

“ADVOCACY IS FIGHTING FOR OUR RIGHTS BY TEACHING THE SOCIETY”

YOUNG PEOPLE ON THEIR SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES, AND
MOTIVATIONS FOR YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY IN ETHIOPIA



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ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEC	Development Expertise Centre
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TAYA	Talent Youth Association
UN	United Nations
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YNSD	Youth Network for Sustainable Development
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

1. INTRODUCTION



SIXTY PERCENT OF AFRICA'S POPULATION IS UNDER THE AGE OF 24 (UN DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, 2019). YET, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE RARELY IN THE DECISION MAKING SEAT, ALSO WHEN IT APPLIES TO THEIR OWN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

Youth are deeply affected by Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) outcomes that have long-term effects on their physical and mental health, development and social lives (Ayieko & Nguku, 2019). Hence, based on the central principle of ‘Leave no one behind’ of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), young people should be at the core of advocacy initiatives that aim to change policies and practices for adolescents and youth. **Advocacy** refers to “the different ways political, financial or public support is built to bring about action for change. It involves influencing leaders and decision makers to address the root causes of problems and to generate long-term sustainable solutions”. ([IPPF, 2011](#)) **Youth-led advocacy** means that “young people are meaningfully involved in every aspect of the advocacy process, from selecting the issue, the audience, the advocacy strategies, to conducting advocacy themselves, and to monitoring and evaluating the successes and the areas for improvement.” (CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, n.d.-a) Especially regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), young people are seen as advocates for their own health (Ayieko & Nguku, 2019).

The Break Free! programme aims to increase adolescents’ access to SRHR information, education, and services in nine African countries. One of its strategies to achieve this is to support capacity and advocacy towards duty bearers and decision-makers so that they develop, resource, and implement legislation and policies that respond to adolescents’ needs. This is done by mobilizing girls, wom-

en, boys, men, and other stakeholders to address laws, practices, and harmful gender norms that perpetuate child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and in some countries female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Break Free! specifically aims to mobilize young people; they are encouraged to be involved in issues that are of their concern. As part of the Break Free! Programme, KIT Royal Tropical Institute led a study on youth SRHR advocacy in three countries in which Break Free! is active: Mozambique, Mali, and Ethiopia. The study explored how young people advocate for SRHR at district and/or national level, and what can be learnt from this for programming to support youth advocacy in the three countries. This current report focuses on the findings in Ethiopia.

While literature on the effects of youth-led advocacy is scarce, available studies suggest that advocacy efforts led by young people have **more impact than adult-led advocacy**, and is increasingly youth-led (Shephard, 2017). Furthermore, research and evaluations of programmes similar to Break Free! show that meaningful engagement of young people in decisions that affect them has positive effects on their empowerment and civic engagement, and the health and development of themselves and their communities (Jacobs & George, 2022; Melles & Ricker, 2018; Sheehan et al., 2017). Additionally, meaningful youth participation has positively influenced the capacity of organisations and their staff to institutionalize meaningful involvement of young people and to provide youth-friendly SRHR services (Melles & Ricker, 2018; Van Reeuwijk & Singh, 2018; Zulu et al., 2020). Yet, successes, constraints, and pathways to outcomes of youth-led advocacy are generally not well documented. This might be due to capacity and resources of young people to conduct such analyses, but also the fact that many youth-led organisations have existed longer than the young people who are involved in them, so institutional memory is lacking. Thus, while meaningful youth participation in advocacy and youth-led advocacy are concepts that are becoming more familiar in development programmes and SRHR programmes specifically, there is also a need to further understand how these processes unfold in practice.

Main objective of the study

To explore how young people advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Bahir Dar district and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, and what can be learnt from this for programming to support youth SRHR advocacy.

Specific objectives of the study

To assess who the main players in youth-led advocacy are in Ethiopia at national and Bahir Dar district level

To explore what the forms (means, set-ups) are of youth-led advocacy and youth participation in advocacy initiatives on SRHR that are present in Ethiopia

To explore the motivations of young people to participate in advocacy;

To analyse the success factors and constraints for effective youth-led advocacy;

To provide recommendations on how youth advocacy can be best facilitated in the Break Free! programme.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW



THIS SECTION PROVIDES PRELIMINARY INSIGHT INTO AVAILABLE LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTS OF YOUTH-LED ADVOCACY IN SRHR, FOCUSING ON THE FORMS AND LEVELS OF YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY, YOUTH MOTIVATIONS TO BECOME ADVOCATES, SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES IN YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY. IT ALSO INCLUDES A SECTION ON THE STATUS OF YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY IN ETHIOPIA.

2.1 Forms and levels of youth-led SRHR advocacy

Meaningful youth participation in advocacy or youth-led advocacy can take place at different levels (community, district, national, regional, and global (e.g., United Nations level) and under different forms. A literature review on youth advocacy in low- and middle-income countries found that, across these countries, young people started to focus more on influencing community and district-level policies compared to their focus on national policies before 2012 (Shephard, 2017). This might be due to the fact that young people report to feel disillusioned by or mistrustful of politicians and the national government, but also because engaging with sub-national governments creates opportunities to influence national policies. Thirdly, young people tend to be more motivated by needs and gaps they directly witness in their community. Lastly, district level government actors are perceived to be more accessible than the national level and more opportunities arise to become a member of a local council or decision-making body (Shephard, 2017). Across African countries, youth-led advocacy takes place in different forms, including youth clubs in communities for awareness raising activities

(Adebayo, 2017; Berhanu et al., 2022; Wigle et al., 2020); children or youth parliaments to influence law-making and policies, often at national or regional level (Adebayo, 2017; Ponet et al., 2011); and youth ambassador networks such as in the Ouagadougou Partnership, that also uses social media and radio shows to advocate for cross-cutting causes (Gassamba, 2021).

2.2 Motivations of young people to participate in SRHR advocacy

The major motivation why young people engage in advocacy is to influence society and policy-makers on issues that are important to them and the wish to fight for social change. Prior studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa have identified that young people were motivated to fight for SRHR issues because of personal experiences, such as having faced child marriage and having faced barriers when accessing SRH services, and not wanting others to face the same (Choonara et al., 2018; Wigle et al., 2020). Additionally, a feeling of duty to support community and national development and wanting to be a role model were important motivations to engage in advocacy or policy-making processes in Malawi (Wigle et al., 2020). Other personal incentives cited by young people in Malawi included receiving recognition for efforts, provision of allowances and opportunities to gain experience or future employment (Wigle et al., 2020).

2.3 Successes and challenges of youth-led SRHR advocacy

Youth-led advocacy has similar success factors and constraints as adult-led advocacy on SRHR, such as continuous engagement of decision-makers in programmes and activities and having to deal with or respond to resistance of actors with opposing views respectively. Success factors that are key to effective advocacy are the need for collaboration between advocacy efforts and initiatives, the continuous engagement of duty-bearers and allies, and building capacity and empowering young people in their advocacy efforts. Building personal relationships with decision-makers is especially important for young people to gain their trust and be seen (Girls Advocacy Alliance, 2019; Jacobs & George, 2022; Oxfam, 2014; Women Deliver, 2016), while building alliances with other youth movements and creating a network can lead to more effective advocacy (Oxfam, 2014). In addition, constraints include lack of trust and respect for youth's opinions; gender norms limiting young people to advocate, for SRHR in particular; lack of fair and equal representation of youth in all its diversity; inter-generational dynamics; lack of meaningful participating in all stages of advocacy; and issues related to sustaining youth advocacy initiatives.

Box 1: Youth SRHR advocacy in Ethiopia

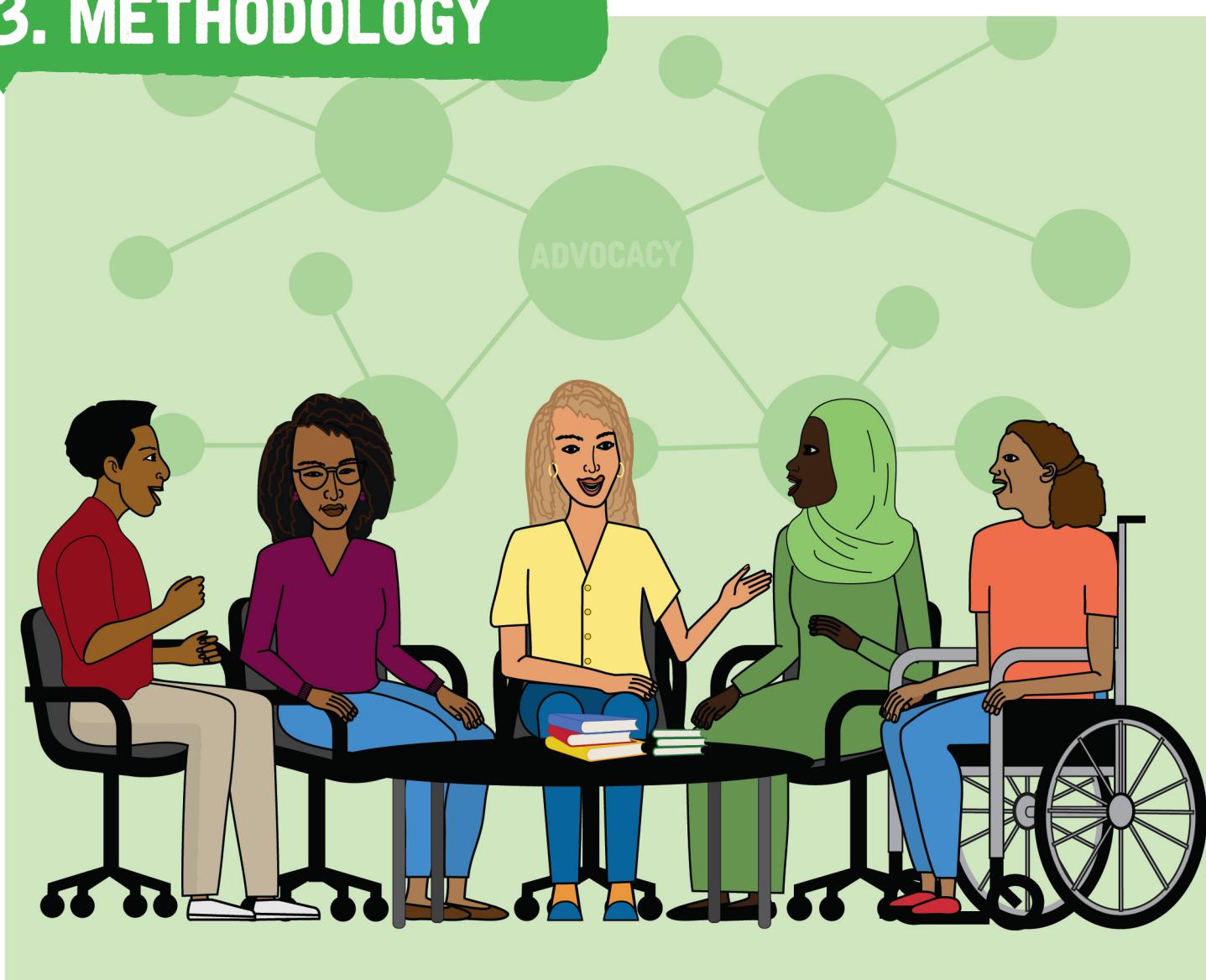
Ethiopia has a long tradition of informal community-based organizations like the “idir” and “iqub” – self-help associations that operate at the local level and offer mutual socio-economic support to their members. Formal civil society – that is, organizations with legal personality- was slow to take root under the Ethiopian Empire regime from 1137-1974. It was also highly restricted under the rule of the Derg (a military government) from 1974-91. Modern civil society organizations were first established as faith-based organizations in the 1930s, and welfare organizations like the Red Cross started to operate in Ethiopia beginning in the 1950s. As a result of the 1973-74 and 1984-1985 famines, many more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a focus on relief and humanitarian services emerged. It was after the downfall of the Derg regime in 1991 that NGO numbers substantially increased.

In February 2009, the Government adopted the Proclamation of Charities and Societies (CSP), Ethiopia’s first comprehensive law governing the registration and regulation of NGOs. The 2009 law and its associated Directives violated international standards relating to the freedom of association (Freedom house 2017). As a result of the Proclamation, many advocacy and rights organisations shut down altogether or rebranded themselves as poverty relief or service delivery organisations (Dupuy et al 2014). The proclamation crippled any sort of advocacy work done by CSOs. In 2019, the CSO Proclamation was revised and a new Proclamation was adopted under the new administration, created a more enabling legal environment for civil society. It was adopted as part of a legal reform program, with a Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council established to review a range of prohibiting laws. Currently, it is a relatively encouraging legal environment for CSOs to advocate for rights, including SRHR and gender equality. With all the challenges, advocacy and rights interventions are currently beginning to establish themselves.

Ethiopia is a country with an overwhelmingly large young population with about 37.4 million people aged 10–24 years. Ethiopia has been trying to address adolescent and youth health issues for decades, including those focused on SRH and youth development. However, adolescents and youth in Ethiopia continue to face a high burden of morbidity and mortality from multiple factors including, teenage pregnancy, unplanned pregnancy, compromised nutrition, HIV and STIs, unsafe abortion, early and child marriage, and unmet needs for family planning (Admassu et al. 2022). Yet, SRHR interventions are fragmented under various ministries, uncoordinated, underfunded, lack effective policy implementation, and lack meaningful participation of young people. The social and cultural norms around adolescents and whether or not their voice/participation is valued or acted upon, as well as cultural and social norms that taboo discussion around SRHR have increased young people's risk of poor SRH outcomes (Admassu et al. 2022).

Given its context of long restricted civil society spaces and dire SRHR challenges, the question facing Ethiopia now is how best to enable, support, and facilitate the participation of young people in advocacy processes. Few studies on the topic have been conducted in Ethiopia, and it seems that adolescents and youth are not commonly participating in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of health policies and programs including SRHR issues. In Ethiopia, youth are primarily engaged in youth structures at community level, created by the government and NGOs. In the Power to You(th) programme in Ethiopia, for example, young people who were involved in advocacy efforts of CSO, were usually not engaged in the actual influencing of policy making and implementation, but rather in awareness-raising activities in the community (Berhanu et al., 2022). These youth clubs are generally set up by development programmes, NGOs or local schools (Adebayo, 2017; Berhanu et al., 2022; Wigle et al., 2020). Youth-led advocacy at national level is however not evident; government departments are not willing to involve youth-led organisations (Berhanu et al., 2022). The reasons for this are unknown. This study thus helps to understand the opportunities and barriers in relation to youth-led SRHR advocacy.

3. METHODOLOGY



3.1 Location

This explorative qualitative study has been conducted on SRHR youth-led advocacy¹ in Bahir Dar area as well as Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These sites were selected because the Break Free! programme is implemented mainly in Bahir Dar area, and Addis Ababa is the capital city where most NGOs and government offices are head quartered.

3.2 Methodology

The study methodology had three components that included mapping youth advocacy structures, a literature review on youth advocacy initiatives, and interviews and FGDs to understand the context on the ground.

¹ While the aim of the study was to focus on youth-led SRHR advocacy initiatives, in reality, interviews and FGDs often spoke about youth participatory SRHR initiatives, which were not always youth-led, and not always about advocacy.

1

A **mapping** was conducted in order to identify the youth advocacy structures that are present and active, with a focus on those in the field of SRHR. The mapping was done collaboratively with the Break Free! consortium² in Ethiopia, who have knowledge on the organisations that are present and already work with. The KIT team then expanded on the mapping by means of desk review, internet search, and interviews. For a full overview of the mapping, please see Annex 1.

2

A **desk review** has been carried out to provide insight into how young people advocate for SRHR at district and/or national level in Ethiopia and broadly in Sub-Saharan Africa, while also exploring what is known already about young people's motivations, success factors and constraints in youth-led advocacy, as well as identifying examples of successful youth-led advocacy. The desk review helped to gain a grasp of general trends and processes in youth advocacy, as well as contextualize the findings further in the national and regional setting.

3

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with key informants and youth advocates (15–29) to understand the landscape of youth-led SRHR advocacy in Ethiopia, the challenges, successes, and motivations of young people. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted; four with key informants, and six with youth advocates. Four FGDs were held; two in Bahir Dar (Amhara region) and two in Addis Ababa (the capital of Ethiopia). These FGDs dived deeper into what young people's motivations have been in their specific advocacy efforts, and aimed to analyse what have been key successes or constraints in their advocacy. Please see the overview in the Table below.

² Break Free! consortium in Ethiopia consists of FAWE, SAT, and Plan Ethiopia. The consortium oversees the daily programme management and implementation of the Break Free! programme in the country.

Table 1 Study participants and instruments

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT AND KEY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS	
4 Youth group FGDs (ages 15–29)	<p><i>In Bahir Dar:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ 1 FGD with young men, in-school and out-of-school→ 1 FGD with young women, in-school and out-of-school
	<p><i>In Addis Ababa</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ 1 FGD with youth council (mixed gender, in-school/recent graduates)→ 1 FGD with youth-led CSO (mixed gender, in-school/recent graduates)
5 In-depth interviews with youth advocates (4 female, 1 male, ages 19–26)	
5 Key informant interviews (3 female, 2 male)	

3.3 Data analysis

After having obtained informed consent from the participants, interviews and FGDs were conducted in Amharic language. They were transcribed and simultaneously translated to English. Both researchers analysed the transcripts – one researcher is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the other in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. For the analyses, the researchers using a pre-defined coding scheme based on the research objectives, and using NVivo software. To ensure the quality of the analysis, both researchers discussed and compared their coding after each having coded two transcripts, after which all transcripts were coded. Emerging themes were added, and redundant codes were revised.

3.4 Reference group and quality assurance

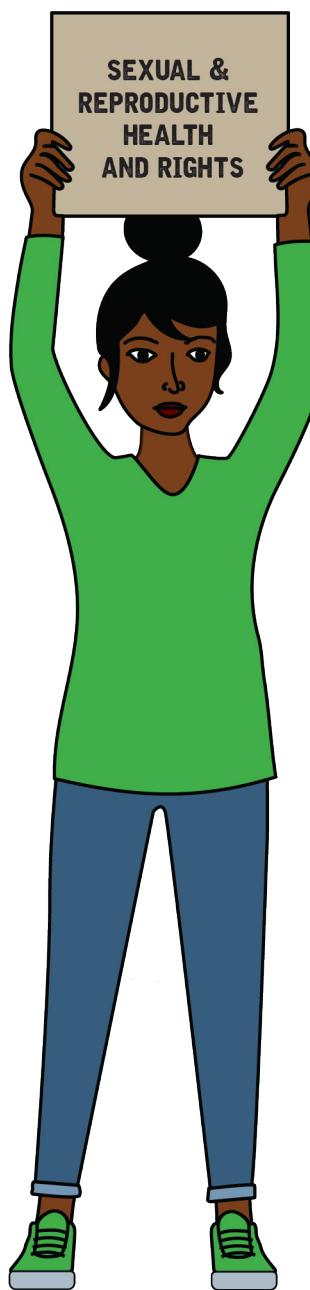
A reference group consisting of Break Free! Ethiopia consortium members and associated youth advocates was formed and consulted with at the end of three key phases of the study; the reference group engaged in 1) review of the research proposal; 2) review of the data collection tools; 3) review of the first draft version of the report. As such, the reference group was able to input on the relevance of the study and further contextualise the tools and findings. They were not compensated for this involvement, as it was considered directly relevant to their work. In addition to the reference group mechanism, the first draft report was reviewed by a KIT colleague who is also an expert on youth SRHR advocacy.

3.5 Limitations

This study is an explorative study on youth-led advocacy in Ethiopia. The causal effects of success factors and barriers and their impact on the outcomes of youth-led advocacy could not be assessed. Furthermore, key informants interviewed are only those who were directly involved in setting up or supporting youth-led advocacy initiatives, and duty bearers were not interviewed. Finally, while youth in different areas in the country participated in the study (Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa), explanations of differences between these two areas should be interpreted with care, since the sample size is small.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained by the Ethiopian Society Of Sociologists, Social Workers And Anthropologists (ESSSWA).



4. FINDINGS



4.1 Defining youth-led advocacy

Youth-led advocacy is pushing for a change by speaking up for yourself and teaching the society

When asked what youth-led advocacy means, youth participants mentioned that it includes young people being at the forefront in leading or pushing for a certain change, often targeted at policies or programmes concerning young people. One participant in the capital city quite illustratively described their role as a youth advocate as follows:

“[As a youth advocate] I participate in identifying our own problems, find solutions together, and try to echo the voice of our own and other young people to concerning bodies.” (Female youth advocate, 26)

Some youth participants added that youth-led advocacy requires collaboration with adults, including policy makers, religious leaders and community leaders.

When asked to explain in their own words what advocacy meant to them³, young people in Addis Ababa referred to advocacy as “being a voice for the voiceless, convincing others, helping others to understand, hammering, continuously telling what we believe in for change” (FGD with youth

³ It should be noted that there's no direct translation of the term advocacy in Amharic. In Addis Ababa, young people were largely familiar with the English term. In Bahir Dar, the term required some further explanation, possibly influencing the definitions of the young people.

advocates in Addis Ababa), and specified that particularly for SRHR advocacy, it includes breaking taboos. Target groups that were mentioned were policy makers and other decision makers, but also youth, marginalized groups, and “everyone”.

Interestingly, young people in Bahir Dar had different notions of what advocacy means. Young men in an FGD summarised that, according to them:

“Advocacy is fighting for our rights by teaching the society. For example, we target the farmers of our society, (...) we advocate and teach the farmers that if a girl experiences FGM, she will be scarred for lifetime, her chance of having a child will reduce. Also, we teach them early marriage will lead to teenage pregnancy, and she might end up having fistula, also she might die. (...) [NGO] is training us to teach the society about these issues.” (FGD with male youth advocates in Bahir Dar)

Young women in Bahir Dar defined advocacy as feeling empowered to speak up for themselves, alongside teaching the society:

“For example, advocacy is, when my parents force me to get married, I advocate for myself that I don’t want to get married, I want to go to school. I also tell others that this is illegal, it’s punishable and the girl will be exposed to different diseases. So teaching this is advocacy.”

(FGD with female youth advocates in Bahir Dar)

Aims of advocacy, according to participants, included: empowering young people to exercise their rights and being well-informed; duty bearers (e.g., policy makers, community leaders) carrying on the SRH agenda and amplifying it, amplifying youth voices and creating/mobilising more youth groups and advocates, creating an enabling environment, breaking taboos around SRHR, and achieving policy change.

4.2 Youth-led advocacy forms and activities

Youth-led advocacy also includes awareness raising and knowledge generation

Youth-led SRHR advocacy takes up many forms, and includes social media/online advocacy, information dissemination and awareness-raising through community gatherings or dramas, event

organising, and participation in youth forums. Participants also mentioned higher-level advocacy targeting policy makers, however, this was only mentioned by a few participants and only in Addis Ababa. The same group of participants also mentioned new knowledge production and dissemination as advocacy, likely based on their prior participation in research activities, and this activity was not mentioned by others.

Most youth-led advocacy targets young people's own communities (this includes virtual communities in some cases) with awareness-raising and information-sharing activities. However, some more established structures, that are all based in Addis Ababa, also target policy change in their advocacy activities. Examples of this are advocating for the disability act to be adopted by the government, and a few years ago advocating for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) towards the government. One youth advocate mentioned that she has been involved in the national youth health strategy development with the Ministry of Health (MoH), and that she is usually invited by the MoH to represent youth voices. At the same time, other youth groups actually shy away from working with the government:

“Because of the bureaucracy we didn’t go to the government, we don’t work with them, we don’t want to weaken our group by involving with the government. Nothing gets done when you work with the government, it’s bureaucracy, and too much regulations” (Male youth advocate, 26)

One youth advocate who was involved in the youth council of the NGO AMREF mentioned there is also some activity at international level, in addition to the community and national level activities, mainly through youth advocates participating in international youth summits.

Within the Bahir Dar area, youth advocacy is solely targeted at the community, and youth participation is integrated throughout already existing community structures. For instance, one youth group has joined a woreda⁴ council membership where young people put topics on the agenda such as harmful traditional practices. Other ways of doing advocacy through existing structures that were mentioned in Bahir Dar area were young people raising awareness on SRHR issues amongst women from the women development army (WDA)⁵, idirs⁶, and school clubs).

⁴ Woredas are the third level of the administrative divisions of Ethiopia – after zones and the regional states.

⁵ WDA members are organized by their neighbourhood and are commonly called “one-to-five” networks (denoting one leader and five member households) to promote women’s health and their family.

⁶ Idirs are community-based organizations that exist throughout Ethiopia and are established to support their members with funeral needs and arrangements. Membership in Idirs is family-based.

Box 2: Preconditions for youth-led SRHR advocacy

Youth-led advocacy is not yet common in Ethiopia, and some participants suggested ways of creating a more enabling environment for youth-led advocacy. One youth advocate based in Addis Ababa explained that there are different preconditions for doing advocacy; including '**awareness creation, empowerment, and project-based representation**'.

Awareness creation is needed to be taken seriously by adult decision makers: "because when you go somewhere in a meeting with adults, it is always assumed that the youth doesn't know much. As an advocate, I show them that we know, young people can decide for themselves"

Empowerment is important for movement building among young people: "For the youth, it is to help them realize that they can, they can advocate for themselves, it is about empowerment, so that they know their rights."

Representation is done through "project-based participation at NGOs to reflect youth voices. We represent the youth who didn't get the opportunity to speak at a higher level." (female youth advocate, 19). This also implies that all youth must be represented through the selected youth who are involved in NGO projects.

In Bahir Dar, youth advocates similarly reflected on how **gaining trust and respect from the community** has helped them in creating an environment in which they are able to conduct advocacy: "What we do is, first we volunteer in our community to gain the trust and so that they listen to us. We have supported elderly people; we have financially supported economically disadvantaged people from our monthly collected membership contributions. (...) After doing this volunteer activity, when we tried to do advocacy, the community said, "these young people have done good for the community, let's hear what they have to say". So, it's helpful. (FGD with female youth advocates in Bahir Dar)

Adult commitment is needed for facilitating meaningful youth participation

Participants indicated that adult-youth collaboration was key to facilitating meaningful youth participation and successful advocacy processes. Nevertheless, there is a sense among participants that organisations, despite reaching out to young people more for their participation, do not do this out of care for the views of young people, but more for bureaucratic or image reasons. This applies to duty bearers in government positions, as well as to NGOs themselves, as the following quotes illustrate:

“There is a problem with the NGOs working on SRH. They only focus on getting rid of the budget and for reporting purposes. They respond to your proposal by the end of the year when it is reporting time. We [youth council] could have done so much.” (FGD with youth council advocates, Addis Ababa)

“The government experts are mainly focused on building their political image. They don’t care about young people.” (FGD with youth council advocates, Addis Ababa)

“Among the NGOs who fund the youth council and who say that “youth voices are so important”, I have witnessed when they neglect and disrespect the voice of the youth. Not only neglecting our voices, but I have seen them ridiculing the young people. Imagine, they are implementers of the youth-led initiatives.” (Female youth advocate, 19)

“Youth led advocacy is a highly abused phrase because most things will be done by the adults and they invite young people at the final stage of the project and say the job is done by the youth.” (Female key informant)

One project, *Kefeta*, was mentioned by participants in both FGDs held in Addis Ababa to be different in nature and young people expected their participation would be more meaningful. They particularly lauded that young people were active owners of the project since its design, and mentioned being engaged in all stages, including in selecting the audience and developing the strategy, and that the majority of the staff are young people (see also Box 4 in section 4.5).

Youth participation is increasingly gender balanced, yet not all youth are equally represented

Despite the above mentioned challenges for meaningful participation, young people themselves often strongly recognised the need for equal participation. According to some youth participants, equal participation firstly meant ensuring a gender balance in staff and volunteer representation, as well as in youth who participate in training. However, at the same time, young women who advocate for SRHR might face stigma from their audience, more than young men would, particularly due to the sensitive nature of SRHR:

“When you are young woman advocating for SRHR, the participants assume, especially men, that you easy going, they want to take advantage of you (...) they label you as balege (unruly).” (Female youth advocate, 19)

Youth participants furthermore observed that young men and young women tend to be involved in advocacy efforts differently: they noticed that young men tend to participate more dominantly in NGO-initiated projects, whereas girls and young women are more actively involved in school-based youth groups. Their explanation for this difference was that boys in school tend to consider SRH issues to be girls' issues, whereas young men affiliated with NGO projects are often medical students exposed to consequences of poor SRH, or see other opportunities by being involved (see also: section on young people's motivations). This observation applied to young men in both Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa. In Bahir Dar, the young women from the youth group reported that the group used to be dominated by young men, but that after undergoing a training facilitated by the NGO Plan Ethiopia, young women have become more vocal.

With regards to including young people with disabilities in youth-led advocacy initiatives, participants reflected that this does happen, yet is less mainstream than they would like. In both study areas, it was reported that young people with disabilities actively participate in the group's activities. In Addis Ababa, SRHR for people with disabilities was a theme that gained growing recognition as an advocacy aim.

When youth advocates were asked if all young people were represented through their advocacy, opinions differed. One male advocate stated that all can participate equally because “No one is denying them their right to participation. (...) everyone has equal opportunity, it's up to them to use it” (male youth advocate, 26). Other youth advocates differed and reflected on the fact that they enjoy a position of privilege “Not only [thanks to] our education but [also] the training we have, the networks we share, where we live, physical ability also.” (FGD with youth advocates, Addis Ababa).

In terms of regional differences, youth advocates in Addis Ababa often felt they were representing and advocating for the rights of young people in rural areas, and some expressed frustration that NGOs did not focus on youth issues in the capital city as well. Generally, it was felt that the main talk was done by youth groups in Addis Ababa, who support sister initiatives in rural areas. However, others felt that the

youth groups in Addis are perhaps more vocal, but that youth groups in rural areas are much stronger in actually creating effects of advocacy, because they are often closer to the government:

“The talk is indeed in Addis, but the real work is out of Addis. The youth groups out of Addis are strong, and they are close to the government, and they influence the local government. There are many organizations sitting in Addis, but their real work is done out of Addis, in different regions.” (FGD with youth advocates, Addis Ababa)

4.3 Actors in youth advocacy

Youth-led advocacy is in its infant stage in Ethiopia

When asked about the youth-led advocacy landscape in Ethiopia, most participants agreed that it is in the infant stage. They attributed this to the CSO law that was active for over a decade in the country, which restricted civic space for lobby and advocacy. As one key informant stated:

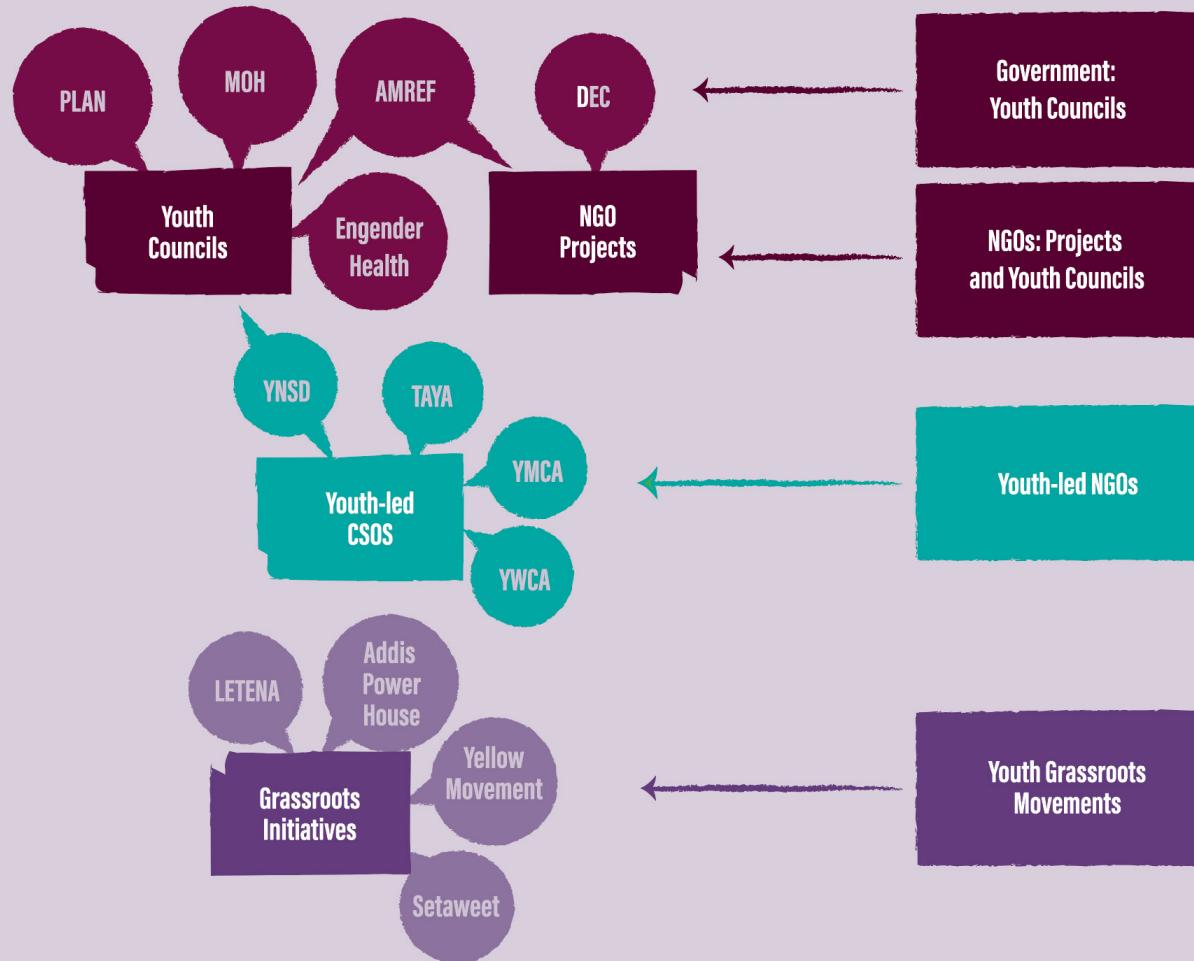
“I think advocacy is a new concept for Ethiopia, and myself as well, following the new CSO legislation it is recently that we started working on advocacy. After joining an NGO, I have been working on youth SRH. The advocacy aspect started since we started implementing the Power to You(th) project in AMREF.” (Male key informant)

However, even though advocacy is now legally permitted for CSOs, it is still associated with some level of stigma or outside interference (the CSO law particularly prohibited advocacy and rights-based work for organisations that received funding from abroad):

“Once you associate your organization with international organizations, there is a stigma, and they associate you with it. They say its Western influence. As we focus on SRH and gender equality, and the country is not ready for that.” (Female key informant)

Related to youth-led advocacy only beginning to take momentum since recent years, in Ethiopia, youth advocates highlighted the importance of training and skill building of youth advocates to strengthen the movement. This particularly related to training on SRHR and public speaking. Other relevant skills, such as project management, planning, and budgeting, were mentioned less frequently, probably reflecting the fact that young people were involved to a lesser extent in these tasks.

MOST STRUCTURES THAT FACILITATE YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY ARE RELATED TO NGOS



Despite the fact that advocacy done by CSOs on SRHR is associated with ‘western agendas’, participants reported that the CSO structure is the most commonly used for advocacy. That is, most youth advocacy initiatives are organised by CSOs or function under the umbrella of CSOs. As the figure above illustrates, participants reported five existing youth councils, four of which were initiated by CSOs, and one by MoH (this youth council seems to be dormant at the moment). There are four youth-led CSOs active in the country: Talent Youth Association (TaYa), Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), and Youth Network for Sustainable Development (YNSD), that are based in the capital city and have branches in rural areas. Other youth advocacy activities operate as part of established adult-led NGO projects, or take the form of (often more informal) grassroots initiatives.

Indeed, there are a few youth groups who are self-organised, but as some informants mentioned, they often aspire to establish themselves as a CSO, possibly in order to be able to obtain funding, and almost always engage with CSOs to access certain platforms for their activities. Indeed, youth advocates also reported to be taken more seriously when associated with established NGOs:

“The MOH for example appears like an ally. But they are not an ally for the youth council, they are more respectful of the umbrella NGO. I don’t think they collaborate with us if we come as a youth group. They do appreciate us now as long as we have the NGOs.” (Female youth advocate, 19).

Youth partnership with NGOs is important for the legitimacy of youth-led policy advocacy and engagement

Establishing youth advocacy as part of CSOs/NGOs seems to provide youth advocates some sense of security in terms of being taken seriously as well as financial sustainability. As one youth advocate stated: “we are safe because we are organised under an NGO” (FGD with youth advocates in Addis Ababa). Youth advocates particularly considered that partnership with NGOs, despite some of its shortcomings, is important for the legitimacy of youth-led policy advocacy and engagement: “as long as our ally NGOs are with us, the government respects us.” (female youth advocate, 19). However, youth advocacy is restricted by small budgets and almost fully depends on voluntary participation from young people, adding to the lack of inclusive representation of the young people who are unable to volunteer:

“Funding is important. The youth council is supported by the projects of NGOs. It doesn’t have independent funding and the budget is limited. (...) My parents are happy that I engage in volunteer work, so they give me money for transportation or any expense. But I feel bad for other young people who don’t have support at home. I wish such expenses are covered by funding, and basic financial needs don’t have to hinder them [other young people] from participation. In YNSD we used to be compensated for our transportation, but not at AMREF.” (Male youth advocate, 19)

Box 3: Youth councils

The most popular form of organising youth advocacy is in the form of youth councils that are associated to NGOs or CSOs. The mapping revealed that at least four active youth councils exist under different NGOs (AMREF, Plan, Engender Health, and YNSD), and another youth council at MoH was formed but seems dormant. However, such a form of organising youth advocacy comes with (financial) implications as well. As one youth advocate illustrated, by being under the structure of an NGO, there is no independent budget for the youth council, so when “The youth council designs activities, then the budget [needs to be] collected from [different] projects. This is challenging. Because of this, many activities have been left at the idea stage.” (male youth advocate, 26). Structuring youth advocacy under the NGO umbrella furthermore risks the sustainability of youth-led advocacy. Participants suggested to involve the state and other societal structures or actors “because once [name of the NGO] is gone, they [other societal structures or actors] will keep the advocacy going. They will sustain it. The project doesn’t have to depend on one NGO.” (Key informant) Finally, participants also reported that another downside of the youth council structure is that they are organised by adult-run NGOs and thus are not fully and independently youth-led.

4.4 Young people's motivations

The youth advocates engaging in SRHR advocacy seem to be motivated to engage in advocacy groups for various reasons.

According to the youth advocates, the most common motivating factors are the importance of SRHR, to youth participation, and personal gains/incentives. It is recognised that some of these motivational factors are inspired by donor trainings and opportunities, although most young people identify with the importance of the SRHR and youth participation agenda.



Almost all young people consider SRHR as an important issue

All the youth advocates reported that their primary motivation to engage in SRHR advocacy is that SRHR is a critical issue that affects the lives of young people in Ethiopia. They report that SRHR issues are affecting their own lives, the lives of young people in their life (friends and family), and of other young people that they do not personally know in their village and city.

“I want to give young women the opportunity to know about themselves, their body, and to educate them. That’s why I joined.” (FGD with youth council advocates, Addis Ababa)

“It’s because of the girls we see every day at the hospital [as a medical professional]. You want to solve it. Also, the people who are against our work, the ones who threaten us online, insult us, [it’s] all because they are uninformed. By the way, they anonymously reach out to us to ask for further information. This is human nature, when they need help, they whisper, and they insult you louder in public.” (Female key informant, 27)

Youth advocates, particularly young women, usually relate their motivation with creating awareness around family planning and reproductive health.

“To be honest, the first motivation was that my friend was pregnant, I didn’t have any knowledge on how to help her. I didn’t know what options she had. Then I decided that it is important to have knowledge and information. Imagine if knew about contraception, her life would have been better. That’s what motivates me. I want to help young people. I know my religion and family doesn’t want me to talk about contraception, but I believe I have to teach young people.” (Female youth advocate, 19)

“Girls we used to feel inferior, we were denied of access to education. They say “what is the use of education for girls, nothing”. So, they [girls] were forced to early marriage. But now after this societal education, they [society] learned that harmful traditional practices affect girls by leaving them behind. This is what motivated me.” (FGD with female youth advocates, Bahir Dar)

On the other hand, male youth advocates seem to relate their motivation to conduct SRHR advocacy with drug abuse in addition to the SRHR issues.

“There are many young people who get trapped in drug abuse, pregnancy because of lack of information. Luckily, I survived.” (Male youth advocate, 26)

The gendered motivations were also recognized by the stakeholders in a way that may reflect on how they engage with young men and women youth advocates (which needs further study).

“Boys and girls have different motivations depending on their different problems. The boys have physical fights among each other, but the girls have way worse problems that can damage their life forever, like early pregnancy that could lead to school dropout and then economic problems and much more. So, their motivation can be different depending on their context.” (Female key informant)

Despite these differences, the importance of SRHR issues was discussed by all young people regardless of their gender, place of residence or background. The difference between genders or youth from urban or rural areas lies in the advocacy issues they focus on and the importance they attach to certain topics.

Young people particularly wish for youth perspectives to be included

The importance of youth participation and the inclusion of their voices is the other factor that motivates young people to engage in advocacy. This importance of youth voices is mostly recognized by the youth groups working in the capital, Addis Ababa, and less so at kebele level. The youth advocates in Addis Ababa argued that the issues of SRHR affect the lives of young people, hence their participation in the advocacy is important.

“As a group, a sense of united purpose is our drive. Lack of meaningful youth participation, SRHR issues decided by the adults only, young people being neglected from the issues that concern them, that motivates us to come together and push.” (FGD with youth advocates, Addis Ababa)

Similarly, the youth advocates seem to be motivated to increase the inclusion of voices of the excluded, particularly the voice of people with disabilities and the voice of young people in rural contexts:

“For example, me as a woman with disability, working on social work, SRHR related works don’t have disability inclusion. Even if the policy advises inclusion, the individual experts do not have the awareness and there is a big information gap. Young people with disabilities also don’t have the information to access the SRHR services available, even if they know about it, the location and the services are not disability friendly. That’s why I wanted to be an advocate, that’s what drives me.” (FGD with youth council, Addis Ababa)

The youth participants seemed motivated to represent the needs of young people who they believe didn’t have the opportunity to be heard. Moreover, these young people also aim to change the prejudice around young people not being capable of advocating for themselves. Their advocacy in turn, they report, will pave the road for the next generation the opportunity to participate in decision making on issues that concern their life.

“The other is, there is a need to advocate against the assumption that young people don’t know, don’t have experience, that they are children. No. This generation has much more exposure and it’s not fair to decide for young people. Even at family level, I don’t want them to decide for me. So at project level as well, I don’t want adults to decide for us about what our needs are, what solutions we need. Adults already had their youth a long time ago, it’s not the same year, the problem is different, good thing, bad thing, it’s different. Adults shouldn’t tell young people that “this is your problem; you solve it this way.” This is my main drive.” (Female youth advocate, 19)

While youth advocates from the capital thus emphasised youth voice and representation of the marginalised as main motivations, the youth advocates working at kebele level seem to be more driven by addressing local-level SRHR challenges. This discrepancy in the sphere of influence among the rural and urban youth advocates implies the degree of privilege that the urban youth advocates get over the rural level youth advocates.

Young people are also interested in personal gains/incentives

Finally, youth advocates were also honest about the gains at a personal level such as satisfaction, professional development, learning and skills development, training opportunities, employment opportunities, financial gains, recognition, and travel opportunities. Such personal level gains were more explicitly valued among male youth advocates:

“I was actively applying for a scholarship. I learned that a scholarship application requires participation in extra-curricular activities in my CV, which I didn’t have. My university didn’t have clubs to participate in. So, when I learned about the YNSD council at the event, I decided to join.”

(Male youth advocate, 26)

In particular, the youth advocates based in the capital reported that their motivation to be youth advocates was underlined by gains at the personal level. In contrast, several youth advocates at the rural kebele level were inherently motivated by their passion for SRHR. This can be a privilege related to urban-rural geographic location that the youth advocates are enjoying in Addis Ababa. Since a large majority of the training, employment and networking opportunities are concentrated in Addis Ababa, the youth advocates located in the area seem to have benefited more than the advocates in Bahir Dar area.

Due to incentives and opportunities available in Addis Ababa, some youth advocates reportedly apply to participate in multiple youth groups, which other youth advocates found problematic:

“When it comes to youth-led advocacy, many of the NGOs recruit the same group of young people. You see these same young people in every meeting, in every organisation’s youth council, it’s always the same face. It’s not fair. This should change. Opportunities should be given to different young people with no experience of advocacy before. In the process, they will be capacitated and empowered. Those who are already empowered have a lot of opportunities to raise their voice.” (FGD with youth council members, Addis Ababa)

Youth advocates recommended that CSOs should provide equal opportunities for participation for all young people regardless of their previous advocacy experience. They asserted that equal participation will promote inclusion of the least privileged young people.

4.5 Success factors

Young people named few examples of youth-led activities

In Ethiopia, advocacy is a new phenomenon that is related to the lifting of the restrictive CSO policy environment. As a result, youth-led advocacy, which is predominantly initiated and financed by CSOs, is newly reviving from the restrictive policy. There are only a few examples of successful advocacy initiatives identified in the study, that are all in the start-up phase. Kefeta project is one of the major youth-led projects mentioned as a successful initiative being implemented all over Ethiopia.

Box 4: The Kefeta project

Kefeta is a five-year programme implemented by the Amref Health Africa in a consortium with other organisations. Kefeta takes a holistic approach to support economic and social opportunities for youth in Ethiopia, by focusing on democracy and good governance, basic education, higher education, economic empowerment and sexual reproductive health in its program activities.

Youth advocates considered it a successful example of youth-led initiatives, because it is the youth council who, in collaboration with adults, **planned** and **designed** the project, and **developed the proposal**. Youth were also engaged in **selecting the audience, strategy, and implementing** the project. It is implemented all over Ethiopia, covering around 17 cities engaging young people between 15-29 years old, who work with local ministries. The **majority of staff are young** people, with only a few adults.

(FGD with youth council members, Addis Ababa)

Interestingly, when asked for an example of successful youth advocacy, the Bahir Dar youth advocates particularly mentioned their actions to create awareness among the society to challenge early marriage, FGM, unwanted pregnancy, rape, and abduction, amongst others. This is also confirmed by a key informant:

“First, at woreda level, the youth groups have intervened and stopped about nine child marriages from happening only in this quarter of the year. Second, so many young people have gotten information on SRH, and services they need in collaboration with the health centre.”

(Male key informant, Bahir Dar)

It thus seems that youth advocates in Addis Ababa consider youth SRHR advocacy particularly successful when it is youth-led or where young people are involved, whereas the youth advocates in Bahir Dar are more focused on seeing change in their own communities.

Success factors include good partnerships with adults, time and recourse investments, and good organisation skills

Box 5: Success Factors

According to the various youth advocates who participated in this study, key ingredients for successful and effective youth-led SRHR advocacy are:



Commitment on paper still needs to translate to fruitful youth-adult partnerships in reality

In one project (Kefeta) where young people were involved in all stages of the project, the youth-adult collaboration was considered a key ingredient for success. However, it should be noted that this success factor is rare. In an FGD with youth advocates who are part of an NGO-initiated youth council, all recalled experiences of not being taken seriously (e.g., being asked if they were accompanied by older family members at high-level meetings, and adults expressing frustration in having to entertain initiatives coming from young people). One young person reflected that the mindset of valuing adult initiatives even trickles down to their own youth organisation.

“The enthusiasm you see on paper and the practical experience for youth engagement doesn’t match. Even our own organization [the NGO that organised a youth council] doesn’t treat the youth council equal to adult initiatives. There is improvement but we are not there yet.”

(FGD with youth advocates, Addis Ababa)

Key informants also reflected on the limitations of existing structures to collaborate with young people. They reflected on the fact that leaders of youth organisations are often not young themselves anymore, and that voluntary participation of youth can decrease their commitment to certain advocacy initiatives and long-term engagement. One key informant was also critical about NGO staffing procedures:

“If you randomly see the vacancy announcements at NGOs, it always requires 5, 7, 8 years of work experience. This excludes young people”

(Male key informant, Bahir Dar)

Coaching and skill development strategies are key to successful youth-led advocacy

Coaching was considered an important strategy to get more young people capacitated to occupy advocacy spaces, because “when the adults coach, the youth learn and take over” (female key informant). Indeed, the Bahir Dar youth advocates reported that they are heard by both members of the society and actively work with the government bodies in addressing grassroot problems. To them, the collaboration with adults and respect received was a key ingredient to their successes.

“Our youth group is respected, and we are treated with respect. The community sees us as the “educated” members of the society. When some problem happens, they consult us and ask for our help. Previously, they used to say don’t speak back to the elders. But now they listen to us. Because of this, many young women are being empowered to participate in community conversations. If you visit a kebele office, you will find many young people working there as well.”

(FGD with male youth advocates, Bahir Dar)

As can be seen from the above quote, the capacity development and sense of empowerment amongst the youth group helped them claim their right to participation in policy decision making.

Young people need allies who work alongside them to amplify their agendas

Both at national and district level, NGOs are mentioned as the major ally to SRHR advocacy, and youth advocates considered it strategic to be organised under NGO umbrella’s or collaborate with NGOs, despite some of the challenges. According to youth advocates, government bodies are identified as both an ally and a difficulty to the advocacy initiatives. Particularly among the youth advocates in Addis Ababa, government bodies are in some way identified as being difficult to work with, and advocates rather work with selected individuals within government bodies:

“The government is usually more of a barrier than an ally [all laughed]... but I think some individuals at the government office is a good way to put it. There are supportive individuals but not the office” (FGD with youth council members, Addis Ababa)

On the other hand, in the Bahir Dar area, the government bodies are identified as an ally who closely work with youth advocates: “we work in harmony with government officials like hand and gloves” (FGD with male youth advocates, Bahir Dar). The kebele level government officers from women and social affairs , kebele leaders, police, health workers, teachers, community elders and religious leaders were mentioned as allies of the SRHR initiatives. The difference in perceptions and experiences of government actors as allies could be explained by the fact that national level policies are made in the capital, which are possibly less accessible for youth than district level government officers in Bahir Dar, where policies are adopted and implemented and youth advocates are engaged in informing practices.

Young people have more power when organised as a group

The youth advocates in Bahir Dar reported that they are engaged in SRHR-related activities and other activities concerning their community in collaboration with the kebele leaders. This opportunity for participation is especially recognised at group level rather than individual level.

“As a group I believe we have a good reputation and acceptance among the society. It can be hard to be heard as an individual youth, but as a group, people listen to us, we are making changes.” (FGD with youth advocates, Bahir Dar)

This indicates that young people have more power when organised in groups rather than trying to individually advocate for youth SRHR and amplify youth voices.

4.6 Constraints

Young people face a double challenge in advocating for both youth participation and SRHR

One of the major challenges young people reported when working in advocacy was limited opportunity for meaningful participation. This is directly connected to the attitudes and values attached to young people's opinions, where adults, and particularly duty bearers, are reported to disregard young people's views. Young people reported such restrictions are particularly coming from the government sector, but some NGOs are also criticised for not prioritising youth advocacy or not taking their (own initiated) youth advocate structures seriously (see also section 4.3). Furthermore, the dependency on NGO timelines and budgets are reported as constraints to youth advocacy, especially for youth councils.

Similarly, the SRHR agenda in itself is viewed as sensitive and makes it additionally challenging for young people to actively advocate on.

“The other problem is attitude. When you invite people for SRHR training, it is assumed that it is to prepare them for sex. It is important to communicate that the objective is to promote healthy youth. (...)

The community norm in general is against SRH agenda. The already existing attitudes towards SRHR is a challenge. SRHR is seen as a sin, so if young people are advocating for that, it is considered that the young people have abandoned their religion. So it is challenging. Just being a young advocate by itself is not respectable and imagine when its SRH agenda. It will be a double challenge.” (FGD with youth council advocates, Addis Ababa)

Not only from the community and adult partnership perspective are the social norms a constraint for young people to freely advocate for SRHR, it is also an internal struggle. One young advocate reflected on how their personal religious values complicates their SRHR advocacy work:

“The other challenge is religion. The issues of HIV, STI, abortion, reproductive health are hard to discuss. Especially on abortion, I’m still struggling to speak about it, it contradicts with my religious values.”

(Female youth advocate, 19)

Some youth advocates also experienced barriers from their own family members:

“Family is also another challenge, they say “you are too young to talk about this”, “is this really your concern?” because they don’t know anything about it. Family issue is the main problem that most youth council members struggle with, “why is SRH your concern?” is what they ask.” (Female youth advocate, 19)

Several youth advocates encounter these issues in the beginning of their participation as youth advocates. Yet, some did also notice that the work of the youth group has a positive impact in terms of duty bearers’ attitudes changing and creating a more supportive environment.

In its current forms, most youth-led initiatives lack the infrastructure to be sustainable

The lack of infrastructure is a commonly reported challenge. The lack of office and material supplies and financial issues are reported as a challenge. In Bahir Dar area, the infrastructure challenges reported are usually direct inputs for the advocacy work like materials, office space, funding, and also time for the youth volunteers to participate; since most youth have other jobs and responsibilities to do.

All these problems are recognized at the national and kebele level. At kebele level, youth themselves have initiated a form of self-organisation to tackle their financial challenges.

We have 30 birr monthly contribution, also a 5birr latecomers penalty, and double monthly contribution (6obirr) for the ones who miss the monthly meeting. So we have sustainable income. (FGD with male youth advocates, Bahir Dar)

Funding is important. The youth council is supported by the projects of NGOs. It doesn't have independent funding and the budget is limited. In Ethiopia voluntarism is completely for free, but if there was some small compensation, it even motivates the volunteers even more. For example I have observed that even to attend trainings, young people chose the one with per diem rather than the one for free. I don't blame them, these people are students, it's not fair that they have to pay for their transportation to participate in trainings. (female youth advocate, 19)

At the national level, it is mostly expected for the NGOs and government to address their needs, since youth groups are mostly hosted under an NGO-umbrella, apart from the grassroots initiatives that have self-organised.

Recommendations by youth advocates to stakeholders

Below the recommended actions that youth advocates mentioned are listed, that they felt would improve youth advocacy on SRHR in Ethiopia. Most recommendations apply to NGO allies; whereas the final recommendation specifically targeted the government.



Empower youth groups by supporting their initiatives with legal registration



Train young people who have less experience with youth advocacy



Ensure meaningful participation in projects and policy development



Cover transport costs of young people who volunteer, to motivate and allow all youth equal opportunities to participate and lead



Include meaningful participation of youth advocates in regular monitoring and evaluation of related projects



Government to strengthen youth centres across the county to provide sustainable structures for youth participation and leadership



Provide equal opportunities for youth participation and leadership to all youth

5. CONCLUSION



THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY WAS TO EXPLORE HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ADVOCATE FOR SRHR IN BAHIR DAR AND ADDIS ABABA, AND WHAT CAN BE LEARNT FROM THIS FOR PROGRAMMING TO SUPPORT YOUTH SRHR ADVOCACY IN ETHIOPIA. It has become evident that, while there is increasing attention to youth-led advocacy and SRHR advocacy in the country, initiatives are at an infant stage. This is mainly attributed to the 2009 CSO proclamation that has been in place for two decades, that has severely restricted civil space to work on rights and advocacy. The 2019 revision of the proclamation should create renewed space and opportunity to develop a stronger youth mobilisation for SRHR advocacy. However, youth participation in advocacy was not yet widely accepted amongst duty bearers and youth advocates faced a “double burden” of breaking taboos in both SRHR issues as well as paving the way for youth voices to be taken seriously.

Youth-led advocacy is understood by the participants as young people pushing for change being at the forefront on issues concerning young people, at both community and policy level; the latter focus mostly in Addis Ababa. Most activities were focused on community level work, such as awareness-raising and information-sharing activities. The focus on community awareness-raising rather than policy change can be explained by the decades of restricted space for civil society to do lobby and advocacy, as well as the fact that NGOs tend to focus on community issues for improved SRHR in rural areas. Youth advocates also thought awareness raising in the community is an important prerequisite for youth-led SRHR advocacy to take off, as an enabling and accepting environment is needed. However, the constraints in being able to influence national-level policy making was a major frustration to youth advocates, especially among the Addis Ababa-based youth.

The most popular form of organizing youth advocacy is youth councils that are associated with NGOs or CSOs. In fact, the mapping done as part of this study identified four NGO-initiated youth councils in Addis Ababa, and one initiated by MoH (although that one seems to be dormant). Establishing youth advocacy as part of CSOs/NGOs provided youth advocates some sense of security in legitimizing their voices and financial sustainability. On the other hand, being organized under NGOs is limiting the youth advocacy groups from independently planning activities and securing

grants, and furthermore increased some stigma towards the young people, by being labelled as influenced by Western agendas. Nevertheless, NGOs are identified as a major ally to youth-led SRHR advocacy, especially in Addis Ababa where youth advocates felt discouraged by the lack of government engagement with youth groups. In Bahir Dar, young people collaborated more successfully with the district government; they actively worked together in addressing grassroots problems. Some youth advocates in Addis Ababa who were part of grassroots initiatives, stated they valued the independence from NGOs. Independence here referred to both financial and content decision making, as well as less association with foreign agendas.

Motivating factors among young people to take part in advocacy included the importance of SRHR, youth participation, and personal gains/incentives (only in Addis Ababa). The importance of individual opportunities and incentives can possibly be explained by the predominance of the NGO sector pulling youth-led advocacy initiatives. This is different from the youth group formation in Bahir Dar area, where the advocates were already established in the grassroots form and later supported by NGOs. Young men tended to participate more dominantly in NGO-initiated projects, whereas girls and young women were more actively involved in school-based youth groups, a difference visible across both Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar.

The most commonly identified success factors for youth-led advocacy are:



Good adult-youth collaboration



Working with allies for fruitful outcomes



Meaningful and inclusive youth participation



Being organised as youth group

In Addis Ababa, SRHR for people with disabilities is gaining momentum as a theme in the advocacy, and youth with disabilities participated in both Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar youth groups. Despite these four factors being key to successful youth-led advocacy, youth advocates, were quite critical about the quality of adult-youth collaboration, meaningful youth participation, and support from allies. This was particularly the case in Addis Ababa, where young people were cynical about the intentions from duty bearers as well as NGOs. In Bahir Dar, the challenge was mostly related to budget constraints and need for more support to be organised as youth group. Other constraints were social values that underrate young people's voices at all levels, as well as lack of sustainable structures to maintain youth advocacy projects. That is, there is a high NGO dependency that makes youth-led advocacy dependent on outside funding and is not mainstreamed into existing government or community structures.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

BASED ON THE STUDY, THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS WERE FORMULATED THAT COULD IMPROVE PROGRAMMING FOR MEANINGFUL AND INCLUSIVE YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY:

Since NGOs are the main player and ally in Ethiopia for youth advocates, they carry a responsibility to set an example in promoting meaningful and inclusive participation and fair compensation. This includes:



Revising hiring policies to attract more young people as staff, and preferably a diverse range of young people



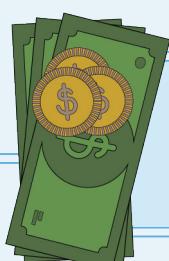
Not only initiate youth councils, but if/when there are youth councils, actively involve youth members in planning, designing, decision making processes, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of activities



Allocate enough budget to youth councils to plan and execute work that is considered relevant by the youth



Diversify youth council membership by revising the requirements, to ensure a wider diversity of (less privileged) young people can become member. This also includes compensation of costs (e.g., travel costs) so that less privileged youth can participate as well



Offer fair financial compensation to young people who are not staff, so that they can be remunerated for their time, efforts, and their costs incurred can be covered



Youth council and other NGO-budget dependent structures are not sustainable for continued youth-led advocacy. NGOs can play key roles in supporting the integration of youth-led advocacy groups and efforts into national/government-owned structures, since they have the legitimacy and often have good working relationships with government offices (depending on the focus/geographic area)



Governments should continue to work with youth representatives in their offices where this is already done, and strengthen youth structures to support youth participation in policy making and implementation



Since youth-led advocacy is at infant stage, it is all the more important to support young people's skills development to manage and lead efforts



Youth councils are a popular form of youth engagement, but such efforts should be coordinated to mobilise a stronger and more unified youth movement for SRHR advocacy. In addition, stronger coordination and unification can help to avoid double memberships and double burdens (or privileges) of youth who participate in several youth councils

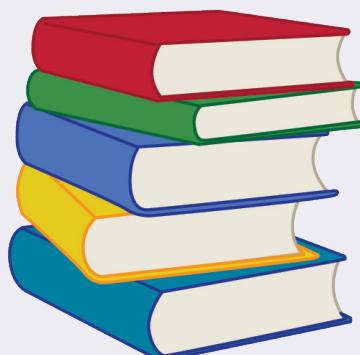


Encourage and support independent youth groups working on advocacy. As seen in Bahir Dar area, what has been successful is that an existing community-based structure was strengthened to improve youth SRHR advocacy. It is recommended to continue working with already existing community-based structures (e.g., school clubs, youth centers) and strengthen those, instead of adding new parallel structures

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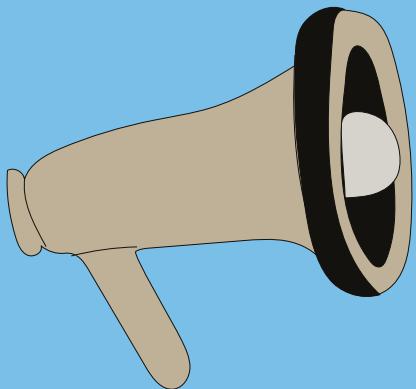
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ANNEX 1: OVERVIEW OF THE MAPPING

NAME OF ORGANISATION, INITIATIVE OR NETWORK	DESCRIPTION	ADVOCACY THEMES	ADVOCACY STRATEGIES	TARGET AUDIENCE	GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE	OTHER COMMENTS
Kefeta Project	Kefeta Project is youth initiated project, led by the youth for a holistic empowerment of the youth	Holistic youth empowerment, Economic empowerment, health, civic engagement gender and SRHR, youth advocacy.	Policy advocacy through meaningful participation of young people	Government and community	17 cities in all regions	
Amref youth council	Youth council organized under the support of AMREF	Youth access to SRHR service and information, youth engagement	NGO organized youth group to represent youth voices in policy making and youth awareness creation	Policy makers, youth, community leaders	Organized at different level national, regional, and kebele.	
Plan International youth council	Youth council organized under the support of plan	Youth access to SRHR service and information, youth engagement	NGO organized youth group to represent youth voices in policy making and youth awareness creation	Policy makers, youth, community leaders	Organized at different level national, regional, and kebele.	
Engender health youth council	Youth council organized under the support of engender health	Youth access to SRHR service and information, youth engagement	NGO organized youth group to represent youth voices in policy making and youth awareness creation	Policy makers, youth, community leaders	Organized at different level national, regional, and kebele.	
MoH youth council			MoH organised youth group to represent youth voices in policy making	Policy makers	National level	It is dormant
DEC	NGO supporting and capacitating youth groups to SRHR advocacy	In-school SRHR education, Kefeta project	Support for School clubs, grassroots youth groups	Adolescent and Youth, decision makers at local and national level	Amhara, Oromia, Afar, and Addis Ababa	
YNSD	Youth organization (CSO) organized by the youth for the youth. Also has a youth council	Youth access to SRHR service and information, youth engagement	Participation in policy dialogues, organizing advocacy trainings to the youth,	Decision makers, youth	National level and Addis Ababa	
TAYA	Youth organization (CSO) organized by the youth for the youth.	Youth access to SRHR service and information, youth engagement	Participation in policy dialogues, organizing advocacy trainings to the youth,	Decision makers, youth	National level and Addis Ababa	

NAME OF ORGANISATION, INITIATIVE OR NETWORK	DESCRIPTION	ADVOCACY THEMES	ADVOCACY STRATEGIES	TARGET AUDIENCE	GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE	OTHER COMMENTS
YMCA	Youth organization (CSO) organized by the youth for the youth.	Youth empowerment		Adolescent and Youth, decision makers at local and national level	Organized at different level national, regional, and <i>kebele</i> .	
YWCA	Youth organization (CSO) organized by the youth for the youth.	Gender Equality, Youth, women and young girl's empowerment, SRH		Adolescent and Youth, decision makers at local and national level	Organized at different level national, regional, and <i>kebele</i> .	
Annual youth health forum	MoH initiated annual youth health forum in which grassroots youth participate					
Addis Power house	Youth initiated and youth led feminist initiative for knowledge creation and dissemination	GBV, gender equality, youth and women civic engagement and participation	Knowledge production/research and dissemination, social media content creation, intergenerational collaboration	Youth, women, decision makers and authorities	Urban centered	
Letena ethiopia	Letena Ethiopia is a youth initiated and youth-led social media advocacy and awareness creation platform	Adolescent and youth SRHR information	Social media and Mass media content creation	Adolescent and Youth	Urban centered	
Yellow movement	Youth initiated and youth led feminist initiative	GBV, gender equality, women empowerment	Gender round table discussion in Universities, resource mobilization for female students in need, free legal support for women in need, social media content creation	Youth, women, decision makers and authorities	Addis Ababa university and Mekelle University (not active due to the war) law school	
Setaweeet	Social nonprofit that employs young women to advocate on gender issues	GBV				
School clubs and youth centres	Community level clubs where youth come together	Depends on the club/centre	Depends on the club/centre	Community, adolescents and youth, local decision makers	Nation-wide at community level	



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