Youth leadership for universal access to HIV prevention and the promotion of reproductive health

Burkina Faso
Bagnomboé BAKIONO

Organization type:
nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

Budget:
$1 million - $5 million

Website:
http://www.rajs-bf.org

- Citizen participation
- Gender equity
- HIV/AIDS
- Reproductive health
- Population
- Youth development
- Youth leadership

Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

RAJS/BF through advocacy and communication campaigns has created a political and social environment conducive to the health of young people. This led to the creation of a youth ministry and a department of youth and adolescent health. A national strategy for youth health and a national youth policy were adopted. RAJS/BF’s programs and projects have led communities and decision makers to no longer treat sexuality as such a taboo subject, creating an environment for making information, prevention services, and quality care more accessible, including for HIV and reproductive health. It should be noted that there has been a continued decline in the prevalence of HIV and increasing use of contraceptives among young people.

About Project
Until 2001, when RAJS/BF was created, Burkina Faso had no umbrella organizations that could present the problems as understood by the young people themselves. Before then, the government of Burkina Faso considered youth as a problem to solve, not a solution to the problems of Burkina Faso. The RAJS/BF, by working to develop youth leadership through advocacy activity, gave young people the chance to speak for themselves and act for themselves. Genuine youth awareness in Burkina Faso was created through the networking of youth organizations initiated by RAJS/BF. This strategy gave youth a setting for training and the consideration of their concerns. It also provided a credible interlocutor to deal with the problems of resource mismanagement. Now young people have their destiny in hand; several international conferences are to be dedicated to the awakening of youth. More and more, responsibilities are being entrusted to them. Before 2001, the United Nations system had tried all kinds of solutions to address the lack of concern for youth and the need to help solve their problems. Most of the efforts ended in failure, particularly at the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) in Cairo. Our project to strengthen youth leadership demonstrates that when young people are involved and given responsibilities, that genuinely addresses the results of the 1994 ICPD.

**Impact: How does it work?**

**Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.**

RAJS/BF carries out communication campaigns to mobilize the highest authorities in the state to achieve the goal of youth leadership development. Youth talent events and anti-AIDS youth days let young people bring their messages and their needs to authorities for effective consideration. Sub-regional networks of youth were also set-up to join the fight against HIV and promote the reproductive health of adolescents and young people. These networks include local affiliates of AfriYAN (African Youth and Adolescent Network on Population and Development) and CRJ/ACO (Regional Committee for Youth Networks against HIV and AIDS in Central and West Africa), youth organizations that work to mobilize resources and advocate for the National Council of Youth of Burkina Faso. After having created a favorable environment and resource availability, RAJS/BF will be working to develop communication activities by young people for young people. For this purpose, a network of more than 325 youth associations was put together; more than 2750 young peer educators in IEC/CCC/HIV/SRAJ life skills and community support of PLHIV (People Living with HIV) were trained; more than 325 teachers about HIV and gender equality were trained, more than 750 parents were trained in parent-child communication; more than 150 health workers were trained in youth outreach strategy; Community radio with youth listening centers were built in Bogandé (Eastern Burkina), 10 counseling centers for youth services with integrated health care were created, local activities for more than 500,000 were implemented including educational talks, video screenings followed by discussions, and forum theater. More than 15 health surveys and studies youth health and requirements were conducted. All these activities have been dedicated to increasing youth responsibility and the mobilization of the state and other partners on their side.
What stage is your project in?

Operating for more than 5 years

Tell us about the community that you engage? eg. economic conditions, political structures, norms and values, demographic trends, history, and experience with engagement efforts.

Burkina Faso's population is predominantly young. According to the 2006 RGPH (General Census of Population and Housing), those less than 20 years old make up 57% of the total population. Adolescents and young women aged 10-24 constitute 31% of the total population and are its poorest segment.

Young people generally face the same health problems as adults but with more acuity because of social, biological, psychological, environmental, and economic factors. Thus, the main health problems of youth are the following:

- STI/HIV/AIDS;
- Early and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions;
- Alcoholism, smoking and drug abuse;
- Harmful traditional practices like female circumcision that continue despite the many-sided efforts undertaken. According to the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2003, in the age bracket 15-49, almost three-fourths (75%) of the female population have been circumcised;
- Food and nutritional deficiencies affect children aged 2-10 as well as high school students;
- Endemic and epidemic diseases such as dracunculiasis, onchocerciasis, the resurgence of tuberculosis due to AIDS;
- Forced and early marriages.

The SRH (sexual and reproductive health) of young people remains a concern. According to DHS-II, one quarter of adolescents aged 15-19 had a child or were having their first pregnancy at the time of the survey.

Early sexual activity and insufficient access to appropriate services, stemming from ignorance, lack of resources, and social inhibitions (fear, embarrassment, the absence of communication with parents, and even among young people), lead not only to the risks of STIs and AIDS already mentioned but also to increasingly more cases of early pregnancy and/or unwanted abortions. Still according to DHS III:

- 52.4% in the survey have already had at least one sexual encounter;
- 56.5% of sexually active young people have never used a contraceptive method;
- 41.6% of girls in the sample and 24% of those who go to youth centers have had at least one abortion.

A 1998 CRESAR study found that 31% of aborted births were induced, of which 50% were by adolescents. At the Yalgado National Hospital Center 15.6% of the maternal deaths are results of abortion. Those who have abortions are for the most part adolescents or young women ranging in age from 16-24 years old.

At the Sanou Sourou Regional Hospital Center, 37% of maternal deaths are due to illegal abortions and more than half are adolescents. In 2009, at the CHUYO teaching hospital in the capital city Ouagadougou, 284 adolescents and youth aged 15-24 were treated for abortion complications, 150 said they had induced their abortions.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. The average age of first use of alcohol is 14 and urban youth are most affected.

Suicides, usually due to unwanted pregnancies and unhappy love matches, are another cause of youth mortality.

Young people are confronted with other equally important issues that affect their health and development. These include:

- Generational conflict,
- Family breakdown,
- Idleness,
- Leaving school,
- Early and forced marriages.

Bagnombe BAKIONO made an early commitment to solving the problems of youth. In 1994, while still a college student, he and a group of friends created the Association for the Promotion of African Youth and Development (APJAD). This association came at a time when talk about sex or sexuality was taboo, especially in a university environment. He had to swim against the tide to continually give youth information at a time when embarrassment, the absence of communication with parents, and even among young people, lead not only to the risks of STIs and AIDS already mentioned but also to increasingly more cases of early pregnancy and/or unwanted abortions. Still according to DHS III:

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Share the story of the founder and what inspired the founder to start this project

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How many people have been impacted by your project?

More than 10,000

How many people could be impacted by your project in the next three years?

More than 10,000

Winning entries present a strong plan for how they will achieve growth. Identify your six-month milestone for growing your impact

Increasing the supply of non-prescription contraceptives and improving the quality of information services, and advice and guidance for adolescent and youth on reproductive health issues.
Task 1
Train 360 youth peer educators in community-based distribution of non-prescription contraceptives and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health

Task 2
Acquire 150,000 units of male condoms and 25,000 female condoms monthly

Task 3
Conduct 450 monthly neighborhood outreach activities for young people in the 45 provinces of Burkina Faso

Identify your 12-month impact milestone
Facilitate access of youth to treatment and preventive services for HIV, malaria, tuberculosis and other common diseases and scourges threatening youth and adolescents

Task 1
Improve the technical expertise of youth counseling centers

Task 2
Train health workers in youth counseling centers in care appropriate to youth

Task 3
Create a framework that strengthens the dialogue between health workers in youth counseling centers and the ministries of health and youth

How will your project evolve over the next three years?
For the next three years, RAJS/BF wants to move toward increasing the number of youth counseling centers and increasing the range of services to include other activities such as vocational training and training in youth entrepreneurship.

Sustainability
What barriers might hinder the success of your project and how do you plan to overcome them?
Lack of financial support for the continuation of the project could be a big obstacle. Therefore the 2011-2015 strategic plan has been developed to expedite funding.
Political instability in Burkina Faso: This should be possible to overcome with this project to strengthen civic participation among youth and promote dialogue.
Non-participation of target populations: This should be possible to overcome thanks to the strategy of upstream community involvement in developing strategies and downstream involvement in evaluation.

Tell us about your partnerships
In the project, we work with RAJS/BF member associations for community outreach and also with State services including the Ministry of Health technical services, ministries of youth and of education, a national council for the fight against AIDS and STIs, and the National Population Council as well as with local authorities. Development partners and private companies include UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, foreign embassies, and Telecel Faso.

Explain your selections
Each year the RAJS/BF sponsors individually provide support to project activities. Since 2008 the NGO OXFAM Netherlands has been providing financial support to RAJS/BF activities, the Presidency of Burkina Faso and government ministries provide financial and technical support activities such as information campaigns, and the United Nations provides more than 80% of the annual budget in technical and financial support to RAJS/BF activities.

How do you plan to strengthen your project in the next three years?
For the next three years, the consolidation of the project will involve strengthening our achievements, searching for new sources of financing, continuing to mobilize national authorities close to RAJS/BF, strengthening innovation, and using innovative strategies. Greater involvement of communities at the base will facilitate the sustainability of achievements and investments and foster their suitable fulfillment.

Challenges
Which barriers to health and well-being does your innovation address?
Please select up to three in order of relevancy to your project.

PRIMARY
Lack of physical access to care/lack of facilities

SECONDARY
Lack of access to targeted health information and education

TERTIARY
Incentives for unhealthy living

Please describe how your innovation specifically tackles the barriers listed above.
Concerning the lack of infrastructure, the Project is committed to developing youth counseling centers with health care services including comprehensive care in areas least served by the state services.

Concerning the limited access to relevant information and health facilities, the Project provides for peer educator training, making outreach tools available, and developing partnerships with health workers for outreach to offer care in communities.

Concerning incentives for unhealthy living, the Project develops appropriate strategies to target populations such as young gold washers and street vendors.

**How are you growing the impact of your organization or initiative?**
**Please select up to three potential pathways in order of relevancy to you.**

**PRIMARY**
Grown geographic reach: Multi-country

**SECONDARY**
Enhanced existing impact through addition of complementary services

**TERTIARY**
Repurposed your model for other sectors/development needs

**Please describe which of your growth activities are current or planned for the immediate future.**

RAJS/BF has drafted a 2011-2015 strategic plan that establishes areas and strategies for growth for the next five years. RAJS/BF is additionally considering setting up a reference and training center for adolescents and youth. RAJS/BS is also developing new strategies to strengthen its financial autonomy in the coming years.

**Do you collaborate with any of the following: (Check all that apply)**
Government, NGOs/Nonprofits, For profit companies, Academia/universities.

If yes, how have these collaborations helped your innovation to succeed?

According to partnership with government agencies, NGOs and for profit businesses, they have helped to finance project activities and increase capacity with technical support.

As to universities, they provided support for surveys and studies on youth and their needs. The last study, “National participatory analysis of the needs and aspirations of adolescents and youth in a context of sustainable development,” was conducted with support from the Higher Institute of Population Sciences at the University of Ouagadougou.

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