

# Acknowledging young people's sexuality and rights

Computer-based sexuality and life skills education in Uganda, Kenya, Indonesia and Thailand

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Today, over 50% of young people worldwide are sexually active by the time they are 17. Liberal attitudes of a new global youth culture, combined with not acknowledging young people's sexuality and rights and not providing them with information, lead to unprepared experimenting with sexuality. Young people in many countries are therefore increasingly affected with sexual health problems. Examples of these are teenage pregnancy, early motherhood, unsafe abortions, STIs including HIV, sexual harassment and abuse. In addition, young people's lower sexual health status is fuelled by gender inequality, exclusion for being HIV positive and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Sexuality education is needed to prevent these problems, but also to guide young people in a healthy sexual development and should therefore start at an early age, at least before the age of 15. To be effective, a comprehensive and rights-based approach supports young people best in making their own decisions about their sexual life, whenever this will start.

In 2003, World Population Foundation (WPF), in cooperation with Butterfly Works and SchoolNet Uganda, developed and implemented a PC-based and online curriculum on sexual and reproductive health and rights: the World Starts With Me (WSWM). This flexible, low-tech and easy to adapt tool was initially developed in Uganda and is currently being adapted to the local context in Kenya, Indonesia and Thailand. WSWM combines ICT skills building and creative expression as job preparation with education on sexual health and rights. Using experiential learning as the didactic method, WSWM aims to empower and support young people in making their own, informed decisions on sexuality.

## WSWM's target group and content

WSWM is designed for school youth as well as out of school youth – to be reached through libraries, telecentres and youth

centres – in the age bracket of 12-19 years and for their intermediaries: teachers and youth workers. The targeted young people do not need to have previous computer experience, but have to be able to read and write and have to have followed at least some formal education. Teachers and youth workers should be youth-friendly and are intensively trained in participatory teaching styles, using ICT tools and in applying the principles of WSWM. These principles are:

- openness and acceptance of young people's sexuality;
- a positive, non-judgemental approach towards sexuality;
- equity in gender, health, (dis)abilities and sexual orientation;
- meeting the rights of young people to accurate and correct information, to self-determination, and to protect and be protected, particularly in the case of sexual abuse;

- active participation of young people and mobilizing them as actors and agents of change instead of seeing them only as recipients of teaching knowledge.

The 14 WSWM lessons start with building self-esteem, getting insight in a person's sexual development (puberty and adolescence) and developing autonomy, values and norms as basis for learning to make decisions. By then addressing the role of the social environment (parents, friends, peers, etc.), gender equity and sexual and reproductive rights, young people learn to cope with social and political influences on their own decision making. With a positive approach of sexuality as a vital source for life, sexual health problems and life skills are then addressed. The next step is to apply lessons learned on goal setting regarding the students' future and making booklets for use in peer education. The curriculum closes with an exhibition, at which young people educate parents and the community showing them the class results, such as slogans, posters, action plans, peer books, et cetera.

## Teachers' role and virtual peer educators

Computer-based curricula are powerful didactic tools by combining text, images and sound and by bringing real-life situations into the classroom through illustrations and animations. These principles make WSWM persuasive and

### Lessons learned

- Active participation of students in the development and implementation of the curriculum and in the teacher training effectively bridges the gap between youth cultures and adult social norms regarding sexuality.
- Accepting young people's sexuality and right to self-determination should be the key issue in teacher training, coaching and support in order to help them to be open-minded and less prescribing their own norms.
- Training on and working with a students-driven curriculum successfully changes teachers' role from lecturer to facilitator; and leads to a better relationship with the class.

assure better identification possibilities. In addition, the WSWM website and CD-ROM provide ready-made ingredients for a curriculum with minimal teacher preparation.

Virtual peer educators in the WSWM programme guide students through their own learning process, being the main source of knowledge. Teachers are expected to conduct class assignments and games to help students to internalize and apply this information, explore opinions and exercise skills by using role play, creating story-boards, art work and other digital means. Instead of lecturing and being the only source of knowledge, WSWM teachers are process facilitators. They encourage young people to give input in the lessons, develop their own attitudes and make their own choices. The use of (shared) computers in groups of 3 to 5 students, offers students privacy in exploring sexuality-related topics. The students-driven programme unburdens teachers to start sensitive discussions themselves.

### Adaptation to local cultures in Kenya, Indonesia and Thailand

Following the experiences in Uganda in designing WSWM with a working group of students and teachers, in 2005 working groups in Kenya, Thailand and Indonesia adapted the content of the programme to the local context. The adaptation process includes defining the sexual and reproductive health problems to be addressed; selecting relevant cultural-specific situations; choosing the style of language, an attractive layout and visual imagery; choosing users-friendly didactical strategies; and linking WSWM with new

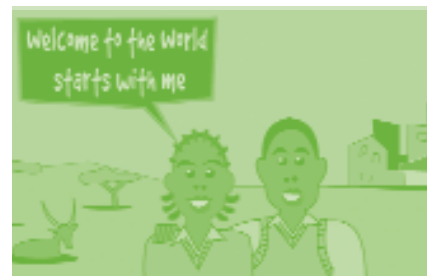
educational policies, such as competency-based education in Indonesia. Advisory Boards consisting of committed stakeholders (e.g., the Ministry of Education and of Health, the national family planning association and the AIDS committee) guide the working groups stepwise through the adaptation process, which is based on a situation analysis, always conducted as start of the project. After adaptation pilot teachers are trained to pilot the draft curriculum with as result a final version, adapted according the results of the pilot. The last step is to train pilot teachers as teacher trainers and implement and evaluate the final curriculum.

Some barriers to overcome are:

- 1) *Misconceptions and taboos* – Many schools starting with WSWM initially have to deal with misconceptions on sexuality education of parents, community members and teachers, and with taboos on discussing sexuality at schools. However, during the implementation and pilots of WSWM in all four countries, up till now local partners and schools were able to successfully advocate the programme in their communities and were not hindered by resistance. Vincent, a student from Nairobi, wrote that his father at first opposed sex education at school, but that he changed his mind after visiting the WSWM exhibition: *“That same evening, he called all of us after dinner to the table and he invited me to talk to the whole family on issues concerning sexuality. This after-dinner talk was then repeated for many more evenings. I was very happy when I was to brief my siblings about the topic.”*
- 2) *The education system* – Conventional methods and lesson materials are often

outdated; the student groups per class are usually large, and self-expression and own initiative in the class room are generally not stimulated. As teachers traditionally only focus on teaching knowledge, in teaching WSWM their role has to switch to a participatory and experiential learning approach (using students' experiences and activities) and to guiding students through an interactive learning process. Through thorough training and coaching of teachers these switches have been achieved in all four countries.

3) *Availability of computers* – In addition to the lack of computers in many schools in developing countries and the age and maintenance of the ones available, power and Internet connections are often unreliable. WSWM is therefore developed in full awareness of these technical disadvantages, basing it on easy, free available and light software and providing alternatives for all educational strategies, for which a computer is not needed. In addition, WSWM is also available as a printed copy.



4) *Lack of access to youth-friendly health services* – A final important barrier is the availability and accessibility of counselling and health services for students. As WSWM provides students with information on consequences of unprotected sex, they might want to do an HIV or pregnancy test, be worried about symptoms of an STI or need support because of experiences with sexual harassment, abuse or discrimination. Particularly in remote areas access to health services is difficult as they are often hard to find in the near vicinity. In addition, health clinics usually are not youth friendly and health workers are mostly not trained in coping with young people in a confidential and non-judgemental way, especially if they are unmarried and sexually active.

### Achievements to date

- In Uganda, SchoolNet Uganda, a local NGO in the field of education and ICT, is implementing WSWM in 50 schools, spread over the whole of Uganda. Since 2003 a total of about 8,200 students have been reached. In the coming years a multiplication of these figures can be expected.
- In Kenya, WSWM is currently being adapted to the Kenyan context, on the basis of the comments of students and teachers from five secondary schools and from one computer school for young people from Nairobi's slum areas. It is expected that in 2007 a total of 25 to 30 schools and two to three special facilities for slum youth will use the Kenyan WSWM.
- In Indonesia, WSWM was adapted and piloted in 2005 in 15 schools in four provinces (Lampung, Jambi, Jakarta and Bali). In September 2006 the adapted version was launched. In 2007, around 80 teachers and 1200 students from 40 schools are expected to use the WSWM curriculum.
- In Thailand, in 2006 the programme was adapted and piloted in six schools, while 27 teachers from 14 schools have been trained to start the implementation by early 2007. In 2008, more than 60 teachers and 1500 students from 30 new schools will start to use the WSWM curriculum.

From the received feedback to date, WPF concludes that WSWM is well received by both teachers and students and has a positive impact on young people's (sexual) development. Results of a baseline study in collaboration with a Ugandan research team in 12 schools in Uganda in 2005/2006 are underway, while evaluations are planned for 2007 in all other countries.

To overcome this barrier in all four countries counselling is part of the teacher training and organizations that are providing local counselling and health services are involved in the project, and represented in the Advisory Boards as well.

### Lessons learned

Developing, implementing and adapting WSWM in different countries and cultures show that:

- Principles of the curriculum have not been changed and the main content and didactical strategies are similar in the curricula of all four countries. Evidence- and needs-based, non-judgemental sexual health and life skills education proves to be similarly relevant for all young people, independent of culture or religion.
- Active participation of students in the development and implementation of the curriculum and in the teacher training effectively bridges the gap between youth cultures and adult social norms regarding sexuality. Young people's input helps to include and address sensitive issues in the adaptation process.
- Involvement of teachers and young people in developing WSWM as an attractive, convincing and users-friendly educational tool is crucial for successful implementation.

- Accepting young people's sexuality and right to self-determination proves to be the key issue in teacher training, coaching and support in order to help teachers be more open-minded and less focussed on prescribing their own norms.
- Training on and working with a students-driven curriculum successfully changes teachers' role from lecturer to facilitator and leads to a better relationship with the class.
- Although many teachers approve of this approach, the fear for the reaction of other teachers and parents has shown the need to invest in a supportive environment, in which headmasters, school staff, parents and community leaders are involved as well.
- As comprehensive sexuality education results in more individual young people seeking timely counselling and specific health care, it is crucial to combine implementation of the programme with counselling at school and a referral system providing access to youth-friendly services.

### Finally...

The WSWM curriculum has proven to be adaptable in other countries, cultures, languages and settings, including its explicit and positive approach towards sexuality and

its didactical, participatory teaching style. In 2007, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and UNFPA will adapt the WSWM curriculum for a pilot in four teacher-training universities. In India, in 2007-2009, the WSWM methodology will be the main source of reference for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in education. For the coming years initial investigations into programme adaptation for more countries (possibly Nigeria, Ghana and Mongolia) are underway. The programme will also be adapted for use in primary schools and out-of-school settings such as young people in prisons. Further, WPF and its local partners strive for inclusion of WSWM in the regular curriculum of schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. For example, in Uganda, the Ministry has in principle agreed on the accreditation of the teacher training. This accreditation will give a high incentive both to the schools and the teachers involved. Finally, WPF hopes to reach with this curriculum as many young people as possible in order to support and empower them in getting more control and enjoying their life, including their sexual life. ■

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