be delivered to its clients, especially to young people by optimising the use of digital platforms to provide CSE and reproductive health information and services. One of these actions is the RH Tambayan Talks.

Youth Virtual Camp

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, FPOP hosted a Youth Virtual Camp which served as a safe space created by and for young people to learn about various topics within CSE.

The objectives of this camp were to connect young people with their peers, inform them of FPOP's advocacy and service provision, and to encourage them to become advocates for adolescent and youth sexual reproductive health (AYSRH) services. Following the completion of the youth virtual camp, FPOP's youth volunteers were inspired to launch "RH Tambayan Talks" -- Tambayan is a Tagalog word that means "hangout", a virtual hangout session to enable further discussion on topics addressed in the camps. These sessions highlight other services available to young people at FPOP such as telemedicine and virtual counselling. These sessions take place on various digital platforms including Facebook and radio broadcasts.

Learn more about FPOP's RH Tambayan Talks [here](#).



Society for Health Education (SHE) Maldives

The Society for Health Education (SHE) is a non-governmental organization proactive in addressing crucial health and social concerns in the Maldives. Founded in 1988 by four women, SHE's mission is to enhance the quality of life for Maldivian families.

With over 35 years of service, SHE provides interventions in four main thematic areas: Sexual and Reproductive health services, Counselling and Psychosocial support services, Thalassaemia-related services, and health promotion and well-being. SHE also empowers women and youth, supports victims of abuse through gender-based violence screening services and referral services.

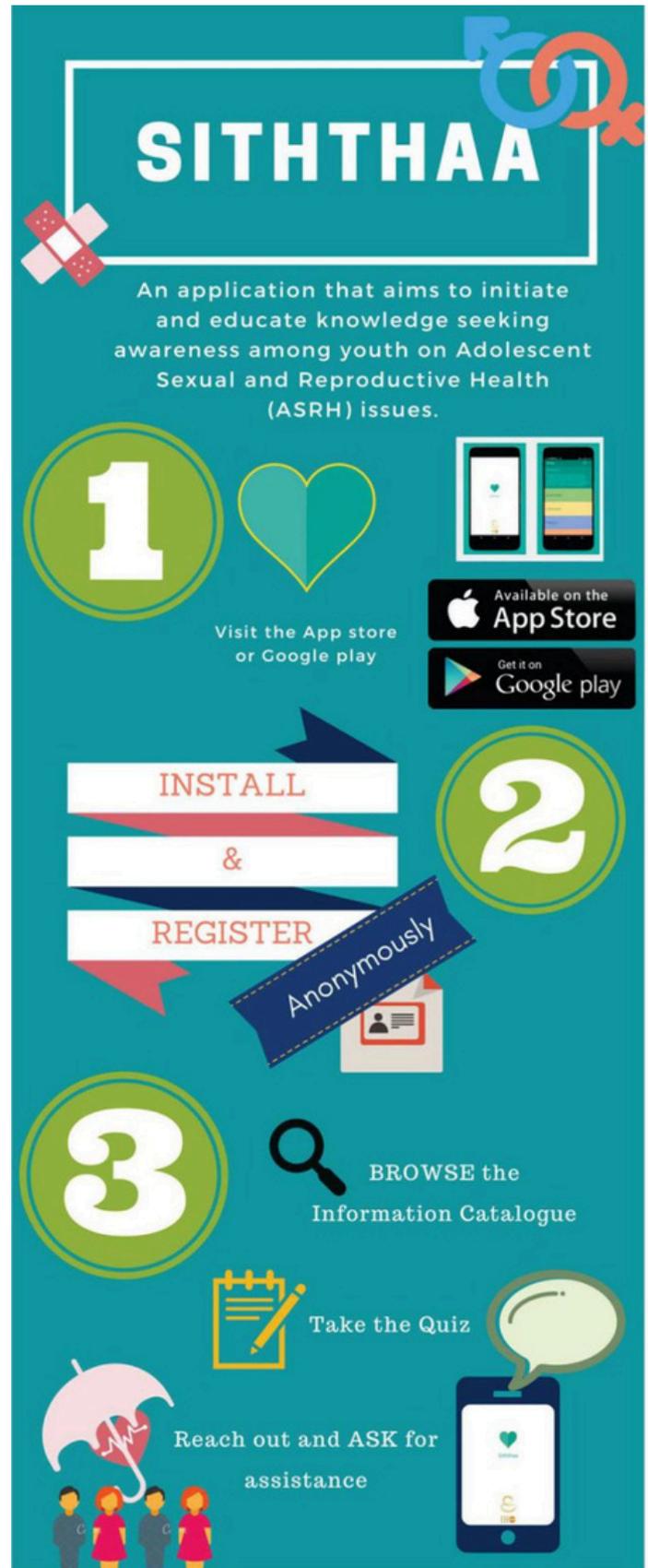
Additionally, SHE offers counselling and psychosocial support to adolescents and families, and encourages community ownership of development. Through these comprehensive efforts, SHE remains a crucial influence in advancing health outcomes and enhancing the well-being of individuals and families across the Maldives.

SHE has been at the forefront of integrating digital innovations to advance comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and youth-friendly services. One prominent example of this youth-led digital initiative is the SITHTHAA app, developed in collaboration with UNFPA.

Siththaa App

The SITHTHAA app is a digital platform designed to provide young people with reliable and accessible information on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and self-care. The app offers a variety of features, including educational resources, self-assessment tools, and confidential advice, empowering youth to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. The SITHTHAA app helps users to get answers to their questions, schedule appointments with SHE, and even engage in telehealth consultations at SHE. This seamless integration of digital tools ensures that young people can access the support they need without facing obstacles related to location or stigma, anonymously.

SHE's work through the SITHTHAA app exemplifies how digital innovations can be harnessed to bridge gaps in CSE and provide essential services to youth. By leveraging technology, SHE not only enhances the reach and impact of their educational efforts but also empowers young people to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.



SITHTHAA

An application that aims to initiate and educate knowledge seeking awareness among youth on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) issues.

1 Visit the App store or Google play

Available on the App Store

Get it on Google play

INSTALL & REGISTER Anonymously

2 BROWSE the Information Catalogue

Take the Quiz

3 Reach out and ASK for assistance



IPPF/Marvin Maduro/Aruba

Acknowledgments

This learning brief was created through the collective effort of the IPPF Secretariat, Member Associations and Regional Youth Networks of IPPF: Family Planning Organisation of the Philippines, Planned Parenthood Association Ghana, Planned Parenthood Federation, Nigeria, YSafe, Europe and Central Asia, and SHE Maldives.

A special thank you to Azra Mehmedović- Vice Chair of the Steering Committee, YSAFE; Riziel Castro-Humanitarian Programme Coordinator; Naadu Addico: Youth Programme Coordinator, Planned Parenthood Association, Ghana; Yahaya Halima Urah: Youth Focal Officer, Planned Parenthood Federation, Nigeria; and Malaha Abdul Rasheed: Director, SRHR Department, SHE Maldives.

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