



A peer education session in Jordan

## The Youth Peer Education Network

*Fatma Hacıoglu*

**Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER), is a grouping of more than 500 non-profit organisations and governmental institutions with a membership of over 7,000 young people from 39 countries. The groundbreaking and comprehensive youth initiative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is involved in adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH). The growing global network covers Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, North and East Africa, and most recently, Brazil.**

Y-PEER groups young people who are active peer educators, trainers of trainers and youth advocates for adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Its core concept is meaningful participation of young people in the governance, management, coordination, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of the network's activities.

Such an expansive network demands an effective communication strategy for both reaching its youth leaders and keeping in touch with other young people. Internal communication tools and appropriate outreach and education materials are key to realising this goal. To reach out to 39 countries, Y-PEER had to create its own internal communication systems to be able to get its voices heard nationally.

Fun is integral to young people's learning. Therefore, reaching out to a wide range of youthful populations calls for employment

of innovative techniques. Y-PEER's five years' experience in peer education has helped develop such techniques.

By the end of 2007, Y-PEER had linked up with nearly 7,000 members in all the member countries. The Network continues to evolve and grow as more young people join in. Currently, our website and listserves provide peer educators with access to the state-of-the-art information and techniques on peer education, prevention of STIs and HIV and AIDS and other sexual and reproductive health-related topics.

### Communication models

Y-PEER uses a newsletter and a news bulletin to organise its internal networking and to promote its activities and issues. Y-PEER Newsletter targets external audiences seeking detailed information about Y-PEER's approaches and activities, while *Y-PEER News Bulletin* keeps the ever-growing membership updated on the

networks' country activities, new resources and upcoming meetings and conferences.

Pivotal to Y-PEER is an interactive website accessible at both [www.youthpeer.org](http://www.youthpeer.org) and [www.youthpeer.net](http://www.youthpeer.net). The websites are designed and managed by members. The website has a daily traffic numbering as many as 20,000 page views with around 12,000 visitors per month. The website is the primary resource library for Y-PEER globally. All the publications in the *Y-PEER Toolkit* can be found there as can meeting agendas and minutes, all the newsletters and news bulletins, videos produced and directed by Y-PEER country networks, photo galleries, and member details, among others.

Y-PEER's electronic forum on the website is quite popular with users. Over 800 subscribers globally subscribe to eight listserves that are managed by Y-PEER, and over 1,200 members contribute to national listserves in all country networks.

Tatjana Todorenko from Ukraine describes the website as 'youth-friendly'. "As a peer educator, the website is very useful for searching for more information. However, I like discussion forums more. Through them I can post a challenge I am facing in my country and other peer educators from

different countries can answer and share their experiences. I like to be part of this big family.”

Y-PEER is creating more interactive, youth-friendly information sharing and training tools for young people, trainers, programme managers and organisations. Its tools include:

### Cyber-peer

The CD-ROM was developed jointly with Family Health International. It provides a wide range of information on sexual and reproductive health topics, including sexually-transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, contraceptives and peer education. The content of Cyber-peer is supplemented by several role-play videos and tests. Young people, who after completing this CD pass the final test with a good score, are awarded a certificate and become peer educators.

“We use Cyber-peer because it’s simple and interesting for our target audience. It comprises all basic information needed for a person to conduct peer education sessions. It also offers a good basis for certification of peer educators,” Victor Petrovski from Macedonia, said.

Victor’s compatriot, Ivica Cekovski, concurs: “It is highly interactive and fun, which is absolutely necessary for the target group that it is designed for – youth. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity for standardisation and ensuring the quality of peer education worldwide.”

### “Transit” movie and training module

Y-PEER and MTV’s Staying Alive have partnered in several collaborations. The production and distribution of the independent film ‘Transit’ is perhaps the most extensive collaboration undertaken to date. The “Transit” Facilitators’ Manual was developed to accompany the 90-minute MTV-produced film distributed in collaboration with Y-PEER.

*Transit* is an original film that exposes issues of relationships, risk behaviours and

HIV to young audiences around the world using fictional, yet realistic interwoven portraits of young people’s lives on four continents. The movie motivated Nour Abbadi from Jordan to take responsibility and play a role in reducing HIV infections. He says: “When I watched the movie for the second time, I felt guilty about social discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Then those feelings were converted into a realisation of my responsibilities as a peer educator to end this social discrimination.”

The Facilitators Manual assists teachers, peer educators and others wishing to use *Transit* as the basis for facilitated discussions on HIV education and issues related to sexual decision making, negotiation of difficult social situations that young people may not be equipped to handle, and the consequences of high-risk behaviours. A DVD of the film is included with the Facilitators Manual. Y-PEER has distributed nearly 5,000 copies of the manual in English, French and Russian and MTV’s *Staying Alive* programme is expanding the distribution.

### Me campaign and working with celebrities

A further collaboration with MTV is the ‘*ME Campaign*’, an on-line initiative to encourage young people to educate themselves about HIV and AIDS. With the reflexive slogan ‘Me is You,’ the campaign includes websites, avatars, games and user- designed T-shirts. ME blips are aired on MTV worldwide featuring the ME cartoon characters in humorous scenes that are designed to raise curiosity, encourage use of the website and mainstream condom use. A ME micro-site hosted at Staying-Alive.org, with links to the Y-PEER website performs multiple functions and features Y-PEER information, a link to the ME video game, and a tool that allows visitors to design and create T-shirts using the ME characters and logos of MTV, ME and Y-PEER.

Celebrities from every region work with young people to reach more of their own by organising concerts, autograph sessions, and panels...Celebrities who are also role-models of young people successfully deliver important key messages on HIV and AIDS to their audiences.



Y-PEER youth at a festival in Turkey



### Movie contests

Y-PEER creates new opportunities for its members to convey their messages differently and effectively. One of the previous innovations was a scenario/movie contest. As a response to the call for submissions, 24 scenarios were received from 12 countries, namely, Algeria, Bulgaria, Jordan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Morocco, Romania, Russia, Serbia and, Tajikistan. From these candidates, eight were selected for production.

All produced videos were uploaded to YouTube and posted on the Y-PEER Website for public viewing: [www.youtube.com/ypeermtv](http://www.youtube.com/ypeermtv). A panel of judges from Y-PEER partners MTV-Staying Alive, SOAIDS Netherlands and

Dance4Life were enlisted to view and critique the eight videos, from which three were selected.

### Challenges

Y-PEER challenges include:

- Requirement of English language skills in order to be active in Y-PEER international.
- Translation and adaptation of English communication and training tools.
- It is difficult to

establish various national portals on the main website for enhanced access. Y-PEER country networks have started to create national websites in their languages linked to the international website.

Despite being the most epidemiologically significant with respect to HIV/STI transmission, very few Y-PEER resources target groups such as Injecting Drug Users (IDUs), men who have sex with men (MSM) and, sex workers. Some work has been piloted with institutionalised youth, and the 2007 Peer Education Training on HIV and Sex Work has resulted in producing resources for peer education amongst SWs. IDU is only briefly reviewed in the various Y-PEER training courses and there are no specific modules on it. ■

reach most at risk youth.

- The level of youth participation in different countries within the network is different and some countries' youth participation is not meaningful.

### Lessons learned

- The requirement of English language skills by those wishing to attend advanced trainer courses and meetings and to benefit from tools and materials at an international level often proves difficult for many skilled and experienced peer educators, meaning, they are unable to progress further within Y-PEER. Y-PEER is, therefore, organising more regional as well as national advanced trainer courses so that young people who speak the same language can benefit.
- Language barriers were also identified as responsible for the failure by the youth in many countries to benefit from the official Y-PEER website. There is a need to



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