

New Tool Offers Skills Building for Youth Participation

The Youth Participation Guide helps youth and adults achieve meaningful youth involvement.

“I have gained skills and knowledge that will help me in my work on how to involve youth as partners – and not use them as implementers,” reported a woman in her early 30s, following a four-day training workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, in March 2005. At this training-of-trainers event, facilitators premiered a powerful new tool, the *Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation*.

Thirty-three youth leaders and adults came to the training from nine African countries – Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zambia. Due to space limitations, many others who wanted to attend could not, demonstrating the demand for resources to help expand meaningful youth involvement in reproductive health (RH) and HIV prevention programming.

In 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) said in *Programming for Adolescent Health and Development* that youth “should be involved from the start as full and active partners in all stages from conceptualization, design, implementation, feedback, and follow-up.” Many groups have called for a shift from focusing on the risks and vulnerabilities of youth to an emphasis on positive characteristics and traits – youth as assets rather than problems. Many youth programs recognize that problem-based approaches do not work and are refocusing on the strengths, resourcefulness, and competencies of young people.

YouthNet, in collaboration with Advocates for Youth, created the *Youth Participation Guide* to meet the demand and need for a practical tool to answer this call for greater youth involvement in meaningful program planning. The guide focuses on RH and HIV prevention and is adaptable to other youth development areas. The target audience includes senior and middle-level

managers, staff involved in implementing activities, and youth who may be engaged at any level of an organization’s work. YouthNet recognizes both the challenges and benefits of adults and youth working together.

The guide is anchored in two main schools of thought. UNICEF and other organizations emphasize that youth participating in programs designed to serve youth is a basic right, that is, an end in itself. Others see youth participation as a means to help achieve program goals for youth or communities. Although information about the impact of youth involvement in RH and HIV programs is limited, literature from other fields, notably community development, indicates that involving young people in programs has a positive impact on program outcomes. YouthNet believes in the inherent value of involving youth in a meaningful fashion and that youth involvement should achieve improved program results in order to justify staff time and financial resources.

How to Use the Guide

Through a series of steps (see graphic, next page), the guide seeks to increase the level of meaningful youth participation in RH and HIV/AIDS programming at institutional and programmatic levels. A conceptual overview, background handouts, and resources can help prepare users for Steps 1 and 2. The conceptual overview summarizes major issues such as selection and recruitment and introduces model programs. Nine background handouts provide in-depth information on topics introduced in the overview, and another nine handouts summarize model programs.

Implementing the institutional assessment and planning tool is Step 1. It uses a staff questionnaire, a group self-assessment, and focus group discussions to gather data that participants

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use to develop a workplan for initiating or expanding meaningful youth participation.

Conducting the youth-adult partnership training is Step 2. Using the curriculum, the training builds the skills of individuals and organizations to engage youth and adults more fully in youth RH and HIV/AIDS program design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Through a participatory approach, the curriculum addresses the different needs and styles of youth and adults in the workplace. It includes sessions on values, power, attitudes, barriers and challenges, and strategies for involvement. The action planning section allows teams to work together to develop a concrete plan for their organizations.

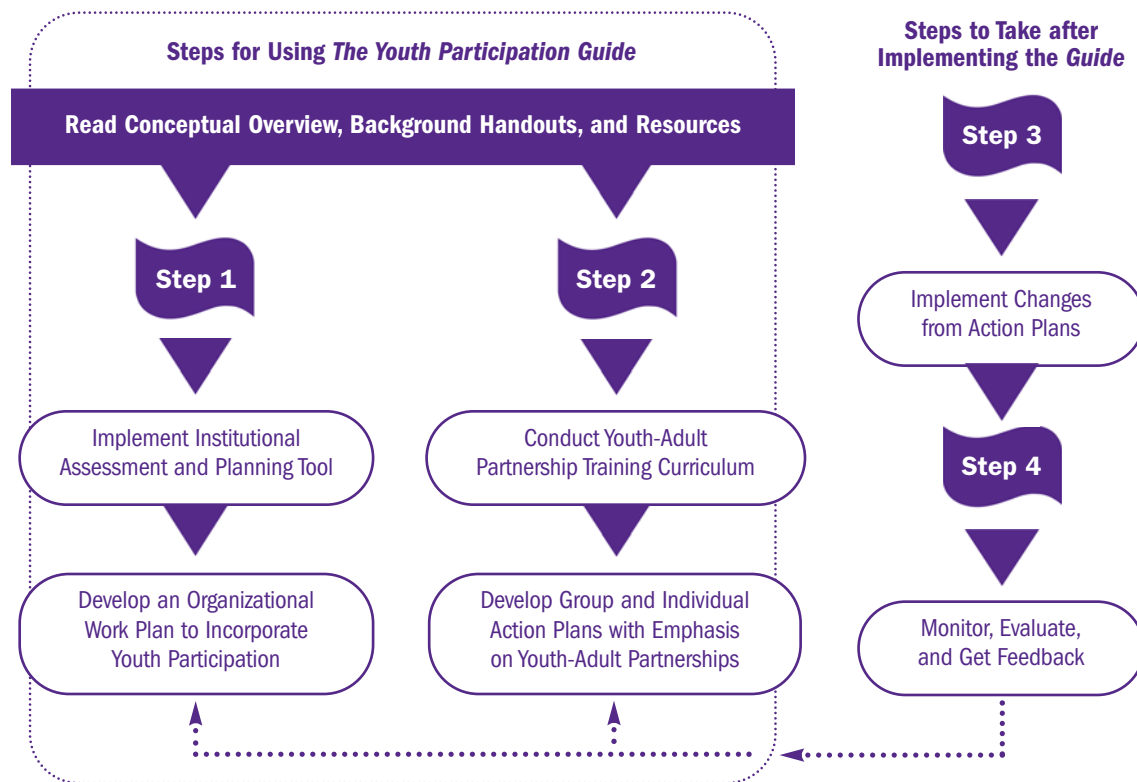
If the *Youth Participation Guide* is used successfully, organizations will be able to proceed to Step 3 – implementing changes from the action plans. In Step 4, the organizations would monitor these plans, evaluate them, and seek feedback on adjusting them, returning to earlier steps as needed.

– Aliza Pressman

Aliza Pressman, a graduate student and YouthNet intern, worked in partnership with the team that developed the Youth Participation Guide.

The guide is available on a CD-ROM and in PDF format (in separate sections, at: <http://www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/rhtrainmat/ypguide.htm>). For printed copies, please send a request with a justification for how this will be used in training activities. Please contact youthnetpubs@fhi.org.

Steps for Incorporating or Strengthening Youth Participation



YouthNet Briefs is an activity of YouthNet, a five-year program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development to improve reproductive health and prevent HIV among young people. The YouthNet team is led by Family Health International and includes CARE USA and RTI International.