YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND SRHR

A step by step guide to creating sustainable youth-led organizations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

By Claudia Ahumada, Karolien Dekkers, Annelies Mesman, Lynda Saleh and Jostein van Vliet

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

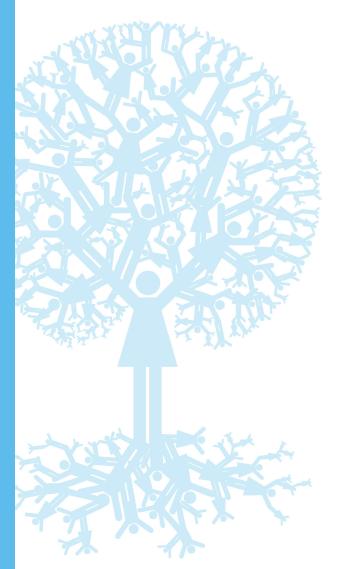# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WHO WE ARE

CHOICE for youth and sexuality and the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights are two completely youth-led organizations. We have existed respectively for 12 and 10 years and are proud to be working examples of young people who can create, maintain and run sustainable, youth-led SRHR organizations.

CHOICE is a Dutch youth-led organization that amplifies the voices of young people on sexuality and reproduction worldwide, and promotes the right to make one's own choices in this area. CHOICE consists entirely of youth under the age of 29, all of whom share the passion of improving the lives of young people worldwide. The organization has approximately 25 youth advocates who all work on a voluntary basis for the organization. CHOICE was set up by the World Population Foundation in 1997 and became independent in 2005. CHOICE members advocate for the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights by addressing decision and policymakers and making sure that the voice of youth is heard and guaranteed on a national and international level. Capacity building of youth and youth organizations are an important investment to empower youth and to realize sustainable youth leadership. Therefore CHOICE supports the initiation and growth of youth advocacy organizations on SRHR worldwide by training and offering organizational development support since 2004.

The Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights is an international organization of young people (ages 15-29 years) committed to promoting adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive rights at the national, regional and international levels. While the office is based in Canada, members are all around the world. It is made up of volunteers, students, researchers, lawyers, health care professionals, educators, development workers and, most importantly, dedicated young activists. It aims to ensure that the sexual and reproductive rights of all young people are respected, guaranteed and promoted, and strives to secure the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making that affects our lives, by advocating, generating knowledge, sharing information, building partnerships and training young activists. During its first few years, the Youth Coalition was hosted by Action Canada for Population and Development and then went on to gain legal independence in 2007.

INTRODUCTION

Why this guide?

This is a step-by-step guide to creating a sustainable youth-led organization on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). While the steps described here may be useful to you if you are planning on creating a youth-led organization on something other than SRHR, given that specific needs and challenges may vary, and because the two authoring organizations work on SRHR, this guide refers more specifically to the establishment and sustainability of youth-led organizations on SRHR.

In the past decennia, a large number of programs, campaigns and organizations have been initiated, led and maintained by young people. As successful and long lasting the impact of the work led by young people has been, youth initiatives can also be short lived. Some youth organizations exist for a few years, and wither as the initial members age-out or move on to other things. Some do not even move past the formation stage, as the barriers they face can be too high.

Why Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights?

Whilst this guide is useful for various types of youth organizations, it focuses and draws upon the experiences of youth organizations working on SRHR advocacy.[1] The reasoning behind this is twofold: there are few subjects as relevant to young people as SRHR and fewer still that are as necessary for young people to get involved and organized around as SRHR.

Sexuality is an aspect of every person's life and this is especially the case for young people. As young people around the world think about and experience the positive and negative sides of sexuality regularly, there are some of us that want to take it a step further and commit to the struggle for SRHR for our peers all around the world. As a young person, you see challenges that your peers face and you see that initiatives developed to overcome these challenges are not sufficient or inaccessible to young people. As young people, we have the passion and commitment to produce change. We are creative and energetic and willing to invest our time and energy in making a difference because we care! But, where can one start?

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1 Note: when we say organization, this could be any type of organization: a youth group, a movement or a network, among others.

About this guide

Over the years we have worked with many organizations and young activists from around the globe, and questions we are often asked include: how did you create this organization? How do you maintain it? How do you ensure that young people stay involved and committed? How do you create a platform that can empower young people to advocate for their SRHR? While there is no single answer on how to go about this, in our experience, there are certain steps which are key to creating and maintaining a sustainable, youth-led SRHR organization.

If you are reading this, you probably have an interest in youth organizations or SRHR. Alongside your peers, you may be considering a few ideas on how to get involved or perhaps you are part of a youth organization but have questions on how to make your organization more sustainable. You could be part of a youth group that is already engaged in SRHR-related activities, such as capacity-building and peer education but would like to expand into other relevant areas, such as advocacy. It also may be the case that your organization was set up by an 'adult-led' organization and you are now considering the benefits of becoming completely youth-led. Whatever your reasons, we hope to add something to what you are already doing. Whether you are running a campaign, engaged in trainings or peer education, or just discussing possibilities for action with friends, you are your own experts and no single guide will be able to provide all the answers.

However, this guide does aim to provide you with information to support you throughout this process. A solid organizational foundation is important for young people to be empowered, speak out and be taken seriously. It is the basis from which your organizational activities will grow.

This guide intends to:

- Provide steps that you can take while building a sustainable youth-led SRHR organization;

- Examine key lessons learned related to ensuring the sustainability of youth-led SRHR organizations; and delineate challenges and strategies to overcome them.

- Highlight a few additional resources for young people interested in creating, maintaining or strengthening youth-led SRHR organizations.

How to use this guide

While reading this guide, we encourage you to contextualize the concepts raised to suit your own reality. We aim to share these ideas as pointers and suggestions that work in a variety of contexts. It is up to you, however, to make them fit into yours.

AN OVERVIEW: YOUTH AND SRHR

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights encompass physical, emotional, psychological and social wellbeing with regards to sexuality and reproduction. To guarantee sexual and reproductive health, young people's human rights need to be recognized, and perhaps even more importantly, exercised. This includes young peoples' right to have access to the information and services required to make informed decisions about their health and sexuality, free from coercion and violence. Moreover, it also means that every individual has the right to experience their sexuality and sexual relations in a positive and pleasurable way and to be free from illness, pressure, discrimination, force and violence. Mutual consent, equality, respect and pleasure form the basis of these universal human rights. These rights apply to everyone, regardless of age, gender, marital status, ability, HIV status, sexual orientation, economic, cultural, social or religious status, geographic location or other status.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of young people

Young people have urgent sexual and reproductive health needs and face challenges in exercising their rights.

Adolescence is a critical time and these years can be damaging when young people's needs are not addressed and their voices not heard; youth participation is integral to achieving SRHR for young people. Young people are a huge focus group but all too often are seen as a problem group instead of the key to development and individuals who are capable of putting forth tremendous contributions. When given the opportunity to make informed choices, young people are receptive to positive change which leads to long-term and wide-ranging benefits. Young people are experts when it comes to their own needs and situations and can best represent themselves as opposed to someone doing it for them. Young people are crucial leaders who can bring about the desired change for themselves. Youth voices must therefore be heard and youth rights must be respected, including those concerning our sexual and reproductive health. Policies and programs must reflect the reality that we are living in and address our needs and challenges.

> *Programs for adolescents have proven most effective when they secure the full involvement of adolescents in identifying their reproductive and sexual health needs and in designing programs that responds to those needs.*
> *- ICPD PoA, Paragraph 7.43*

9

Why youth-led organizations on SRHR?

In order to realize sustainable youth leadership, youth-led organizations are key. Youth potential can be fulfilled even more so when channeled through youth-led organizations and networks. Youth-led organizations can strategi-cally work together in national and in-ternational advocacy to promote and safeguard our SRHR. Youth-led orga-nizations can support knowledge and information exchange between fellow youth advocates thus safeguarding a continuous and sustainable youth voice. In order to become this major catalyst for change, young people and youth-led organizations need capacity building in the field of SRHR advocacy and organizational development.

As young people, we have unique knowledge and energy in compari-son to 'professional' organizations. All youth organizations working on SRHR have their own agenda; its own specific strengths and can reach out to youth in different geographical regions. For ex-ample, some organization's niches will be in international SRHR advocacy, so part of the organization's strengths will be derived from its worldwide member-ship. Much needs to be achieved when considering the present SRHR situa-tion of young people. As SRHR orga-nizations, we all have our own goals, skills and knowledge. This creates an exciting platform for collaboration and partnership, further strengthening the meaningfully involvement of youth voices and the inclusion of our issues in policies and programs.

2 From the International Conference on Population and De-velopment Programme for Action (ICPD PoA). The ICPD PoA, which was approved by 179 countries in September 1994, was the first international document that recognized the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.

SETTING THE FOUNDATION: STRATEGIC PLANNING

You probably already have a good idea of what you want to do and what you would like to achieve with your organization. You would like to start your activities, and as fast as possible! However, it is important to take a step back, look at your organization, look at your environment, and think how you can best reach your goals. When beginning to build an organization around a task as large and daunting as 'improving the SRHR of young people', it is easy to become overwhelmed by the number of things that could be done to accomplish this. In addition, you will most likely find that it is easy to get lost in all the information and themes within SRHR. Therefore you need to set boundaries and establish a clearly defined identity for your organization.

Please note that in writing this guide, we have assumed that you are starting from scratch. However, whether the activities of your organization have already been implemented, or you have yet to start, it is important to look at the foundation of your organization and to engage in 'strategic planning'. For this process, do give a thought to the following:

- **Focus:** There are so many problems that we can try to solve, and it is common to want to take up several important issues. However, it is usually wise to limit yourself to a specific set of issues and activities that form the basis of your organization and develop your expertise around these issues. We recognize that as young people working in SRHR, there is a pressing desire to make a difference in the world. However, solid preparation and taking the time to develop your activities in a way that is financially efficient and which can lead to a positive and long-term impact is critical.

- **Motivation:** Sometimes the problems that you try to solve can become overwhelming. Setting clear goals that you feel are achievable and referring back to your past results and lessons learned will help you in continuing your mission and keeping motivation levels high.

- **Balance:** For the organization to be sustainable, activities, membership, funding and coordination capacity should remain in balance. More activities means more funding should be sought. At the same time, more activities means a larger amount of capacity should be devoted to coordination. A strategic plan helps you make sure these components are in balance with each other. For example, if you have more members than

activities, you can choose to devote more time to fundraising.

- **■ *Donors and other sponsors:*** To successfully carry out organizational goals, it is important to have other organizations believe in what you are doing and support you; a strategic plan facilitates easier dialogue about organizational activities. Additionally, some donors will require a strategic plan before considering your funding proposal.

There are many different ways to approach the strategic planning process. However, it is advisable to consider the following:

- Look at what your organization really wants to **achieve** (mission), and the principles and values that form **the core of the organization**;

- Define the steps your organization must undergo to achieve its mission. In other words, set goals;

- Look **outside** the organization: what challenges and circumstances do you need to take in to account, and vice versa, are there factors that can help inform your work?;

- Look **inside** the organization, to see what strengths and limitations exist;

- Based on the environmental and organizational analysis, decide **how** you

want to achieve these goals (strategy);

- Identify **what exactly** you have to do to achieve these goals: make **action plans**.

Some general points that are important to consider in strategic planning:

- The planning process is at least as important as the document that it is produced. To encourage ownership over the strategic plan, thus activities, and ultimately the organization itself, it is important to include as many voices as possible in the strategic planning process, as everyone will be able to contribute good ideas and their unique perspective.

- Creativity is an important factor in developing objectives and activities, within your strategic plan, that are inspired and realistic. Oftentimes, brainstorming on how best to reach organizational goals yield the best and more relevant options. Paying careful attention to priorities within your goals, objectives and activities and holding one another accountable to those is an integral part of maintaining focus and producing the type of outcomes that are desirable. Harnessing ambitious goals and objectives in your strategic plan will help to avoid disappointment down the line and ensure that the goals your organization has set for itself are met.

- It is as important to do enough strategic planning, as it is important to not do

too much! While it is an important process, there will always be the temptation to make your plan as complete and perfect as possible. There comes the point where it is best to actually begin carrying out your activities instead of developing an even better plan. Strategic planning is a prime opportunity to get bogged down in semantic discussions. When you find yourself in one, remember that meaning is more important than literal text.

• Strategic planning has its limits. You cannot plan for everything, and your environment can change as you carry out your plans. Reality will always be different than what you expected. Opportunities can also arise while you are busy implementing your activities. A strategic plan can help you in dealing with these unexpected events. It is unnecessary to set everything in stone; there needs to be room for flexibility and growth.

• Before you start the strategic planning process, it is important to think about the kind of information you will need to develop a thorough plan. For example, if you start planning for an advocacy process, it is important to know how the policy cycles within government evolve.

• Every organization is different. If you are a smaller organization without too many activities in the future, the strategic planning process may be much simpler than if you plan to utilize multiple strategies.

However small or large your organization, you will be able to adapt the following steps to suit your needs:

Figure 1: **Defining your identity, and how your organization relates to the environment (SWOT) helps in setting your goals and planning for your activities**

Mission and vision

A **mission** is the organization's purpose. **In its basic form, it should say what the organization is, what it does, and for whom it works.** An organizational mission allows your members, volunteers and staff to effectively communicate to others what your organization is about. Keep in mind that all your activities and projects should be aimed at realizing this mission.[3]

You can choose to formulate a vision before you start on your mission. A vision is your image of an ideal world; it describes when the goals of the organization finally have been achieved. For example, you could envision, and work towards "a world without HIV". In your vision you can and should be ambitious; it is meant to be inspirational.

Principles and values

An organization working on SRHR deals with issues that can be sensitive. Issues such as abortion and sexual orientation are hotly debated subjects. It is important that your organization takes the time to define where it stands on the diverse range of SRHR issues, and clearly position yourselves. In doing this, you may want to formulate a list or 'charter' to express your organization's principles, values or beliefs.[4] Creating such a document can help you in defining, understanding, and articulating your principles within the organization and to the outside world. A charter will also prove to be useful in the selection process for new members and staff, as well as in guiding your key activities. The document functions as a set of organizational principles that everyone within your organization has a shared agreement on. While periodic debate on the charter may happen, and perhaps is even necessary, having a charter to fall back on ensures the focus is on outside action, rather than internal debate.

Organizational values speak to the identity and culture of your organization: What kind of behaviors do you agree on within the organization as desirable? For example, as a youth-led organization, you aim for meaningful youth participation. It is therefore important to realize meaningful youth participation within your own organization as well. This includes empowering

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3 The mission of CHOICE for example is "CHOICE is a youth-led organisation that strengthens the voice of young people worldwide on sexuality and having children and that advocates for the rights and the space to make our own decisions around these issues. The mission of the Youth Coalition is "to ensure that the sexual and reproductive rights of all young people are respected, guaranteed and promoted, and strives to secure the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making that affects their lives, by advocating, generating knowledge, sharing information, building partnerships and training young activists with a focus on the regional and international levels."

4 You can find the charters of CHOICE and the YC in the additional resources section.

your members with responsibilities, decision- making capacity, ownership over the organization, equal opportunities, and invest in the knowledge and skills building of members.[5]

It is crucial that all members and staff are included in the process of defining the mission, charter, principles and values and steadfastly believe in them. Not only will they influence your organizational culture, they will also inform the actions that ultimately will be carried out by the members of the organization. In most, if not all organizations, taking time to revisit your mission, principles and values every few years is important. This is particularly necessary for youth-led organizations as ownership is important and we are faced with ageing-out and turnover.

Environment and organization: SWOT

Another key ingredient in strategic planning is looking at what your organization is good at, and in what environment your organization will operate. In other words, look at the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and the potential opportunities and threats that could influence the organization.

The advantage of this exercise is that when time is taken to seriously consider all the potential strengths and weaknesses, a SWOT analysis will provide you with the opportunity to select a strategy which best suits your organization. Also, keep in mind that while brainstorming, you may come to the realization that there is always something more you can add and in this way, it can become a very long process. After an initial brainstorming of ideas, it is helpful to limit the discussion to the most important aspects in order to save time.

For a members-based organization, for example, a strength could be that your members have specific experiences and knowledge that other people do not have; on the other hand, a weakness could be that people have limited time available to devote to the organization's work. One of the opportunities could be that an important campaigning moment is coming up; and one of the threats could be that other organizations do not yet accept your organization as a serious partner. It is also helpful to think of the human and financial resources that you may or may not have as an organization.

Once you have listed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of your organization, you can cross link them. For example, you can choose

5 As a tool for meaningful youth participation, CHOICE developed the 'Flower of Participation' which illustrates the different levels of youth participation and a distinction between meaningful and not meaningful youth participation.

to use your strength of having unique experiences and knowledge to reduce the threat of people not accepting your organization as a serious partner.

Strategic goals and objectives

Following the SWOT analysis comes the time to set one or more strategic goals. A strategic, or "overall goal" is **what** you want to achieve in the coming years by carrying out your activities. This goal should be achievable and should contribute to your mission.

Setting strategic goals is also about deciding **how** you want to achieve your mission. A strategy is a plan of action that will help you achieve your goal. It is helpful to set one goal per strategy. For instance, if your organization decides to focus on national-level campaigns, each of the strategies associated with this, such as supporting national campaigns, carrying out national campaigns and engaging in international advocacy, should have separate and clearly defined goals. Defining clear goals and objectives for your organization's activities before you start will make your work easier in the long run and will also make it possible gauge the kind of results your activities may have.

While it is great to be ambitious, be-

ing mindful of what your organizational capacity will realistically allow you to do will keep motivation and commitment levels of members high. Strategic plans are often set for the long term and range between 3-5 years and despite not being able to predict what will happen in three years time, long-term strategic plans allow for a sense of direction and ensures that activities contribute to your organization achieving its mission. While it is alright to start with a shorter strategic plan in the initial stages of your organization, say 2 or 3 years, it is ideal to be able to develop longer term plans, ranging 5 or 7 years, as the organization progresses.

Once you have set your goals, it is time to get more specific and define objectives. The level at which you define your objectives depends on what your organization looks like and how many different activities you plan to carry out. An important concept in objectives is that they should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound, in other words SMART.[6] For example, if the overall goal of an organization is to 'improve access to sexuality education for high school students', the objective would be that 'within 3 months, 75% of the trained peer educators will be able to conduct sexuality education

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6 For a handout on SMART objectives, see additional resources.

classes at high schools in district X'. Developing an objective in this way, the SMART-rule makes your activities easier to monitor and evaluate).

Activities and budget

The last step in your strategic planning process is a plan of action. What needs to be done? By when? Who will be responsible? An action plan will ensure that you plan for the different aspects of your activities in a realistic way and that individuals, taskforces or working groups will be held accountable for a certain task. A very important aspect of your action plans is the budget. You should be able to forecast the cost of activities so that you can fundraise for it.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Throughout and following the implementation of activities it is important to know whether your activities have achieved what you intended, and lessons learned to make activities more effective in the future. Seeing your efforts result in achieving your goals is helpful in keeping motivation levels high and is of interest to donors as it demonstrates that you have efficiently utilized funds to contribute to a successful activity.

Do not be afraid of recognizing that sometimes things could have been done better, learning from challenges, and building upon those experiences, in other words, your '**lessons learned**'. No matter how hard you are working to ensure that your organization is a success, there are sure to be some bumps along the way. This is particularly true if your work entails something that has not been done before and where you are breaking new ground. The important thing is that you recognize that as an organization you are always learning and applying those lessons. Lessons learned also include your successes and developing best practices, so be sure to also keep track of those and carefully evaluate what made a particular initiative so successful.

The process of recording your results and your lessons learned is called **monitoring and evaluation** (also known as M&E). Through M&E, you can track the impact of your activities, make changes along the way, and ensure that they will achieve the objectives you have identified. Monitoring is what you do while the project is going on. You see whether the activities are on track and whether unexpected things happen. This allows you to adjust your plans while you are carrying out your work. Evaluation is what you do after an activity has ended. You then look at whether you have achieved

your objectives, and the ways in which it can be improved upon next time.

If you have set your goals and objectives in a careful manner, it will be much easier in the end to evaluate whether what has been achieved is what you intended. Thinking about M&E while working through the strategic planning process is helpful because it will allows you to assess the criteria against which you can judge an activity has having been successful or unsuccessful. Ask yourself the question 'at which point would I happy with the result?' and 'how will I know I have achieved it?' To keep with the example of improving sexuality education, you can choose to do a test to see whether the peer educators have received enough information.

Depending on the kind of information you are seeking, the nature of the activity and your own internal capacity, the way you do M&E can vary quite a bit. Some approaches may include developing written evaluation forms after activities, having focus group discussions, conducting one-on-one interviews, keeping track of the number of publications you are distributing, tracking the number of visits to your organization's website and resources downloaded, analyzing the number of young people participating in advocacy since the beginning of a certain initia-

tive, monitoring changes in the SRHR situation of young people, etc. Whichever approach you choose, monitor and evaluate, ensure follow up, and be sure to regularly seek feedback so that you can consistently learn lessons and build on them, significantly increasing your chances of success. Also, do not forget to celebrate your victories together as these are just as important as your challenges. Celebration of your successes will keep up the motivation and commitment of members!

DECISION-MAKING BY CONSENSUS[7]

Crucial to an organization's foundation are clear decision-making mechanisms. In this guide, we will discuss a particular form of decision-making: consensus. Both CHOICE and the Youth Coalition use this form of decision-making. We feel that for an organization consisting of young people, often working on a voluntary basis, consensus is a powerful tool. However, it is for each organization to decide which decision-making mechanism works best for them.

Consensus is a participatory model of group decision-making. In consensus decision-making, making the decision itself is not necessarily the main goal, as a "majority rules" approach is likely the speediest way to make decisions and move the agenda forward. Consensus is based on the principle that every voice is worth hearing, and every concern is justified. If a proposal makes a few people or even one person deeply unhappy - then a consensus approach recognizes that there is a valid reason for that unhappiness, and if the group ignores this, they are likely to make mistakes.

7 This section is based on "Guidelines on consensus decision-making. A handbook of the Youth Coalition" For more information, see additional resources.

Consensus decision-making requires time, as everyone must have an opportunity to share their opinions. In group decision-making, the larger the group, the more time required to make a decision. Consensus also requires trust, to encourage sharing of ideas and opinions in a safe environment. The group must be willing to engage in open discussions and trust that the group has the capacity to make good decisions through consensus. At times, consensus decision-making may require that someone manage the decision-making process without contributing any content to it. Nominating someone to facilitate consensus-based decision making is helpful to guide the group through the process. The facilitator will also be mindful that some people feel more secure than others to raise their points in a larger group and will play a central role in encouraging everyone to speak their mind.

There are many benefits to operating by consensus decision-making:

- ☐ Consensus definitely takes longer than an arbitrary decision, but the decision is usually more meaningful and assures follow-through on implementing decisions. Decisions made by consensus generally stick, which can save a lot of time in the long run.

- When each individual shares in the decision of the group, then all have a greater commitment to implement the group's decisions.

- Consensus increases group strength by decentralizing authority, and allowing more people in the group to take on leadership roles.

- Consensus stresses the cooperative development of a decision and the active search for common ground rather than differences.

- When a decision is not favorable to the whole group, time is often taken to find creative (and often better) solutions.

Consensus decision-making is best used in a group that has a strong willingness to work together. For members to share the mission, values and goals of the organization is important, as members will have the flexibility to sometimes set aside their personal beliefs for the benefit of the organization. It is important to make sure that people can speak freely, and that expressing alternate opinions is not limited by peer pressure or power dynamics.

The Steps

When conducting consensus decision-making, the following steps can be followed:

Step 1 - *The Issue*: The group describes and defines the decision item.

Step 2 - *Brainstorm*: The group brainstorms a list of possible courses of action without judging, discussing, or rejecting any of the ideas presented.

Step 3 - *Discussion*: The group reviews, discusses and synthesizes the options presented in Step 2, developing a draft decision based on the input of all members of the group.

Step 4 - *Decision*: After adequate discussion, the facilitator will ask if there is any opposition to the proposed decision as stated. The facilitator should poll each person in the group, pointedly asking if they agree with and support the decision as stated.

Individuals can register their views on the proposal under discussion in three ways: by expressing support, non-support/reservations, or blocking the proposal.

Support: The person agrees with the proposal, solution or plan of action before the group, and supports the proposal and the group. (*"I agree with and support this proposal." "I agree, this is the best possible solution."*).

Non-support/reservation: The person does not feel that the proposed decision is required for the functioning or that the proposal is best for the group, but agrees to abide by the decision for the well being of the group. (*"I don't see the need for this, but I will go along." "I think this may be a mistake but I can live with it."*)

Blocking: The person disagrees with the proposed course of action and feels they must block consensus. (*"I cannot support this or allow the group to support this."*)

If several members of the group express non-support/reservations on the proposal, there is no real consensus. A proposal that sparks reservations is typically not a very viable or appropriate decision, even if no one directly blocks the proposal. When this situation occurs, the facilitator and the group must make a concerted effort towards consensus building and compromise. If a group member has strong objections to a proposal that affects them, in consensus decision-making, this person can block the proposal. Since it takes only one person to halt the entire process, this is a lot of power. Consensus cannot work unless people are responsible regarding their use of this power. Blocks should be used rarely and carefully.

MEMBERSHIP: THE BASIS OF THE ORGANIZATION

The most prominent feature of youth organizations is their youthful membership. There is no universal definition (or age-limit) of 'youth'. According to the UN, young people are defined as persons between the age of 10-24 years old and youth as being between 15-24 years old. Your organization's age limit is reflective of your organizational values, philosophy and commitment to youth-leadership. As such, you will need to set your own boundaries and adhere to it, even if that means that the founder or a very dedicated member will 'age-out' of the organization.

You should consider what kind of members your organization wants to have with respect to factors such as diversity, age, experience and skills. Important for every youth organization is the need for members to acquire the necessary skills by investing in internal capacity building and training and to be mindful that if you want certain groups of people on your team, you must actively outreach to them!

Recruitment and selection of new members

To remain a truly youth-led organization, the process of seeking out new members, introducing them to the organization, and enabling them to meaningfully contribute to and have ownership over its work is an ongoing task. Youth-led organizations face a huge turnover as members of your organization grow older, they will eventually 'age-out', which means that members and staff transition out of the organization when they reach a certain age. In addition, members may leave the organization for a variety of reasons, both personal and professional. This means that you will need to focus on and invest in recruitment and selection of new members. Having a strategy in place will make it easier to spot opportunities for recruitment and highlight appropriate venues where you can promote your organization. Regardless of the route you choose, it is important that you develop a system and budget for ongoing recruitment of members. You may want to do this by including a section on your website for membership applications or by sharing the news at community meetings and with fellow NGOs. It is important to recognize that while ageing-out can have its challenges, it is also a tremendous opportunity to regularly infuse the organization with new people, ideas and perspectives, which will ultimately enrich your work.

Selection of new members can, for example, be done by conducting intake

interviews. During these interviews, the organization can pose the most relevant questions for the possible membership. The interview also provides the potential new member with space to pose any questions to the organization and what it means to be a member. An intake interview also ensures that expectations of both parties are clear and that the new member is committed, passionate and able to invest time in the organization and its mission. A report of an intake interview can afterwards be used to select a potential new member or not, depending on the needs of the organization and the quality of the potential new member.

Ensuring a sustainable learning organization

Membership turnover can create certain challenges as when people leave they take with them knowledge and experience, but this can be overcome by ensuring that strong institutional history is developed and documented. Take the time to constantly document how your organization has developed, keep reports on activities and write down how you have dealt with challenges in the past. All of this documentation will be a huge help to new members and staff as they join the organization and avoids having to reinvent the wheel or start from scratch constantly.

In addition to documenting institutional history, you have to be prepared to guide and strengthen the skills and knowledge of (new) members and staff. You have to ensure that they are empowered and motivated to take the lead within the organization. This can be done through induction trainings for new members and staff, regular internal trainings, information sharing, and annual members and staff meetings. Coaching or buddy systems, as seen below, can also help share organizational history, knowledge on ways of working, information on activities and facilitate the growing roles of newcomers to the organization. How you facilitate this, depends on your structure and size, as well as on human and financial resources in your organization. For example, you may want to choose to have a task force or working group of members dedicated to outreaching to new members and coaching them; a staff person dedicated to this; or a combination of both. In the end, it is key to create a space for new members to bring in and implement new ideas. As their sense of ownership over the organization and their commitment grows, so will the sustainability of the organization.

Coaching example: take two principle

A coaching system is an ideal way to transfer knowledge and to empower new members. It means activities are carried out in pairs by a newer and older member. This is often called the 'take two principle'. You can apply this rule to all your activities or to those activities that are most difficult and therefore also have a considerable learning effect. The more experienced member has the role of coach towards the less experienced member before, during and after the activity.

To implement this kind of coaching system, you need to decide what makes somebody experienced or less experienced. You can express this in terms of competencies or in terms of experience (somebody has done this kind of activity before). This does not mean less experienced members do not have any knowledge at all! They can provide a new perspective on the existing knowledge of experienced members.

To make sure members have an equal chance to participate in activities and develop themselves, you can introduce a selection procedure for activities. This means members can apply for activities and selection of experienced and less experienced members is based on their application. In order to introduce such a procedure, make sure you have agreed on who is authorized to make the selection. In most youth organizations, everyone but the applicants decide together. This is very motivating for new members, as their vote is as valuable as the votes of an 'older' member. However, who decided also depends on the size of your organization.

Furthermore, clear conditions and criteria are needed to make a fair selection. Conditions can be:

- Members need to be a member for a certain period of time
- Members need to have a certain level of activity
- Members need to continue their membership for a certain time after the activity to make sure their knowledge can be shared within the organization
- The group of selected persons differ each time
- Somebody cannot be selected two times successively

Examples of selection criteria are:

- The knowledge and experience of members
- The learning opportunities for new members
- Their motivation
- Their availability
- The expected impact of an activity on the personal development of a member.

DEFINING THE STRUCTURE

With passion and commitment in hand, and the foundation firmly established, you can begin thinking more about the structure of your organization. Creating a structure which meets your organization's needs and establishes the different mechanisms that will be used to carry out the organization's work is an important part of building a well-functioning and sustainable organization. There are many different ways of structuring your organization and in the early stages, it can be done through trial and error; however choosing or creating a structure that responds to the needs of your organization and clearly lays out decision-making structures, roles and responsibilities and program implementation methods is fundamental and will put you on the road to efficiency and sustainability.

The structure of an organization should be linked to the type of activities, the internal values, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the environment within which the organization works. Organizations will vary in complexity so choosing an organizational structure is a matter of weighing of the pros and cons of a particular approach. Keep in mind, however, that the most important thing is to choose a structure that supports your organization in achieving its goals and that is respectful of your or-

ganizational values.

When considering the structure of your organization, it is important to have solid leadership in place to guide you through the process. As youth organizations, we may not have several years of experience to draw from when establishing a structure, but what we do have is passion, commitment and creativity, and these are powerful factors in creating an organizational structure and culture that suits you. As youth organizations, we are also in a constant state of transition as members, volunteers and staff age out of the organization, so having a strong and resourceful leadership base that can take these challenges and identify a structure that anticipates how knowledge will be managed and how tasks will be distributed is important. Doing this in a way which motivates and empowers people with learning opportunities within your organization is an important building block to creating a truly sustainable youth-led organization. While organizational structures differ and it is up to you to decide how you want your organization to look, there are a few core elements that should be kept in mind.

Clearly defining the roles and responsibilities within your organization is an important step in establishing a strong organizational structure. Working on SRHR, oftentimes there is overlap in

work areas and added to this, technological advancements and budget constraints can necessitate shared work, at times more so than initially envisioned. As such, defining roles and responsibilities allows everyone to clearly understand their role in and contribution to the organization, avoids unnecessary work, thus increasing efficiency, and contributes to a cohesive member, volunteer and staff force. All team members should have their roles and responsibilities clearly communicated to them, on an ongoing basis, particularly as the organization grows and responsibilities evolve. Some current examples of defined and structured roles and responsibilities utilized by youth organizations include a membership base, Board of Directors, taskforces, workgroups and/or committees, staff, and advisory councils.

Membership-based

In this guide we are assuming the organization is built around members. An organizational structure that is members-based is an excellent way to build an organization that is comprised of passionate and inspired young people. Members contribute their knowledge, expertise and diverse perspectives and are absolutely critical to the success of the organization. The scope in which members inform the organiza-

tion's direction is for each organization to decide, but establishing guidelines as to what is expected of members is important in creating a structure that works for your organization and maximizes members' contribution. For example, members may be responsible for following SRHR discussions and sharing this with the membership as a whole, for determining future activities and organizational direction and for participating in financial and legal decision-making. If members contribute their time voluntarily, it is important to respect their autonomy and create a structure that allows for continuous and open dialogue, and engages members to the extent that they feel true ownership over the organization.

Board of Directors

The most common subgroup or body within an organization is a Board of Directors or Steering Committee, which can provide general oversight and hold decision-making authority. The name of this body is dependent on culture and legal requirements. The role of the Board of Directors varies by organization, but it can be as limited as holding monthly meetings to review organizational work, or be involved in the day to day decision-making of the organization. In a members-based organization, a Board of Directors, is elected by

the membership and is empowered to act in the interests of the membership. It ensures that the strategic objectives established by the membership are implemented. It makes sense, and is often legally required, to have a division of responsibility within the Board and have positions such as Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. For example, it can become messy if all Board members are responsible for liaising with staff about the organizational budget. Appointing one member, the Treasurer in this case, to be the point person on this, and subsequently share information with the Board of Directors avoids confusion. The Board of Directors can also be responsible for ensuring that the organization complies with local laws. The level of responsibility and involvement you would like the Board of Directors to take is entirely up to you, but as always, clearly defining these roles are key to a creating a Board of Directors that functions effectively and is accountable to the members of the organization.

Task forces, Working Groups and/or Committees

In addition to forming a Board, it is helpful to create other bodies with specific tasks. They can be called working groups, task forces, committees, or any other name you like. They can be organized in different ways. For example, it can be around themes, such as HIV and AIDS or abortion; or events-based, around a certain conference. They can also be focused internally such as focusing on member management or communication.[8] Some of these bodies can be permanent (for example, a communications subcommittee). Whatever your structure, it is important to define clearly not only what the responsibilities are, but also what the power or authority of the body is in relation to that responsibility. In other words, if people have a task, but do not have the means to carry it out or the mandate to make decisions related to that task, it will be hard for them to work.

If you decide to have taskforces, working groups or committees, it is useful to elect members to chair or co-chair the group to provide leadership, to motivate the members and to ensure tasks are completed in a timely manner. To foster fluid information exchange between

8 One challenge in youth organizations is the balance between the 'primary process', which is the activities you do to achieve your goals, and the 'secondary process' which is everything that is necessary for your primary process to run smoothly. Both primary and secondary processes need enough capacity. For example, fundraising and website maintenance can be time-consuming and challenging, but are crucial for organizational sustainability and visibility. A solution to make sure that the secondary processes are taken care of is to have all members take places in bodies that work on maintaining the organization, in addition to their membership in bodies concerned with primary processes. Creating bodies with specific tasks does not mean that members cannot do things outside of the ambit of their taskforce or working groups.

different bodies it could be beneficial to have a staff and/or Board member be part of each taskforce.

Staff

Growing slowly and appropriately budgeting for the costs associated with organizational growth is a great way to ensure sustainable growth. As your organizational and financial resources grow, you may consider hiring staff members to manage and support your organization's activities and projects. You will need to have staff on board to facilitate the growth and support the daily administration, as well as the independence process, should your organization choose this route. Staff are a valuable resource, particularly within a voluntary organization, as they will continually be connected with the organization's work. Prior to hiring any staff members, is it important that you carefully budget for this and only take on as many staff members as is financially feasible for your organization. While this is an important part of building an organization, for most youth organizations staffing an office will be financially risky. Your overhead costs will increase and your Board of Directors will have added responsibilities, as they will be the official employers and will need to develop an understanding on issues like salary and employment

taxes. This is a complicated process and if you have limited knowledge or experience in this, it is a good idea to consult a lawyer to make sure it is done in accordance with local laws.

Job descriptions which clearly outline a list of tasks and responsibilities are important. Fundraising will very likely be one of the tasks for your paid staff. As you do not want your coordinator to spend most of her/his time on raising funds for their own salary, it is wise not to start hiring until you have secured enough funds to employ a staff member for at least 12 months.

In the early years of your organization, and particularly as you develop your funding base, you may want to consider hiring part time staff or recruiting an intern or volunteer to keep costs to a minimum. If possible, and especially during the initial years of building an organization, it may be possible to make your host organization the official employer of your staff. It is also worth noting that hiring young people to staff your organization is an important component of creating an organization that is genuinely youth-led and reflective of its principles and values.

Hiring staff can bring quite a change within the organization. One of the changes is that there are people that are being paid and people that do not

get paid in the organization, and it is important to decide how to approach this. In a membership based organization, the organization exists because of its members, however it is important to strike a balance between this while also valuing the important contribution of staff, who are also individuals committed to young people's SRHR and in a truly youth-led organization, will be young people themselves. The Board of Directors has an important role to play in making sure that the diverse role of members and staff are respected and valued, as well as in ensuring that staff are enabled to support members in their tasks and vice versa. It is also important to make clear to everyone, staff and members, that staff can never be expected to also invest their free time voluntarily for the organization. Such an expectation, spoken or outspoken, will most likely end with unhappy and burnt out staff.

As young people, the Board of Directors might not have a lot of experience in managing staff. For many youth organizations, this creates problems from time to time, as conflicts arise or the workload becomes too heavy. It is therefore important to have an ongoing and open dialogue regarding management and problems that the Board of Directors need to attend to, as representatives of the employer. If an organization has more than one staff per-

son, it is advisable to hire one person, such as an executive coordinator or manager, and empower that person manage the rest of the staff.

Advisory Council

Advisory councils are typically composed of individuals with experience in the different facets of your organization and can include members who have aged-out. They may not necessarily be young people but do have specialized knowledge and can provide your Board of Directors and membership with guidance relating to the legal, financial, programmatic and administrative elements of your organization. The role of the advisory council is limited to guidance, as well as support if necessary and appropriate; they are not decision makers. It is a good resource to consider, especially in the early stages of building your organization.

As for mission, values and goals, continuously redefining your organizational structure is very important, particularly for youth-led organizations. The structure should at all times be positioned in such a way that it will help in achieving your goals and objectives. To redefine your organizational structure and look at how internal processes are function-

ing, you may want to consider conducting a SWOT analysis every few years. Whichever structure you choose, it is important that the members are aware of it. This will add to transparency in decision-making processes, which is essential for trust among members of the organization. The structure of your organization should make clear to everyone who is responsible for what, who can be held accountable and who takes on what role. Even though members may voluntarily be investing their time and energy, it is important to be held accountable for your work.

Be mindful that youth-led organizations can become successful in very short periods of time and as such it is extremely important to keep your focus, prioritize and learn to say no. This counts for your activities but also for organizational growth. In building a sustainable organization, it is beneficial to start with a core group of 10 people and expand gradually, rather than having 400 people carrying out projects under your organizational banner but not actually sharing your values!

ACTIVITIES:
MAKING AN IMPACT

Advocacy and lobby organizations try to influence policy development and advance the implementation of existing policies. There is a wide scope of activities through which you can try and achieve your strategic plans. Advocating, networking and conducting trainings and workshops are some examples of activities that are applied by numerous advocacy organizations. As you will find out, it is relatively easy to join any of the ongoing campaigns started by other organizations. However, it is hard to see through the political agendas of the various stakeholders and it can be quite overwhelming. To realize your own organizational goals, you should therefore try to set your own agenda and be pro-active! The process of agenda-setting will also help you in prioritizing your activities.

Your organizational activities need to be aimed at particular policy changes. However, be aware that it is just as important to ensure that your organization has the internal capacity to support these activities. Most of the activities of 'adult-led' organizations will be output activities, aimed directly at reaching their objectives. In contrast, the balance between output activities and condition-shaping activities (such as internal capacity building, communica-

tions and fundraising) in youth-led organizations might lean more towards the latter.

Advocacy

Advocacy is crucial in realizing the development and adoption of more youth-friendly policies. There are a variety of definitions of advocacy, however, the central and primary purpose of advocacy is ultimately to influence policy, laws, regulations, programs, or funding priorities. Advocacy activities and initiatives may be conducted at the international, national, regional, or local level. In this way, advocacy is different from Information, Education and Communication (IEC) which aims to raise awareness among a certain target group. Effective advocacy requires solid knowledge of existing policies and the politics in the 'field'. It also requires strong negotiation and communication skills. Successful advocates are able to communicate in a way that inspires others and motivates them to take action. Moreover, advocates are successful because the campaigns or causes that they are advocating on behalf of are methodical and well planned. An advocacy campaign is most effective when it is planned systematically. As an organization, you should identify your issue, set advocacy goal(s) and objectives, identify sources of support

and opposition, research the policy audience, develop messages, mobilize necessary funds, collect data and monitor your plan of action.[9]

As advocacy often plays out at meetings and conferences, participation in conferences can provide an excellent opportunity to reach policymakers and network with allies and funders, particularly at regional and international levels. Participating in conferences will also enable you to establish your organization at the national, regional or international levels. In becoming recognizable, opportunities to work with diverse constituencies, such as governments and other NGOs will grow, as will your ability to influence politics, policy and practice. Furthermore, it also offers opportunities to extend your network and increase and improve collaboration with like-minded organizations. Participation in meetings and conferences does require extensive preparation beforehand, so be sure to have a strategy in place which will allow you to identify persons of interest and key messages that you would like to bring across.

Training and workshops

Skills and knowledge are key to mean-

ingful youth participation. One of the barriers for policymakers not to include youth in the policymaking process is the assumption that young people lack the knowledge and experience to make informed and worthwhile contributions. To prove they are wrong, building awareness, knowledge and skills through training and workshops is essential. It means helping people to build knowledge and experience in the issues they want to advocate for. These can be your own members or people outside your organization, for example members of a partner organization. There are different ways of building knowledge and skills: training, (access to) information and knowledge, practicing, exploring and discussion. Skill building programs are most effective if they answer the needs of participants. Also keep in mind that the most effective way for people to learn is to actually practice things! So pay attention to the follow up of a training or workshop.

Networking

To actually reach and influence policymakers, you need allies! Networking and establishing partnerships with other organizations (which can be youth organizations, institutions, donors, networks or any other relevant entity) are essential to increasing your chances

9 For more information about advocacy and how to set up advocacy campaigns, refer to the advocacy training manual of the Policy Project in the additional resources.

to receive more funding, broaden your contact base, and help you reach areas or people you otherwise may not have been able to. Start with the people and organizations you know, and broaden your network by exploring their networks. You can, for example, start with exchanging information with relevant stakeholders in the field of SRHR in your country and/or take part in regional or global (youth) networks. Networking can also help you to make a link between the local and global policy level. Networking is all about giving and taking. Think about what your organization can provide other organizations, for example knowledge and experience or access to information or to a network (of young people). Dare to ask other people for their knowledge, funding or access to their networks. When you establish partnerships, it is advisable to establish clear terms of references (TORs) that clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of each organization and ensures that expectations are clear on both sides. Ultimately, working in partnership has tremendous potential to enrich your work and though it can be time consuming, it is certainly worth the extra effort.

COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING

In addition to developing a sound structure and ensuring lasting impact of your activities, an organization's success is just as dependent on effective communication. Communication will raise the visibility of your issues, activities and organisation. Communication however needs to be organized, for example by creating a communications strategy. Having a strategy in place will allow you to better plan and understand the situation, identify your goals and carry out your work. While developing a strategy, keep in mind the following questions:

- What information do you want to convey and why? What are your objectives?
- What are your target groups (policy makers, young people, NGO's, donors, general public etc.) and what do you think they will find most interesting?
- What are the most effective tools to reach your target audience?
- How much time and resources (financial/human) do you have available to developing an strong communications strategy?

It is very possible that your organization will consider branding when creating a communications strategy, and in particular, selecting a name for your organization. This name should be something that you feel comfortable with and ideally, it should personify your mission and be indicative of your organizational focus. Everyone affiliated with your organization should feel proud to say the name. There is always the possibility that over time, the organization's name is no longer reflective of its focus or misrepresents that focus. In that case, it may be necessary to change the name to something more accurate. This is not something that you should be afraid to consider, especially in the early stages of building your organization, however, keep in mind that changing your organization's name more than once can be detrimental as fewer and fewer people follow you through the organizational name changes.

Internal communication largely depends on where your members live. Are you able to meet face-to-face or only through chat, Skype or phone? How often do you want to meet and with whom? Is it necessary to meet with the whole group or just with the people carrying out projects? These are all important questions and despite what works best for you, it is highly advisable to have everyone together at least once or twice a year (if not more often). In-person meetings are important opportunities for members to get

motivated and energized as well as provides an excellent environment to share knowledge, learn, create new plans, and get inspired! An online tool, such as an e-mail group, can be helpful for effective internal communication as it makes information available for a large group of people and facilitates appropriate documentation.

External communication is a way to make your organization visible to the outside world and is necessary for advocacy and fundraising. There are many different ways of communicating with the outside world and can include business cards, a website, newsletters, brochures, banners, articles, t-shirts, etc. When you are in the early stages of establishing your organization, you may not have the financial resources to produce some or any of these materials. While helpful, it is not necessary. Resourcefulness and creativity go a long way; you can use the internet, different online social networking websites, advertise your organization on other organizations' websites, or use word of mouth! When reaching out to other people and organizations in your advocacy efforts, you should be aware of the language you use and the image you are creating of your organization. The same language often does not apply, for example, in rural areas and within the United Nations. As a youth organization, you are in the unique

position of being able to communicate with many different worlds. It is therefore important to find your 'unique selling point', your added value in the field of SRHR and communicate this to the outside world.

You also should decide on the language that will be used for communication within your organization. Will you use a local, national or international language? This also depends on the capacity within your membership as well as on the scope in which you work as an organization. While this may exclude some or many great potential members and partners, it is essential for the effective and efficient working of your organization. Feel free to revisit this as and when required and be flexible regarding the use of different languages in different contexts as the need arises and as is strategic.

ENSURING SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Fundraising is one of the most important parts of ensuring long term organizational success. Youth-led organizations face unique challenges in guaranteeing continuous funding sources, and as such, should strive to develop a fundraising strategy which takes these challenges into account and is sustainable. Sustainable funding is a big picture approach to funding that consists of 'core' and 'project-based' funding. Core support is used to fund administrative and overhead costs, such as rent and salaries, as well as project-related costs and generally is longer term, ranging from 3 to 5 years, and allows for a great deal of flexibility. Project-based funding, on the other hand, only supports project related activities, but may also partially cover administrative costs, though there typically are stringent limitations to this. Often, organizations which are still trying to establish themselves are supported by project-based funding that covers all overhead and activity costs. While project-based funding is important, relying only on one or two funders or failing to secure core funding will potentially put your organization at risk if the funding is not renewed and you are unable to come up with alternate funding streams. As such, developing a funding portfolio that is varied, both in terms of income types and duration is critical as most donors are reluctant to fund an organization indefinitely and will encourage you to seek other funding sources as well. A diverse funding stream is more sustainable and will enable you to stay true to organizational goals and not compromise your vision in order to meet a funder's objectives.

Building a sustainable funding base takes a lot of time and hard work. When starting to think about your funding needs, it is a good idea to think critically about your organization's mission and potential areas for growth, and to seek out funders that support these areas. A well thought through Strategic Plan, previously discussed, will make it easier for you to compile a list of funders that support work in your field and whom you can begin outreaching to. However, before doing this, it is worthwhile to utilize the resources you have close at hand. If your organization is being hosted by another or is in the early stages of gaining independence, look to your host organization to provide guidance and potential networks through which you can begin building the initial steps of a sustainable funding base. Through sharing their experiences and networks, your host and other partners can play a valuable role in steering you towards funding opportunities.

The first step to building a sustainable funding base is to develop strong working relationships with your funders, both current and future. Funders are rooting for your success, and expect as much, so it is important to keep them updated on your organizational activities, achievements and project successes as well as any problems that may arise. Depending on the funding body, reports will have to be submitted, either following specific activities or when the grant term concludes. These reports may only have to be submitted once or twice per year, so it is important to maintain strong communication and relationships with current funders throughout and build the same with new funders, whether it be by sharing new resources that you have created, such as factsheets or shadow reports or even meeting with them when both parties are at the same function, so that your relationship with the funder is not limited to contact once or twice yearly through formal reports, but is ongoing. This will ensure that they are continuously engaging with your organization, are fully apprised of the latest developments and understand that your success is also their success.

Alongside working to maintain your current funders, researching new funding sources is an essential part of growing a sustainable funding base. In your research, it will not be uncommon to come across multiple dead ends and closed doors before securing a new source of funding. All potential funding opportunities, whether monetarily large or small should be taken into consideration. Smaller grants can evolve into larger grants, particularly if you build a strong relationship with the funder. Nothing is too small! It is also worth considering partnering with a like-minded organization to submit a joint funding application. Partnerships are a valuable and cost-effective resource, operationally, to gather support for a project, and for exchanging information and ideas. They are integral to the success of an organization. A unified approach to fundraising, which is based on shared objectives of all parties involved, allows different organizations to draw on their competencies and demonstrates a cohesive approach to addressing an SRHR issue that has greater impact and wider reach.

A serious approach to fundraising also takes into consideration the manner in which you approach potential funders. A coherent and persuasive concept note or brief that details the unique value or approach of your work is hard to turn down. Of course, funders may be in support of your activity but have their hands tied due to budgetary constraints or if the project or activity goals are outside their realm of work, howev-

er they may be able to send your concept note to a colleague or department that is better positioned to support your organization. Regularly monitoring list serves for proposal calls, as well as networking at various forums and relying on your members or supporters are also helpful in learning about new funding opportunities.

Once you have access to new potential funders, it is important to develop a funding proposal that is well-conceived and that clearly demonstrates a well thought-out strategy, the added-value of your project or organization, monitoring and evaluation systems, and tangible outcomes. Proposal writing is a time consuming process and if you have limited experience in proposal writing or are facing a complicated application process, you may want to consider hiring a consultant to support your efforts. Consultants can be expensive but when levied against what you may gain, it can be worthwhile. However, it is worth noting that even if your organization does not have the funds to hire a consultant, there are many other resources available to you. Online fundraising and proposal writing courses and factsheets with proposal writing tips are good to refer to[10].

What differentiates strictly project-based funding from sustainable funding is a diverse approach to generating funds that utilizes all of your organizational resources to ensure a steady and sustained source of income. In addition to short and long term funding, organizations can generate additional income through membership fees, individual or corporate giving, lottery or government funding and through trusts, to name a few. If your organization focuses on resource development, such as training kits or online courses, these can be sold. Some organizations whose niche is in providing SRHR training can charge consultancy fees for these services to larger or for-profit organizations, or nominal fees or honorariums for non-profit organizations. However this may be dependent on your organization's legal status, so it is important to verify this before proceeding.

Developing a funding portfolio that is varied and recognizes the value of strong funder relations and building alliances with other organizations are critical pieces of the puzzle to ensure sustainable funding and thus the sustainability of your organization. An awareness of the challenges and risks to sustainable funding is equally important in ensuring the success of your organization. Failure to develop your organization's internal capacity to carry out projects, not knowing when to turn down a funding opportunity or venturing into unfamiliar territory too quickly are major threats to sustainability and

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10 http://www.youthaidscoalition.org/page/ecourses and http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/financial.pdf

should be avoided. Successful organizations strike a funding balance between different income streams that are in line with their needs and capitalize on their strengths. Remember, above all, diversify and stick to what you do best!

ESTABLISHING AN OFFICE

Office space

Another big decision to make is choosing an office space. As these decisions often depend on an organization's financial resources, it is important to define your needs, such as whether you need working spaces for fulltime staff or a meeting venue for 40 people, and try to match these with your financial situation. 'Professional' or established organizations may have an office space that is not used during the evenings and weekends – the times that most young volunteers need desks. On the other hand, if you have internet connection at home and are only looking for a meeting space, you might find it in a university or student organization, or at commercial meeting venues (which are usually more costly). If you do have full-time staff, but of only one to a few people, you may not need a full office just for yourselves, and it actually may be a lot more cost efficient to share office space with another organization.

Being hosted

If you are not able to have your own office, a good option to consider is being 'hosted' by an existing organization, as this may lead to financial benefits, such as more funding opportunities while you develop your own funding base as well as a structural partnership for both parties. In the early days of your organization, the structural support provided by another organization may be the perfect point of entry to information and networks, access to venues to hold activities or conferences, and funding. This situation will lead to advantages for both organizations, because while you have an organizational 'home', your host will benefit from your knowledge on youth and ability to reach young people. It is great when you can work together with your host organization, but you should be cautious not to get 'used' for realizing their goals. To prevent that from happening, a Terms of Reference (TOR) must be formulated. This document, that usually gets updated every year, is a legal-binding contract that states the rules of your partnership. In the drafting of the TOR, make sure that you retain ownership over your projects, and make clear agreements on the use of office supplies, responsibilities of insurance and financial administration. If you are working towards independence, it is important to enter into a TOR that gives you the flexibility to pursue this!

MOVING TOWARDS LEGAL INDEPENDENCE

As has been seen in the preceding chapters, creating a sustainable youth-led organization is not a quick task, and as such, being hosted within another organization at the early stages can be helpful. If this is the route you choose, it is important to identify a host organization that understands the value of youth leadership and respects your youth organization's autonomy to determine priorities, activities and other key issues.

With the passing of time, you may reach a point where becoming legally independent, that is, registering as an official nongovernmental or other form of legal organization, may become appealing. Lack of legal independence does have certain drawbacks, such as that another organization is legally responsible and not the youth organization or 'project' itself; that you cannot apply or receive funding independently, but this must go through the host organization, which may mean giving them a percentage of the grant; and that you cannot apply for additional opportunities, such as ECOSOC status with the United Nations.[11]

By becoming legally independent, these drawbacks can be surpassed. However, as seen in the section on establishing an office, being hosted by an organization does also have some benefits, so becoming legally independent is not a decision to be taken lightly. Consider your internal capacity, funding, and sustainability before making this decision. If after considering the factors noted below, you decide that your organization is ready for legal independence, go for it! Registering as a legal organization as a youth-led organization is an excellent way of demonstrating that young people are fully able to successfully create, maintain and run an independent organization.

Before making the decision to become legally independent, though, it is important to carefully consider a number of aspects. The following sections provide a brief overview of issues that you should consider.

Human resources

The first point that you should think about prior to beginning the process of registering as an independent organization, is whether you have the human resources to manage and sustain the process. In other words, are there people within your organization that are available to oversee the pro-

11 The ECOSOC status allows non-governmental organizations to participate in United Nations meetings and to issue policy recommendations to the UN system and to Member States.

cess? Registering as an independent organization takes time and work, and you need to make sure that there is the capacity to oversee the process. In addition, beyond the process of registration itself, ask yourself whether there are people available to continue running the organization after registration, managing additional responsibilities such as financial audits, grants, board responsibilities, legal liability, etc.

For staff, you may want to revise their job descriptions, as the responsibilities of their positions may increase or change. You may even need to hire consultants (such as legal and audit firms) as well as more full time or part time staff as fundraising, reporting and financial management responsibilities of the organization will increase. This is important when considering costs and budgeting for a legal independence process.

Legal aspects and the development of bylaws

The legal requirements to register as an independent organization vary per country, so the first thing you will need to do is find out what the specific requirements are in your country. In some places, you can ask about this at your local municipality, search the information online, or you can even ask a partner organization that has already undergone the process.

While requirements vary, in many places it is necessary to work with a lawyer on this, which will have financial implications. A lawyer can help you prepare any necessary paper work and guide you through the registration process. Steps that you may need to take include applying for incorporation (signed by a number of applicants), present a declaration of an applicant stating the intent of the request, send a copy of the organizations by-laws, and pay a fee.

In preparation for this, you will need to develop by-laws or regulations which are similar to the basic norms of the organization and include things such as the purpose of the organization, general issues that you work on, membership, location, board of directors, etc. Typically these must be drafted in legal jargon and comply with legal formalities, so the support of a lawyer in doing this is helpful. However, be sure to remain involved in the drafting process and make sure that you understand what the by-laws will say, as this will constitute the main legal document of the organization. Preparing by-laws or regulations can be a time consuming process and you may need to go through several drafts, but it is a process well worth the time as through it

you will be legally establishing the basis of how the organization will work. Since by-laws and regulations use legal language and are not really youth-friendly, but they will be an important legal document for your organization, you may want to consider developing a youth friendly version of them, for use internally within your organization. This will enable all members and staff to fully understand them.

Once the official by-laws or regulations are finalized, they can be submitted as part of the registration application. Then you just need to wait for the response to your application, in a time frame that can vary anywhere from a few weeks to months, depending on where you register and whether your application was complete.

Financial aspects

Before deciding to register as an independent organization, there are a number of financial aspects to consider. First, there are the costs of registration itself, as in some countries it is necessary to pay a fee to the government entity. At the same time, you may need to hire a lawyer to oversee the registration process, which will also have financial implications. If you are planning to begin the registration process, be sure to budget for these costs in advance.

In addition to the costs of registration itself, it is also important to consider financial implications post-registration. For example, as the staff responsibilities are likely to increase, considering salary increases and budgeting accordingly would be appropriate.

Another relevant aspect to consider is how registering as an independent organization may affect funding. If your youth organization has existed for some time, you may already have some relationships with donors. To see whether becoming independent would affect your funding, it is advisable to let them know in advance that you are planning to initiate the registration process and gauge their responses. It is worth noting that during the first year or two of becoming independent, some funders may be hesitant to provide grants to an organization that lacks their own financial history. In order to overcome this, you can ask other organizations to receive the grants and re-grant them to your organization, providing them with a small percentage of the grant for this service. Be sure though that the fee that they charge you is reasonable – 5% is usually standard.

Lastly, once you are registered as an independent organization, your organization will need to undergo financial

audits, for which keeping clear, transparent, and up to date accounting of all expenditures, supported by the corresponding receipts and invoices, is extremely important. Hiring an auditor also implies funds, so remember to include this in your budget.

Administrative aspects

There are also some administrative issues to keep in mind. For example, you may need to establish a pay roll system for staff salaries, as well as determine a system for staff benefits. You will also need to have systems in place to administer funds and keep a proper accounting. Also, you may need to get your own telephone and/or fax line installed. If you were sharing an office with another organization before and plan to move to a separate office, you will also need to think about the equipment needed for the office, such as computers, desks, phones, photocopier, and even little things such as pens and papers. Be sure to budget for this in advance.

Due to high turnover of staff and members, it is also important to have a good documentation system for legal matters, finances, insurances, visa, bank accounts etc. These documentation systems are also crucial to keep knowledge accessible within the organization and prevent you from reinventing the wheel.

IN CLOSING

As you will have seen, creating a sustainable and youth-led organization working on SRHR is not a quick and easy task. It requires a continuous redefinition of what we know, requires us to broaden our horizons and be receptive to the type of learning environment conducive to successfully reaching our goals, whether it be promoting the sexual and reproductive rights of young people, creating and pushing for meaningful youth participation or creating a youth-led organization. The principles, concepts and strategies we have discussed throughout this guide are informed by our own experiences of what has worked and what has not, and as has been mentioned, is meant to serve as a flexible blueprint for other young people interested in creating such organizations.

Broadly, this guide has covered:

1. Setting the foundation for success: Strategic Planning. We discussed the importance of carefully crafting a strategic plan that is underpinned by the principles and values your organization holds and is guided by an organizational mission. This chapter also addressed necessary technicalities, such as the importance of developing coherent monitoring and evaluation strategies and conducting SWOT analyses which ultimately contributes to developing a strategic plan that is relevant, flexible and meets your organizational needs.

2. Consensus decision-making model: The importance of consensus based decision-making for youth-led organizations, particularly if the organization's membership contributes voluntarily, was outlined, as was the value of this decision-making model in inspiring confidence by members over the organization, and empowering all those involved to feel ownership over decisions made.

3. Membership: Based on our experiences as membership based youth-led organizations, this chapter elaborated on the various aspects of recruiting suitable members and creating an environment which values learning and information exchange as a way to develop the internal capacity of an organization.

4. Defining a structure that works for you: Integral to the successful functioning of an organization is the development of a set of clearly articulated guidelines on the roles and responsibilities within an organization. We discussed leadership for decision-making, organizational direction and the implementation of activities. Examples of structures, such as a Board of Directors, task forces or working groups, staff and advisory councils were elaborated on.

5. Making an impact with organizational activities: Different methods to effectively advocate for young people's SRHR were outlined in this chapter, including the different ways to leave a lasting impression and hopefully produce change, whether it be organizationally, or in the recognition of youth issues within policies and programs. We discussed making an impact through capacity-building, networking and effective advocacy.

6. Communication and branding: Tips on the different ways to communicate internally and externally, depending on membership composition and geography, was offered, as well as points to consider when branding an organization.

7. Ensuring sustainable fundraising: The difference between core funding and project-based funding and the importance of developing a diverse funding portfolio was discussed, in addition to fundraising strategies which contribute to organizational sustainability. We also provided tips to approaching funders which have proved to be successful in our fundraising endeavours.

8. Becoming a legally independent youth-led organization: The benefits of gaining legal independence, as well as the credibility gained by moving away from host organizations and establishing your organization as an independent entity was discussed. The added responsibilities ensuing such a process, such as financial implications, human resources necessary to carry out the process, and administrative details, were also described.

We hope that you have found this resource to be useful regardless of what stage you are in developing your organization. As we said earlier, this is not a quick and easy task and it has taken CHOICE and the Youth Coalition, 12 and 10 years, respectively, to develop a solid understanding of the complexities involved in creating an independent youth-led organization, and our learning continues to this day! However, at the end of the day, meaningful youth participation in SRHR, which we believe includes sharing key lessons learned and espousing the benefits of developing youth-led organizations, is a worthwhile endeavour.

Have fun in developing your organization and we look forward to working with you in the future!

GLOSSARY

Advocacy	Advocacy has been defined in different ways by a range of organizations that work in the sexual and reproductive rights field. CEDPA defines it as "speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision-makers towards a solution. Advocacy is working with other organizations and people to make a difference."
Charter	A Charter is a document that outlines an organization's principles and values.
Constitution	A Constitution describes the structure and overall functioning of an organization.
Core Funding	Core funding support is used to fund administrative and overhead costs, such as rent and salaries, as well as project-related costs and generally is longer term and allows for a great deal of flexibility than project based funding.
Host Organization	A Host is an organization which provides the financial, legal and administrative support for an organization to carry out its activities and support. A host can also administer funding and provide access to international meetings.
Mission	A Mission describes an organization's purpose and, broadly, what it strives to accomplish.
Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	Monitoring and Evaluation consists of ongoing collection of information throughout a project cycle and the evaluation of project activities against the intended goals. It is a way to gauge the effectiveness of activities.

Principles and Values	An organization's Principles and Values outline the basic and most fundamental agreements on SRHR issues that an organization holds. This agreement is shared by all of the organization's members and staff.
Project-based Funding	Project-based funding primarily supports project related activities but may also partially cover administrative and overhead costs. It is more restrictive than core funding.
Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)	SRHR are human rights and as such apply equally to young people. The ICPD Programme of Action defines reproductive health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes" and rights as "the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.
Terms of Reference (TOR)	Terms of Reference are prepared at the beginning of a project done in collaboration with another organization. The TOR will outline the scope of the project and clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each organization.
Youth	Internationally, youth are defined as people between the ages of 15 and 24.
Youth-led organization	An organization formed and led by young people.
Young people	Internationally, young people are defined as people between the ages of 10 and 24.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

On building an organization

In depth overview of strategic planning for non-profit organisations
http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/str_plan.htm

Networking for Policy Change: an Advocacy Training Manual
http://www.policyproject.com/pubs/AdvocacyManual.cfm

Building Leadership for an Effective Organization: Selected Annotated Bibliography
http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/leadership.pdf

10 years on! A story of successful youth leadership: the case of the Youth Coalition
http://www.youthcoalition.org/site08/attachs/YC@10_publication_web.pdf

Youth Coalition: history of a youth-led organization
http://www.youthcoalition.org/site08/html/index.php?id_art=43&id_cat=2

GYCA e-courses
http://www.youthaidscoalition.org/page/ecourses#4

Charter CHOICE
http://www.choiceforyouth.org/

YC principles and values
http://www.youthcoalition.org/site08/html/index.php?id_art=22&id_cat=2

Guidelines on consensus decision making: a Youth Coalition handbook
www.youthcoalition.org

On meaningful youth participation

The flower of participation
http://www.choiceforyouth.org

Youth leadership: recommendations for sustainability
http://www.worldaidscampaign.org/en/Constituencies/Youth/Resources/Youth-Sustainability

On fundraising

Approaching Foundations (From Research to Practice)
http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/foundations.pdf

Cultivating Individual Donors (From Research to Practice)
http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/indivdonors.pdf

Ensuring Financial Sustainability: Selected Annotated Bibliography (From Research to Practice)
http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/financial.pdf

Fund-Raising Tips for Local Organizations (From Research to Practice)
http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/frtp/fundraisingtips.pdf