

Gap between offline and online platforms

Programme theme: **E/M health strategies**

Country: **Uganda**

Tags: **E/M health strategies; Peer educators; Access to information; SMS portal; Website content; Straight Talk**

From its beginnings as a Unicef newspaper in 1993, Straight Talk has become an all-round media platform for Ugandan youth. Besides print, Straight Talk now offers radio transmission, face-to-face services in youth clinics and ICT centres, a Facebook page, and a toll-free SMS helpline. Research shows that Straight Talk has a well-established reputation and wide reach, but the various communication channels do not communicate very well with each other.

The ICT centres and SMS helpline of Straight Talk Foundation (STF) seem to be quite popular among young people. All survey respondents used the SMS helpline at least once, and over 80% visited an ICT centre every week. They learnt about it through radio, friends and school outreach. The opportunity to ask questions in private, and interact with a STF radio disk jockey is especially attractive to young people.

Phone is not enough

Although 80% of all respondents have a phone, almost half say they face difficulties accessing STF services. Access to the SMS helpline is hindered by the lack of a phone or having to share one, not being able to charge the phone, or not being allowed to use it at home or in school. Access to the ICT centre is made more difficult by long waiting times, slow internet connection, restricted access to websites and user-unfriendly computers.

SMS offers privacy

At the ICT centres young people tend to search for information on reproductive health (50%) but also on news, entertainment and job opportunities. For comparison: the SMS helpline is used for reproductive health information in 90% of the cases. Despite the relative popularity of the ICT centres and the SMS helpline, the STF online services (website and Facebook page) are not well known among youth. Radio, ICT centres and the SMS helpline do not mention the online services frequently, and the pages are not regularly updated. Staff members also say they do not know enough about online SRHR messaging to be really effective.

Recommendations

- Integrate the various communication channels to take advantage of the synergies between them. Print and radio channels should not only promote online and mobile health platforms, but also feed their content.

Facts about the research

Where? Gulu and Bugiri

By whom?

- Straight Talk Foundation

For whom?

Young people (10-24 years old)

Scope of research

338 young people responded to face-to-face surveys; 99 phone interviews; 146 took part in focus group discussions; 9 staff members were interviewed.

- Invest in the infrastructure and staffing of ICT centres: the centres need more and better computers, standby generators and skilled staff members who are able to troubleshoot and answer all kinds of questions asked by youths.
- Invest in the capacity of the staff in using E/M health strategies to disseminate SRHR information.
- Strengthen monitoring of E/M health programmes. Routinely collected data should be used to inform new strategies and a shared learning agenda.

