



Empowering Young People to Strengthen Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Ethiopia



About the International HIV/AIDS Alliance

We are an innovative alliance of nationally based, independent, civil society organisations united by our vision of a world without AIDS.

We are committed to joint action, working with communities through local, national and global action on HIV, health and human rights.

Our actions are guided by our values: the lives of all human beings are of equal value, and everyone has the right to access the HIV information and services they need for a healthy life.

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About Link Up

Link Up, an ambitious five-country project that ran from 2013-2016, improved the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of over 8000,000 young people most affected by HIV in Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Uganda. Launched in 2013 by a consortium of partners led by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, Link Up strengthened the integration of HIV and SRHR programmes and service delivery. It focused specifically on young men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who use drugs, transgender people, and young women and men living with HIV.

For more information visit www.link-up.org

Acknowledgements

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Unless otherwise stated, the appearance of individuals in this publication gives no indication of either sexuality or HIV status.

Cover photo: Addis Beza youth dance troupe, ages 15-20, raise awareness about HIV prevention. © 2016 International HIV/AIDS Alliance

Executive summary

Ongoing barriers to accessing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services continue to burden young people in Ethiopia with elevated risk of HIV exposure, and poor health outcomes like unplanned pregnancy and STIs. In addition to dealing with discrimination and strict cultural taboos around sexuality, young people often lack the knowledge required to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health (SRH).¹ In order to address this need, Talent Youth Association (TaYA) is working to create an enabling environment for young people to discuss SRH issues such as gender equality, and learn life skills. TaYa is also advocating for integration of youth-friendly SRH and HIV education into school curricula.

For three years, TaYA partnered with Link Up, a project working to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of more than one million young people in Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Uganda. In Ethiopia, the project is led by Organization for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHD) in partnership with Marie Stopes International Ethiopia (MSIE), the National Network of Positive Women Ethiopians, Nikat Charitable Association, TaYA, Family Guidance Association Ethiopia (FGAE), and the Ministry of Health. This case study details TaYA's work in promoting the integration of CSE in school curricula.

1. Context

Young people under 24 make up more than 60% of Ethiopia's population.² While HIV prevalence in Ethiopia has remained steady at around 1.2% for several years, young people are disproportionately affected by HIV because of economic, social, and gender inequality factors.³ Not only are young people more likely to be affected, but they also tend to lack access to adequate information and education around sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV prevention and treatment, and life skills such as negotiation and communication. Research shows that the majority of adolescents lack the knowledge required to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, leaving them vulnerable to coercion, sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy.⁴

TaYA, founded in 2003, is built on the premise that young people are the future of Ethiopia. In order to be productive, influential leaders of the future TaYA believes that young people need the knowledge and opportunities to be healthy and self-reliant. They work to prioritize the health and wellbeing of young people in Ethiopia by eliminating barriers and enabling young people to be healthy, educated, and independent.

Little by little, an egg will walk. –

Ethiopian proverb

¹UNFPA (2016), 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education'.

²CIA (2016), 'The World Factbook: Ethiopia'.

³UNAIDS (2012), 'Fact sheet: Adolescents, young people and HIV'.

⁴UNFPA (2016), 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education'.



Recent studies in Ethiopia found only 24% of young women and less than 35% of young men correctly identified ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and rejected major misconceptions about HIV transmission.⁵ Community dialogues with young people led by Link Up partners GYCA and the ATHENA Network found that comprehensive sexuality education in Ethiopian schools is severely limited.

The community dialogues also revealed that young people felt uncomfortable discussing sex, sexuality, relationships, and SRH openly,⁶ experiencing significant stigma, especially when talking with older people. Participants often perceived it as something inappropriate to talk about, or shameful. They cited the Amharic pejorative word, *wesibawinet*, used to describe people who express sexual desire or speak about sexuality openly, reinforcing the perception that sexual acts or behaviour are immoral.⁷

Comprehensive sexuality education programmes enable young people to make informed decisions about their sexuality and health, building life skills and increasing responsible behaviours. Such programmes are also grounded in human rights principles, helping advance the rights, gender equality, and general empowerment of young people who are then better able to assume agency over their own bodies and decision-making.⁸ The International Planned Parenthood Federation's Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education states that:

A rights-based approach to CSE seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships. It views 'sexuality' holistically and within the context of emotional and social development. It recognizes that information alone is not enough. Young people need to be given the opportunity to acquire essential life skills and develop positive attitudes and values.⁹

TaYA has noted a lack of information access and a strong demand for CSE from young people and schools. There has also been increased government prioritisation of SRH and HIV in Ethiopia's national strategic plan, providing an excellent opportunity for TaYA to begin mobilising for schools to support CSE.

2. Strategies

As part of Link Up, TaYA's two key roles are to build the capacity of youth club leaders, and to establish clubs at local high schools to create an enabling environment for young people to gain life skills and to discuss topics such as SRH and gender equality. This work is foundational to TaYA's long-term

The school principals thought of students aged 15 or 16 as a child; those principals were refusing sexual education in the school, they thought sexual education could lead to sexual intercourse, what they had missed however was that most of us were having sexual intercourse. –

dialogue participant

⁵Ethiopia Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (FHAPCO) (2014), 'Country Progress Report on the HIV Response'.

⁶Link Up project (GYCA and ATHENA Network) (2013), 'Visions, voices and priorities: key issues of young people living with and affected by HIV in Ethiopia'.

⁷Ibid.

⁸UNFPA (2016), 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education'.

⁹International Planned Parenthood Federation (2010), 'IPPF Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education.'

advocacy outcome of youth-friendly SRH and HIV education being integrated into school plans at the regional level.

Early in the project, TaYA identified the need for partnering with school administrations to ensure confidence and buy-in of establishing clubs to provide information and education and a safe discussion space. The in-school youth club model has existed in Ethiopia for some time but TaYA has pioneered integrating SRH and HIV content into clubs that were initially focused primarily on HIV prevention and behaviour change. TaYA staff and Ethiopian Youth Council for Higher Opportunities (ECHO) members began to discuss the need for safe spaces for young people to speak about these issues with school administration and to ensure they were able to operate with permission. TaYA's pre-existing relationship with local schools has been essential to securing buy-in from school administrators and staff. ECHO, TaYA's youth advisory group, is made up of young people serving as youth educators, advocates, and spokespeople on sexual and reproductive health issues and policies affecting young people in Ethiopia. ECHO members work with the staff of TaYA to increase support for young people's sexual and reproductive health, especially in the areas of family planning. In the global HIV and AIDS field this is done by organising events, utilising online and traditional media outlets, developing educational workshops, attending conferences, and lobbying policy makers. As part of their work, ECHO members serve as mentors and youth advisors in Link Up Ethiopia.

After hearing about TaYA's research and the results of the Link Up community dialogues many school administrators agreed that young people needed a space to have open discussion and receive accurate information about issues they find difficult discussing at home or with teachers.

After reaching an agreement with school administrators at five schools in Addis sub-districts TaYA sent a draft proposal for the clubs to the Bureau of Finance and Development (BOFED). After two review cycles, and significant perseverance on the part of TaYA navigating the bureaucracy of school administration and cultural resistance to SRHR and LGBT issues, the application succeeded.

TaYA began training 10-12 young leaders from five local high schools in a curriculum on life skills, SRH and HIV, and gender. The curriculum is part of a training manual that contains lessons (as well as fact sheets about Ethiopia in both Amharic and English) around advocacy for young people's needs. Topics include family planning and contraceptives, dealing with unplanned pregnancy, STIs, and peer pressure to have sex or to sell sex against one's wishes, and basics around SRH and HIV. This manual was developed specifically for Link Up by a local consultant who worked closely with TaYA staff and peer educators. The manual was then validated during a comprehensive two-day workshop with representatives from the relevant sub-city education offices, school directors and vice-directors, and Link Up implementing partners. After the validation workshop TaYA led a training of trainers on the manual for sub-city officials,



one school director, vice-director, and one teacher who co-leads the club. Finally, TaYA held a capacity-building training for school club leaders and ECHO members on SRH and on using the manual. Both trainings included resources on linkages to local SRH and HIV service providers so that club leaders can make referrals for students needing access to services.

Using this manual, youth club leaders (teachers and student co-leaders) were trained to facilitate weekly club meetings. They meet with TaYA staff and ECHO members every month for additional support. TaYA staff members also build and maintain positive relationships with school directors and vice-directors, keeping them informed and in active collaboration with the club activities. TaYA now supports 25 school club leaders who run SRH, gender, and HIV-focused clubs at schools in five sub-cities of Addis Ababa (Bole, Yeka, Nifas Silk/Lafto, Kirkos, and Akaki Kality). All club members are aged between 15 and 19 and many are, or were, ECHO members with a pre-existing relationship with TaYA. Student leaders co-lead the clubs with teachers to ensure collaboration and shared ownership of the discussions.



Addis Beza youth dance troupe, ages 15-20, raise awareness about HIV prevention. © 2016 International HIV/AIDS Alliance

Mahlet and Tigist, students at Bole Preparatory School in Addis Ababa, have been youth club leaders at their school for just over a year and were in clubs at their previous school focused on gender equity (also supported by TaYA). Now both co-lead their school's Gender Club for both boys and girls, which strives to create awareness around gender issues. In the club, Mahlet and Tigist lead discussions around issues such as unplanned pregnancy and abortion, sexual abuse, drug use, and gender disparities. TaYA recognises the intersections of HIV prevalence, gender inequality, and stigma around young people's sexuality and SRHR—seizing the opportunity to build awareness and comfort discussing these issues.

According to Gender Club leaders at Bole Preparatory School:

I joined the gender club because I felt like there was already a lot of information and awareness available around HIV, but still there is lack of awareness around gender issues. Talking about issues faced by young women such as sexual harassment and rape is very sensitive, and having a space to talk about those issues is rare.

Before they joined the Gender Club, boys thought that gender was only a 'girls' issue-but since recruiting boys they have been more engaged and have begun to feel that it's more important to learn about these issues.

TaYA is prioritising advocacy for CSE and their general activities include:

- Dissemination of research-based educational materials around HIV and sexual and reproductive health for young people;
- Training of young people (both in and out of school), parents, teachers, and school administrators in SRH needs specific to young people, and other youth issues such as unemployment or lack of educational opportunity, and their effect on development;
- Facilitating youth discussion groups and clubs for young people to share their HIV and SRH needs, share information, and provide a 'safe space' for discussing sensitive issues;
- Mentoring in the areas of healthy life skills such as negotiation and communication, SRH practices, career planning, and leadership development;
- Supporting young people to participate in international networks, conferences, workshops, and leadership opportunities;
- Organising and leading high-level panel discussion and workshops with decision-makers around the SRH needs of young people in Ethiopia; and
- Raising awareness and sharing information across multiple platforms such as newspaper, radio, and community forums.

3. Results

Key advocacy achievements include:

- **Shifting the focus to integrating SRH and HIV:** In earlier national health strategies there was a siloed focus on HIV prevention activities that became less popular over time, such as Ethiopia's "anti-AIDS" clubs. In the most recent Health Sector Transformation plan, launched in October 2015, focus has shifted to SRH. In its clubs, TaYA has incorporated elements of both SRH and HIV in its curriculum and has helped young people access integrated information and resources with buy-in and support from schools.
- **Financial buy-in from schools:** High schools in Ethiopia are given an addition 2% budget line by the Bureau of Education as part of the national strategic plan on HIV to mainstream HIV into all sectors. They are allowed



to use this budget for any activity that mainstreams HIV. TaYA has found that every school they work with has expressed willingness to use their additional budget on training around CSE, SRH, and HIV for students and staff. TaYA has played a key role in providing technical assistance to schools for delivering this training and how to implement clubs that share accurate and complete information. In one school (D.J. Wundrad High School, Yeka sub-district) TaYA supported school staff to hold a 2-day weekend training event for the entire school community on CSE, SRH, and HIV and how to run co-led clubs with students.

- **Increased prioritisation of SRH in the school communities:** TaYA reports a stronger relationship with schools and increased trust in its ability to lead clubs, provide training, and share CSE information with students. It is no longer necessary for staff and ECHO members to spend time convincing or explaining the need for CSE programming as many school staff members already know and support their work. In fact, the schools continue to use the training manual and pass it on to their peers or teachers at other schools.



The BEZA Anti-AIDS youth group get messages about HIV prevention across to the wider public, and in particular to their peers.
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4. Unanticipated outcomes

Unanticipated results include:

- **Changing attitudes toward young people from key populations:** Although TaYA's curriculum does not specifically address LGBT young people, it emphasises the importance of open and safe communication, and empowering young people to be themselves. TaYA believes that young people who participate in the clubs have become increasingly comfortable with, and accepting of, their peers from key populations.

- **Increased leadership and self-confidence of school club leaders:**

Youth club leaders and members have reported feeling more comfortable with public speaking, group facilitation, and discussing sensitive issues with their peers in a safe space. One youth club leader said that:

“The most valuable thing about this club is that we’ve had the chance to build our self-confidence as leaders and to be connected to NGOs like TaYA. [We also] gain access to information and feel more comfortable communicating about sensitive issues with others.”

- **Improved teacher-student relationships:** The clubs are required to be co-led by teachers and students. Leaders are encouraged to meet regularly before club meetings to agree on relevant topics of discussion from the manual and provide feedback and value each other’s voices. This has led to a reported increase in students’ willingness to speak with their teacher or co-leader about issues that were more difficult to discuss in the past. One student leader said:

“If the teacher is there she is also a member of the club—we’re not afraid to talk about anything, as we are all peers in the club.”

5. Challenges and issues experienced

A number of challenges arose during the project, including:

- **Reliance on outside sources of funding and support:** Based on TaYA’s experience, these clubs tend only to be sustained with continuous funding and technical support from other NGOs such as Save the Children and Dance4Life. This same reliance can lead to competition, as other organisations are funding clubs simultaneously and prioritising different focus areas in school clubs.
- **Occasional lack of participation from school administration and high staff turnover:** Of the five schools where TaYA is operating under Link Up, one school has been less active. It often missed meetings and training events due to clashing schedules and high staff turnover. In this school, student club leaders continue to hold meetings but do not have the participation of a teacher co-leader. When a school club is launched with one director or teacher and that person leaves, it can mean that TaYA needs to start from scratch with a new staff person to explain the benefit of the clubs and sign agreements.
- **Time commitment for securing approval:** At the beginning of the project, TaYA staff met with school administrators as many as 8 times in a two-week period to gain approval for starting clubs. The schools needed



reassurance that nothing against government policy would be mentioned in the curriculum, and it was important for TaYA to ensure full participation and buy-in from any staff members who would be involved in the clubs.

6. Lessons learnt

Key learning to inform future activities encompasses:

- **Maintaining sensitivity to norms around acceptable language:** Using rights-based language can be challenging in some country contexts. It can expose a program or organisation to excess scrutiny. Working within political realities and using language that is respectful to local culture and avoiding controversial terminology is very important. It can be the key to allowing advocacy work to move forward.
- **Capitalising on the consortium model:** Link Up Ethiopia has been successful in working collaboratively with other implementing partners. This has been around technical support, sharing expertise, and to reach wider groups of stakeholders and young people who might contribute to, or benefit from, programming.
- **Focusing on documentation and impact:** The program focuses currently on sharing information and implementing school clubs, rather than impact and results. In order to achieve sustainability, understand how to improve the clubs, and achieve its advocacy goals, TaYA will need to focus on documentation and monitoring and evaluation to move towards a more evidence-based model.
- **Ensuring buy-in from school administration:** Schools and relevant institutions must be included from the very beginning by engaging key stakeholders, such as school administrators and sub-city officials, for sustainability, resource mobilization, and on going support of clubs and CSE.



The BEZA Anti-AIDS youth group. © 2016 International HIV/AIDS Alliance

7. Plans for the future and sustainability beyond Link Up

TaYA plans to continue supporting the clubs and advocating for a CSE curriculum in schools with funding from the Get Up, Speak Out programme supported by Choice for Youth Sexuality. TaYA believes supporting school clubs is the first step in seeing a CSE curriculum supported officially in schools. Typically, when funding for clubs ends TaYA holds a transition meeting to share feedback from the program and hand off the clubs to other programmes or the school if they have agreed to use the Bureau of Education's 2% budget allocation. This strategy is important for TaYA, as it means can continue their relationship with the schools and their collaboration on the curricula implementation.

In addition, UNESCO, The Packard Foundation, and the Ethiopia Ministry of Education have produced a draft standard CSE curriculum that now needs to be lobbied with religious and other socially conservative communities in Ethiopia. FGAE, another Link Up partner in Ethiopia, has also played a role in drafting a new National Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health Strategy (the previous strategy expired in 2015) and is advocating for the inclusion of CSE. TaYA has a great opportunity to engage with the increased momentum behind CSE and SRH in Ethiopia, and plans to take advantage.

8. Contact details

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LINKUP

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

For more information, visit www.link-up.org



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