

Convening Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Advocates for Advocacy Strategy Creation and Organizational Development

Introduction

Teen pregnancy and early marriage rates remain high in Malawi, despite government commitments to improving youth-friendly health services. To hold the government accountable, the youth-led organization Youth Response for Social Change (YRSC) worked with young people and government stakeholders to improve access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies. In Machinga District, where stigma and misinformation lead to high rates of teenage pregnancy, YRSC created a targeted advocacy strategy to increase district funding for youth-friendly health services to better meet the needs of adolescents and youth in the district.

Program Description

With financial support from PAI through the YOUAccess Fund, YRSC attended a workshop with other youth advocates where everyone shared their experiences, learned from other youth advocates and developed a targeted strategy. At the workshop, PAI shared the SMART Advocacy approach to help YRSC and other youth advocates determine opportunities for advocacy, identify decision-makers and create an action plan to advocate for increased funding for youth-friendly health services in Machinga District.

While PAI was there to guide the strategy development process, provide feedback and ask probing questions, YRSC identified the advocacy opportunity, activities and strategy details, resulting in a locally driven work plan. This was the first time many adolescent- and youth-led (AYL) organizations were financially supported to attend a workshop where they had the time to create their own strategy. YRSC built its strategy around asking the Machinga District Health Officer to include a 10% increase in the family planning budget line specifically for adolescents and youth.

Following the workshop, PAI provided a grant to YRSC to implement its strategy. Armed with a clear plan, YRSC held meetings with district health and budget officials and youth champions, ultimately asking for an increase in the district budget for reproductive health supplies for adolescents and youth. YRSC also participated in additional YOUAccess convenings with other youth advocates throughout the grant period to strengthen its advocacy capacity. These convenings provided a safe space for learning and allowed advocates to adapt the experiences of others to their own advocacy work.

“The meetings that bring the YOUAccess partners together allow us to learn from each other. Learning from other partners, what they’re doing in terms of advocacy, we also follow their lead ... I feel like the flexibility to say, ‘Okay, let’s come together. Let’s learn from each other’ is great!”

— PEACE NDOLA, YRSC

Results

YRSC staff strengthened their understanding of different advocacy approaches and created a locally driven strategy that allowed them to achieve their objective.

Due to YRSC's advocacy, Machinga District increased the family planning budget line by 10% to provide additional youth-friendly health services.

More young people in Machinga District have a better understanding of the district budgeting process and can advocate for their rights.

Lessons Learned

Providing AYL organizations with technical support to develop their own advocacy strategies strengthens civil society and builds a cohort of young people who can successfully advocate for the needs of adolescents and youth.

Supplying sufficient funding to AYL organizations to implement their advocacy strategies supports the achievement of advocacy goals and objectives.

Creating spaces where adolescents and youth advocates can ask questions, learn, strategize and dialogue with each other empowers them to try/pilot new advocacy approaches.



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YRSC
Youth Response for Social Change

Youth Response for Social Change focuses on improving the lives of women, young people and adolescents by identifying, preventing and following up on cases of poor governance and weak engagement between duty bearers and citizens. More information can be found at www.youthresponsesc.org.

PAI works with policymakers in Washington, D.C., and our network of global partners to advocate for accessible, quality health care and advance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, youth and at-risk communities. More information can be found at www.pai.org.

YOUAccess provides financial and technical support to youth-led organizations to advocate for increased funding and improved policies on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights in low- and middle-income countries. More information can be found at www.pai.org/projects/youaccess.