

DANCE4LIFE INPUT TO CONSULTATION ON YOUTH STRATEGY IN THE SAHEL, HORN OF AFRICA AND MENA REGION¹

1. If you look at the three regions that we focus on (MENA, Horn of Africa, Sahel) – can you mention specific trends per region which are relevant for the strategy? Are there, for example, specific sectors where there is much to be gained? Or specific skills that young people lack in a certain region or sector?

The three target regions all have a young population facing not only challenges in accessing quality education and employment, but also underlying Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) challenges: a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, unintended pregnancies and sexual and gender-based violence (including harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation and early and forced marriages). We have included these SRHR related challenges in our analysis below as we consider these being interrelated with future perspectives of education and employment.

In the **Horn of Africa**, young people make up the largest and fastest growing proportion of the general population. The region is characterized by high level of political instability and insecurity, with open conflicts in many areas and bordering countries. Ethiopia represents the most populous (with over 100 million people) stable and economically growing country. While life is improving for many, nearly 30 percent of Ethiopia's population still live in extreme poverty. Ethiopia has made progress in improving youth's education, especially regarding formal education attendance and literacy rates. The literacy rate of people aged 15-24 years is estimated to have reached the level of 69.48 percent in 2015. However, low levels of education quality and high drop-out rates, low access to secondary education, as well as gender and rural-urban disparities remain major challenges for the achievement of universal basic education and a smooth transition to work. Youth unemployment rate is estimate at around 27 percent, while 25 percent of youth ages 15 to 29 are underemployed.

SRHR challenges

Sexual and reproductive health plays an important role in school attendance, creating gender and regional disparities. The majority of girls for example do not attend school during the menstrual cycle. About 40 percent of girls marry before the age of 18 years and 20 percent before the age of 15. Teenage pregnancy remains high (12%) and contributes to school drop-outs. Health services for adolescents are largely not integrated, are of poor and uneven quality and coverage, with inequity in access and utilization. Despite, positive trends in mitigating the HIV epidemic in the country, evidence indicates that there is increased risk of acquiring STIs and HIV among adolescents and youth due to the early initiation of sexual intercourse and higher-risk sexual behavior.

In the **Sahel region** young people aged 10-24 years constitute 32 percent of the population² and are expected to rapidly increase in the near future. Instability and insecurity at political level, climate change effects, and migration challenge the economic and social development of the region. The education system is characterized by large numbers of out-of-school children, low school enrolment and completion rates even at the primary level, high student-teacher ratios, and by critical gender gaps in school enrolment and progression. Youth unemployment, particularly underemployment, is high while most young people who work are in the informal sector³.

SRHR challenges

Early and unintended pregnancies, HIV infections and school violence are critical issues which hinder access to education and the academic success of students in the region, impacting negatively on their professional and livelihood opportunities. The pregnancy rate among adolescents is more than twice the global average⁴ and the region has the highest proportion of adolescents giving birth before the age of 18 at 33 percent⁵. This is due to several reasons including low access to services, lack of education and child marriage.

Girls in West and Central Africa face the highest risk of marrying in childhood; about 4 in 10 young women in the region were married before the age of 18 and among all child brides, 1 in 3 was married before age 15⁶.

¹ <https://www.internetconsultatie.nl/jongerenstrategie>

² UNFPA State of the World Population, 2017

³ Izugbara, C.O., Wekesah, F.M., Amo-Adjei, J., Kabiru, C.W., Tsala Dimbuene, Z.T., & Emina, J. (2017). Young People in West and Central Africa: Health, Demographic, Education, and Socioeconomic Indicators. African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), Nairobi, Kenya. November, 2017. Page 7

⁴ UNFPA. Transforming and Uplifting lives One Region One Mission. Annual Report 2015. West and Central Africa Regional Office

⁵ UNFPA, Adolescents and Youth Report: West and Central Africa, 2018

⁶ UNICEF Data and Analytics Section: Achieving a Future Without Child Marriage; Focus on West and Central Africa; UNICEF, New York, 2017.

West Africa is experiencing a rise in AIDS-related deaths among adolescents aged 15- 19 yet continues to lag behind on most measures of HIV prevention, treatment and care for children and adolescents.

SRHR as a precondition for healthy, educated young people

Overall, extreme poverty, (gender) inequality, inadequate education systems and lack of information and skills hold young people back from realizing their full potential and dreams. In the face of this uncertainty and insecurity, we know that young people are less likely to practice healthy and safe sex, establish equal and stable relationships with freedom of choice, or make informed decisions about if and when to have children. This is one of the key factors for perpetuating poverty and unemployment in these regions.

The realization of young people's SRHR is a precondition for staying healthy, staying in school, and thereby seizing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. This is especially true for girls and young women who face a higher risk of dropping out of school due to early pregnancies, marriages, complications from FGM, or not receiving support from their family to continue school due to traditional social and gender norms. Girls are also at higher risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS because of biological, social and economic reasons. Gender expectations and age discrimination also play a factor in the high youth unemployment rate as girls/young women are less expected to be the bread winner in the family, while young people in general need to finish higher education and gain experience to get employed. Workforce participation gender gaps remain wide across these regions, reflecting an inefficient use of education investments (WEF, 2018).

Equipping young people with both comprehensive sexuality education and [21st century skills](#) and confidence to make decisions about their (sexual) lives, is key to preparing them also for employment and/or entrepreneurship. In conclusion, given the growing needs and strategic role of the health and education sectors for these regions to benefit from the demographic dividend, resources should also be invested in improving the quality and variety of training as well as the attractiveness of professions in those sectors. Given that young people will become a larger share of the general population, services and products targeting this group will have a potentially fast growing market.

2. Do you have examples of successful "scaled up" initiatives / programs in the field of education and work to increase youth employment, and if so, which ones? Or do you know of certain successful initiatives that are worth scaling up in the three regions mentioned?

Dance4Life would like to mention two relevant interventions that are being scaled across Sub-Saharan Africa (incl. Horn of Africa), Eastern Europe/Central Asia and Asia.

- / One is the [Journey4Life](#), a curriculum which takes a holistic perspective of a comprehensive sexuality education program and is based on building personal leadership and soft skills among young people which the current education system often fails to provide. This model is contextualized to local culture and youth trends, meaning it is easily adaptable to diverse needs among different age and target groups, including key populations and marginalized groups in the three regions, responding directly to the needs of our partner organizations and young people. Using this agile approach, the [Journey4Life has proven](#) to empower young people to recognize their aspirations, increase their self-confidence, challenge stereotypes, especially based on gender and alter their gender attitudes, empower young women to confront sexual harassment and discrimination, raise youth willingness to challenge harmful social norms and advocate for their human rights. All these changes help boost young people's participation to education, society and the labour market.

Teachers from all regions have expressed that the program has had a positive effect on students' attendance and active participation also outside of the class, and in Nepal the program resulted in a 93% reduction in school drop-out linked with early marriages. This is an example of how interlinked issues around gender, SRHR, education and employment are. The Journey4Life is fully based on local ownership: as a social franchise our franchisees co-own our empowerment curriculum, and we only work with franchisees – often CSOs or INGOs – who explicitly state that our model will provide added value to their ongoing programs. Our franchisees take the lead in integrating our model into their programs and into other ongoing interventions, and they are, together with young people, leading contextualization and co-creating their own version of our curriculum. In this way, a social franchise approach enables effective scaling while avoiding a one size fits all-approach.

- / Secondly, in order to roll out the empowerment model around the world, Dance4Life has successfully designed an **Academy4Life** which has been a vehicle to launch the careers of young community development professionals passionate about SRHR. This Academy supports [young leaders](#) through personal development and building

professional and 21st century skills. These leaders are empowered to train others to deliver the Journey4Life, creating a ripple effect of youth leadership for young people to stay in school and pursue their dreams while being becoming change agents in their communities. The Academy4Life offers training and cultivation of personal leadership skills which meet the current global market needs, and offers on-the-job training for young people within the SRHR and wider development sector. With a net promotor score of 100%, we have already seen participants in the Academy4Life securing full-time jobs in the civil society sector and/or launching their own organizations and initiatives.

3. Do you have specific ideas or additions about how we can make young people part of this policy? How do we ensure that they participate in the implementation of this strategy?

Dance4Life encourages Embassies to organize consultations with young people in the target regions to ensure their input to the policy from planning to implementation. Such consultations need to take urban/rural variety and representation and the diversity of youth (including youth key populations) into account. Dance4Life's expertise in youth engagement and our network of local CSOs could help in setting up mechanisms for consultation. Such mechanisms would be inclusive and enable safe spaces for youth to speak up for their needs and co-create solutions using a human centered design approach. Once involved in the creation of the strategy, accountability for its implementation is stimulated on all levels and through different means, including digital tools. Dance4Life would be happy to help local embassies and the ministry to set up such processes in form of co-creation labs and contribute towards establishment of functioning systems of accountability.

One way of doing this can be to leverage existing programs in the target countries which emphasize meaningful youth participation. The Right Here Right Now (RHRN) partnership, funded under the Dialogue and Dissent framework, specifically focuses on meaningful and inclusive youth participation in national, regional and international advocacy. Young people advocating for their own sexual and reproductive rights increase the legitimacy of their advocacy goals. The structural support of youth advocates and the use of storytelling in advocacy are two important strategies to include the voice and needs of young people in often non-youth friendly decision making spaces. Dance4Life has developed several toolkits to enable young people to advocate for their own rights and to make sure their voices, and those of their peers, are being listened to. Dance4Life has also supported young people to become empowered individuals able to make healthy decisions and important life choices. Through participating in advocacy programs focused on young people, we also contribute to an enabling environment in which young people have the right to decide over their own bodies and who to love. This dual focus on empowering young people and advocating for an enabling environment advances young people's opportunities to healthy lives, education and employment.

Any projects funded through this strategy should be asked to show how young people are part of designing, planning, implementing and monitoring the intervention, making young people integral to the projects rather than beneficiaries of an intervention.

4. Anything else you feel is worth mentioning?

Dance4Life is open to contribute and participate in the follow up of the process of this Youth Consultation regarding future perspectives and employment opportunities. Below we have listed the relevant links mentioned in this document:

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/03/21st-century-skills-future-jobs-students/>
<https://dance4life.com/journey4life/>
<https://dance4life.com/positive-outcomes-dance4life-program/>
<https://dance4life.com/my-week-of-change-2/>
<https://dance4life.com/toolkits/stories-for-advocacy/>
<https://dance4life.com/toolkits/making-each-voice-count/>