SRHR alliance

Youth4life's potential not yet fully reached

Youth4life, an online SRHR platform for youth developed by Africa Alive and Nairobits, was launched in October 2014. The Youth4life website attracted around 19,500 people in its first four months. Most website visitors were satisfied with the online services, but further research showed that younger and marginalised adolescents were not among them.

Even though Kenya is ahead of most African countries in online development, using online tools to communicate with and promote communication among young people about their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is still quite a new phenomenon. The researchers wanted to find out whether and how these online tools influence the choices young people make when it comes to their sexual and reproductive health.

Facts about the research

Where? Nairobi

By whom?
- Nairobits
- Africa Alive

For whom?
Kenyan youth (15 - 24 years old)

Scope of the research
Online survey among 328 youth participants; key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

Attracting visitors
The *youth4life* website was considered an accessible, useful and reliable source of information on SRHR by those young people who visited the site. The most searched topics were sexual health checks, relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, and STIs including HIV/AIDS. More than half of the visitors said they read the information section on 'sexual health' and 'life skills'. The least accessed section was the 'forum' and the section on 'growing up'. Overall, the website was positively evaluated by its visitors, but few returned. However, almost 10% of the online respondents said they visited a health clinic after learning about it from the *youth4life* website. This is a reasonably good score given the short time period between the website launch and the survey.

No slum pictures
The *youth4life* website has not (yet) reached its full potential due to many different challenges. Internet is costly, connection is only available in specific places and using it requires a certain level of literacy, thereby excluding younger and marginalised adolescents. One respondent said that the website developers should "target people from slum[s], they should use pictures from [the] slum and enable [the] website [to] be accessed by any phone". Another participant said, "the language [on the website] is friendly to educated people. It should cut across […] those who are literate and illiterate". Those young people who do have access to speedy and mobile internet preferred internet information on SRHR rather than other sources, because online platforms are considered trendier, funnier, more reliable, less judgemental, and more interactive.

Recommendations
- Invest in community level online mobilisation to reach younger adolescents (below 20). Most current online visitors are 20 to 24 years olds. Attracting younger audiences could be done through mobile cyber cafes, or maximising (local) Facebook groups.

- Adjust the website to serve marginalised youth (deaf, blind) using voice add-ons and videos using sign language.
- Strengthen the referral services to the mapped youth-friendly clinics. Keep in mind that young people may prefer clinics not located in their own neighbourhoods but in the outskirts of the city, to make sure they do not get recognised by their relatives.
- Make the website responsive for all kinds of phones with different operating systems such as Symbian, iOS, Android.
- Minimise the cost of accessing internet by creating free Wi-Fi hotspots and supporting an offline app which can be updated whenever there is internet access.