



# AIMING HIGH: 10 STRATEGIES FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- 1. Agree together to roles, responsibilities and expectations among youth and other partners/ stakeholders.** For example, describe clear roles and responsibilities for young people and partners in a written agreement for working together.
- 2. Support young people's leadership by giving them decision-making roles in all stages of the project.** For example, set up a youth advisory group for the project with a clear structure for influencing the project's direction. Keep spaces for young people on planning and decision-making groups or advisory boards.
- 3. Regularly ask young people whether their views and ideas are being heard, and how meaningful participation of young people can be improved.** Establish a clear method of addressing and responding to feedback. For example, agree on expectations with your youth advisory group and have regular meetings with them to evaluate how those expectations are being met.
- 4. Identify opportunities and support young people to advocate for their issues, and to safely share their experience and knowledge as experts.** For example, connect young people with key population networks. Mentor young people to speak at advocacy events. Hire young people as staff (peer educators, peer counsellors, service providers, programme staff, etc.). This might also include speaking with guardians, spouses, or teachers to help facilitate young people's participation.
- 5. Build skills and knowledge of young people – including through mentorship – so they can confidently and effectively take part in both decision-making and implementation.**
- 6. Use language that is understandable, respectful, and accessible to everyone (this includes providing translation support).** For example, avoid overly technical language and jargon, and make sure translation is included in meeting budgets.
- 7. Give young people enough support and resources (financial and other) in a timely manner; do not expect them to volunteer their time.** For example, pay young people for their participation, in recognition of their skills, expertise and time. Make sure transport or other costs are covered.
- 8. Value and respect the perspectives and views of young people.** For example, make sure young people in all of their diversity are involved, and if necessary create or provide 'safe spaces' for young people from different groups (young women, men who have sex with men, sex workers, etc.) to discuss together before sharing with the wider group.
- 9. Support consultation and feedback between young people and the communities they represent.** For example, provide enough time, space and money for meetings with community members before and after major events.
- 10. Trust young people to take responsibility and be accountable for programme delivery.** For example, partner or sub-grant to youth-led organisations to come up with and run their own projects.

# AIMING HIGH FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In this brief we provide practical guidelines for meaningful youth engagement for the use of programmers, policymakers, civil society and others who wish to work with young people in an inclusive and equitable way. Examples of how the 10 strategies can be applied, drawn from the Link Up project, are given in five areas of meaningful youth engagement in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV integration. These can be adapted and applied to any level of decision-making and programming.

## LINKUP What did Link Up do?

The three-year Link Up project, led by a consortium of global and national partners, sought to advance the SRHR of young people in five countries. Link Up worked with young people most affected by HIV aged 10–24 years old, with a specific focus on young men who have sex with men, young people who sell sex, young people who use drugs, young transgender people, and young people living with HIV. It also amplified the voices of these young people through community mobilisation and advocacy in national and global forums.

Young people aged 15–24 account for 40% of new HIV infections globally. Cultural expectations of 'appropriate' behaviour and norms around discussing sexuality often make access to integrated HIV and SRHR services difficult for young people. Compounded by stigma and discrimination, imbalanced power dynamics, gender inequality and lack of confidentiality, young people living with and affected by HIV are particularly likely to be excluded from SRHR programming and policy.

The Flower of Participation illustrates the ways young people can be involved in programmes and organisations.



Source: CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality. [www.choiceforyouth.org/information/meaningful-youth-participation/flower-of-participation](http://www.choiceforyouth.org/information/meaningful-youth-participation/flower-of-participation)



# MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SRHR AND HIV INTEGRATION

## Internal project governance and advisory

### Within Link Up, young people living with and most affected by HIV were:

- participants in global and national consortium project management meetings
- given space at consortium meetings to participate equally with colleagues in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities across the project
- on a global youth advisory group to inform the Link Up project, as well as national youth advisory groups in Burundi and Myanmar
- financially supported in their youth networks and as focal points to dedicate time to the project
- actively consulted for feedback on youth participation within the project.

## Community mobilisation

### Young people living with and most affected by HIV have been at the core of community mobilisation in Link Up through:

- delivering peer education training and mentoring other young peer educators
- leading one-to-one peer outreach, small group discussions and support groups, and community-wide events
- implementing youth-led education sessions for teachers, school staff, parents and service providers, so young people can share their expertise with community partners.

## Service provision

### Through Link Up, young people most affected by HIV:

- received training and support to provide HIV counselling and testing services in Burundi
- were supported to work as peer educators and peer counsellors during clinical outreach in Uganda
- distributed female and male condoms and information, education and communication (IEC) materials during one-to-one outreach and small group sessions in Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia and Uganda
- worked as 'mystery clients' to evaluate youth-friendly service provision in Myanmar and Uganda.



In Burundi, Link Up supported the start up of a **youth centre** run by Burundi's national network of young people living with HIV, Réseau National des Jeunes Vivant avec le VIH/SIDA (RNJ+). The centre opened its doors in 2014 and is used and run exclusively by young people living with and most affected by HIV. The centre is one of a kind in Bujumbura: it offers information and advice, training, HIV counselling and testing, contraceptives and male and female condoms, a helpline, and community and school outreach. These services equip young people with the information they need to make their own decisions. The centre also works with local health service providers to provide referrals when necessary.



In Bangladesh, geographical distance and the diversity within and between young people most affected by HIV inspired a new model for youth involvement – the **Young Key Population Platforms**. There are 10 platforms across Bangladesh, each with 11 members. They are led by young people and supported with guidance by two national youth focal points who are paid full-time staff in the Link Up project office. By working and acting locally, more young people are able to participate, including different key population groups who might otherwise be under-represented. The platform leaders also meet, train and strategise together as a national leadership group. The platforms are relatively new and under-resourced, but have huge potential as a foundation for youth advocacy.



In Ethiopia, young people who sell sex from the Nikat Charitable Association were trained on SRHR and HIV issues (including relationships, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and life skills) and as peer educators. They then led regular **peer education** sessions in their places of work (hotels, bars, etc.). Nurse counsellors from Link Up's lead organisation in Ethiopia – Organization for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHD) – provided support and assistance. During the sessions, participants had access to condoms and referrals to further STI, HIV or family planning services, counselling, or other support. As young people who sell sex, the peer educators often had to work after the sessions, so nurse counsellors accompanied young people to youth-friendly health providers if they desired.



## Policy and advocacy

In every Link Up country, young people living with and most affected by HIV:

- met with community leaders to do local and district level advocacy
- trained in leadership and advocacy and played a major role in designing their country's annual advocacy strategy (through consultations, think tanks, validation meetings and full participation in the design of a theory of change)
- became mentors, paired with new or less experienced advocates (in Myanmar and Uganda, a peer mentoring programme was piloted to help sustain the local youth movement)
- engaged in national and global-level policy processes (such as Global Fund concept note development in Uganda and the national adolescent health strategy in Myanmar)
- took part in community-wide events, such as youth camps, pageants and weekend retreats, to learn about their SRHR, accessing services and advocacy work.



Link Up supported the development of the **Young Key Population Charter** to contribute towards Uganda's concept note to the Global

Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Youth-led networks of young people living with and affected by HIV called for and convened a consultation among young people living with HIV and from key populations to prioritise and articulate their needs and priorities in the lead-up to the Uganda Global Fund concept note development. The charter was drawn up and presented in a civil society consultation on the Global Fund. Content from the youth charter was included in the civil society charter, and recommendations ultimately taken forward to the final concept note.



## LINKUP

Link Up improved the sexual and reproductive health and rights of over 800,000 young people affected by HIV across five countries in Africa and Asia. The project was implemented by a consortium of partners led by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance.

For more information, visit [www.link-up.org](http://www.link-up.org)



## Research

Young people in all five countries:

- wrote and presented abstracts to be shared at national, regional and global conferences
- delivered oral and written evidence-based interventions around the needs of young people at the United Nations, the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board and many other advocacy forums and meetings
- helped shape the design and implementation of research and a project mid-term review as co-researchers, and co-authored research papers with colleagues.



External consultants conducting a **mid-term review (MTR)** of Link Up worked

directly with two teams of paid co-consultants comprising eight Link Up youth advocates from Myanmar and Uganda. The co-consultants, representing young people living with HIV and young people from key affected populations, helped steer and implement the evaluation. The youth co-consultants from Uganda developed and reviewed interview tools for youth focus group discussions and key informant interviews, which were translated into Burmese and reviewed by the youth co-consultants in Myanmar prior to data collection. During the MTR, the youth co-consultants in both countries worked as part of the consultant team facilitating focus group discussions and key informant interviews with stakeholders, participating in consultant team debriefs at the end of each day, and contributing to the data analysis.

Photos © International HIV/AIDS

Alliance. Pg 1: Young women perform a traditional dance at Uganda Development Link in Masooli, Uganda.

Pg 2: Peer educator Mark Tuhaise, 23, gives a condom demonstration to young men in Kampala, Uganda; Young women in the youth group at Malnicherra tea plantation in Sylhet, Bangladesh.

Pg 3: Nahimana, 22, and Pacifique, 20, playing table football at the RNJ+ youth centre, Burundi.

Pg4: A training session at Daulatdia Brothel, Bangladesh © Syed Latif Hossain/Alliance; The BEZA Anti-AIDS youth group in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, uses dance to encourage free HIV testing at mobile clinics.

