



*Lessons learned with promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of Adolescents and Youth in Nepal*

*- November 2008 -*

# Implementing Youth Information Centers (YIC)

The information in this handout is based on the collective sharing of knowledge and experience of Nepali experts working in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) during the “National Expert Seminar: History, Present and Mystery - Learning from the past to improve sexual and reproductive health of young people in Nepal and moving towards the future”. This seminar was held on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008 under the auspices of the Family Health Division, Population Division of the Ministry of Health and Population, Family Planning Association and GTZ Nepal. The information was generated in working groups that consisted of experts from government, non-governmental organizations, youth organizations, external development partners and freelance consultants. This handout documents the lessons learned regarding the use of Youth Information Centers (YIC) as an approach to reach young people in Nepal.

## **What is a Youth Information Center (YIC)?**

Generally, a YIC comprises of three basic components – a library with information education communication (IEC) materials, a training and edutainment room and a service section. A YIC can be established as part of community based organizations (CBOs) and local clubs but it is different than other community forums as its main purpose is focused on raising awareness, providing life-skills-based education and training, empowering young people on SRHR as well as gender based violence (GBV) issues. A YIC provides or ideally should provide services such as counseling, condom distribution, pills and referral services for young people presenting with concerns regarding sexually transmitted infection (STI), voluntary counseling testing (VCT), comprehensive abortion care (CAC) and family planning. The majority of YIC-based activities are organized and implemented by young people themselves.

YIC underscores the principle of team spirit and adopts peer education approach in empowering young people. Apart from youth, it involves local adults, leaders and teachers. It is run by a youth management committee, which develops and oversees certain rules, principles and norms for the smooth functioning of the center. YIC is usually set up in a school, club, public place, community house, market place or where large numbers of youth can congregate.

YIC is a place for young people to meet and share knowledge, problems, curiosities and concerns on various issues including their SRHR. YIC is often a resort for adolescents and youth because it provides a relaxed learning environment where youth entertain within the same age group.

## **Implementing YICs in Nepal**

The mobilization of peer educators to educate young people and implementation of youth initiatives by youth themselves



are the core aspects of any YIC. In 1998, Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) became the first organization to introduce the concept of YICs in Nepal. The experience of FPAN was later scaled up through the Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia (RHIYA) project in Nepal. Operation guidelines for YICs and a life skill based adolescent sexual and reproductive health peer education trainers' training manual were developed through this project. Currently, there are 88 YICs being operated by 4000 peer educators in various communities and 81 school information centers (SICs) in 28 districts. There are 7 multi-purpose resource centers (MPRCs) managed by young people in 7 districts of the country. The MPRCs are equipped with unique combination of resources to address and facilitate the needs of young people. Information related to SRH, space for reading/studying, cyber café for internet and communication as well as space for games and community activities are packaged under MPRCs.

The experts agreed that although YICs have contributed in serving the needs of young people, knowledge among youths on SRH, sexuality and needs of young people in Nepal remains minimal. There are not sufficient numbers of YICs to cover the needs of young population. The community's attitude towards YICs remains skeptical. The general conviction is still that information on issues like sexuality and SRH to young people encourages them to engage in pre-marital sexual activities. Moreover, SRH services and information should be only for those who are married. The experts also voiced that the effectiveness of YICs is rarely evaluated, hence its impact on young people and the quality of services remains unanswered.

For efficient functioning of YIC, it needs to be integrated within or linked to services that provide access to comprehensive SRH services including counseling, care and community development initiatives. Implementing YICs and equipping them with state-of-the-art facilities, up-to-date resource materials and services can be expensive. Generating regular funding and involving the community in YIC activities is essential for the sustainability of a YIC.

### Operating a successful YIC

In order to operate a successful YIC, the experts suggested the following points to be followed:

- It is important to utilize local resources (human and physical) and involve the communities, local leaders/politicians, parents while establishing a YIC.
- It requires trained and skilled human resources to moderate and implement YIC-based educational youth activities.
- Youth participation in all program activities from planning to evaluation is critical for the success of YICs. It is vital that YICs are managed and operated by youths.
- It is imperative that YICs are equipped with proper information and services along with the facilities that attract youths such as edutainment activities - regular supply of new reading materials, journals, music, etc.
- Managers of YIC need to have a strong network, coordination and linkages with civil society, donor organizations, community and families in the locality.
- Feasible opening hours, choosing a strategic location where youths

can congregate easily and providing information about the YIC and regular services is essential for the smooth functioning of the YIC.

- Regular monitoring and evaluation of activities and services provided at the YIC will enable YIC to be more effective and goal oriented.

### Strengths of setting up YICs in Nepal

- YICs are believed to be cost effective, as they can be located in existing premises. They can be set up on the premises of CBOs, NGOs and INGOs, schools, colleges, or even governmental organizations.
- YICs have the potential for sustainability as they are community based.
- YICs help to build positive attitude and behavior among young people. It promotes participation of young people in the activities and programs of youth and gives them the feeling of self-worth, responsibility and life skills.
- Through YIC, young people can easily make contacts with other young people and can develop new and creative initiatives.
- YICs attract young population and help in building their capacity. A YIC provides young people with the opportunity to voice their opinions. And in return, young people can provide adults with innovative ideas to develop IEC materials and methods of delivery.
- YICs help in bringing fresh ideas and the information provided is based on the identified needs of the young people.



## Challenges and limitations of applying YIC in Nepal

- Socio-cultural reasons including the lack of supportive environment in the family and community can hinder young people from accessing YICs. The general assumption of the community is that YIC promotes immoral behaviors among the youth.
- Physical barriers such as inappropriate location as well as geographical isolation create difficulty for rural youths to access YIC. Opening hours of the centers should also be youth friendly. If locations are not appropriate and opening hours are not youth friendly, there is a high chance of underutilization of the YIC.
- Economic barriers such as fees of service or cost of medicine/contraceptives also hinder young people from visiting YICs.
- Many young people are unaware about the existence of YICs and the services being provided. Lack of information and knowledge about YIC also restricts young people to access its services.

- Sometimes activities offered at YICs are redundant- discouraging young people to access YIC and the resources limited innovation and regular updates of the materials and equipment available at the YICs are imperative in drawing the attention of young people.
- Attitude of providers – lack of proper communication skills with young people, insufficient knowledge of SRHR and unfriendly attitude create barriers.
- Services provided at YIC should be gender responsive since it will help the young female population in accessing YIC services more confidently.

### Lessons Learned

- Extensive training and support are required for service providers to deliver effective SRHR services to young people.
- It is crucial to involve and provide orientation to parents and community groups regarding the importance and purpose of a YIC.

- It is important to introduce vocational and skill development trainings at YICs in order to increase the participation of young people.
- Equipping and updating YICs with modern and up-to-date information, education and communication (IEC) materials to attract youth is necessary.
- For sustainability of a YIC, collaboration with local groups and organizations is imperative. It is easier to promote YICs through already established community level organizations or youth groups by providing specific training and information to them.
- It is critical to involve local young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of a YIC and its activities and services.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation of YIC programs is essential as it helps in identifying the barriers for the smooth functioning of YIC.
- It is indispensable to promote and publicize YICs in order for young people to get informed about the services being provided for them.

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