GET UP SPEAK OUT
for youth rights

DEALING WITH OPPOSITION

OR SUMMARY

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, young people frequently do not claim their sexual rights or their right to participation because of restrictions at community, societal, institutional and political levels. This hinders their access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education and services that match their needs, and diminishes their ability to make their own informed SRHR decisions. The Get Up Speak Out – GUSO – consortium addresses this problem in seven countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan and Uganda. In these countries, local civil society organisations (CSOs) have formed alliances to implement the programme. The change that is envisioned by the GUSO programme is that all young people, especially girls and young women, become empowered to realise their SRHR in societies that take a positive stance towards young people's sexuality.

Get Up Speak Out is a five-year programme (2016-2020) developed by a consortium consisting of Rutgers, Aidsfonds, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, Dance4life, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and Simavi. The programme is financed by and in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the SRHR Partnership Fund.

Operational research on overcoming opposition to SRHR

Operational research has been identified as an integral part of the activities of the GUSO programme. Its aim is to enhance the performance of the programme, improve outcomes, assess feasibility of new strategies and/or assess or improve the programme's Theory of Change. This research brief summarises the findings of GUSO's operational research track on overcoming opposition to SRHR.

Advocates for SRHR have always experienced opposition in their work. Over the past few years we have seen that opposition groups are relatively successful in their anti-rights lobbying towards certain governments and that governments themselves can also be a force of opposition against SRHR. In order to support CSOs, Rutgers developed the facilitator's guide 'Working on SRHR in times of opposition'. This provides guidance that deepens the understanding of opposition groups in a context-specific manner, sharing experiences and learning on effective (advocacy) approaches; the guide encourages joint and pro-active strategising on how to apply these approaches in order to prevent or limit the impact of opposition on reaching SRHR-related goals. The aim is to integrate approaches to prevent and deal with opposition into advocacy strategies and efforts for SRHR from the start.

The guide identifies five major clusters of advocacy approaches which seem most relevant and/or provide considerable potential for more effective use when working on SRHR in times of opposition, based on experiences in a number of countries:
1.   Advocacy towards policy and decision makers
2.   Building public support for the advocacy agenda (for example by engaging with the media)
3.   Looking for entry points for dialogue with (representatives of) opposition groups
4.   Strengthening narratives and (re)framing language
5.   Strengthening (collaboration within) civil society and beyond

The effectiveness of the approaches in these clusters will depend in particular on how they are being used. Besides, there is not one 'best' approach. Rather, the idea is to work on a number of approaches simultaneously. In doing so, different organisations (different types of CSOs or with different areas of expertise) can complement each other.

With this operational research track we aimed to gain more in-depth understanding of how CSOs apply the different clusters of approaches described above. We wanted to understand challenges as well as results that come from applying these different approaches. We also wanted to know how working in an alliance contributed to these results. To get these insights we conducted operational research into three specific cases of opposition that CSOs in the GUSO programme faced in relation to their advocacy work for SRHR. For each case local consultants conducted interviews with CSO staff involved with the GUSO programme and with other relevant stakeholders. In this brief we present summarised insights from the cases researched in Ethiopia, Indonesia and Uganda.

The cases describe very specific situations in-country and may therefore not be easily applicable to other settings. However, we hope the approaches and the lessons learned described in this brief can inspire other CSOs facing similar challenges with advocacy for SRHR. Additionally, in Rutgers' facilitator's guide 'Working on SRHR in times of opposition' we describe the five clusters of approaches in more detail, including lessons learned from this OR as well as many lessons we gathered in learning meetings with CSO representatives from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The facilitator's guide will be published on Rutgers' website in the course of 2020.

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1 ETHIOPIA: WORKING WITH ADVISORY COMMITTEES TO CREATE CHANGE

The challenge

One of the key obstacles to pursuing SRHR through the Get Up Speak Out (GUSO) programme in Ethiopia has been the country's 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation. Under this law, community organisations in receipt of more than 10% of their income from overseas, including the alliance of Ethiopian CSOs who are implementing the GUSO programme, were barred from advocacy to and lobbying of government, its officers and organisations. This restriction remained in place until the 2018 Charities and Societies Proclamation came into force in March 2019, allowing advocacy and lobbying by Ethiopian organisations. During the period, CSOs had to abide by strict regulation of their spending and activities, reporting to the government's Charities and Societies Agency.

The strategy

To support changes or improvements in government policy and provision in SRHR, alliance members needed to adopt practices that suited the environment created by the 2009 proclamation. They chose to pursue their objectives of engaging policy and decision makers by creating programme advisory committees (ACs) for each level of their work, city and sub-city, and inviting representatives of government agencies and departments to be members, alongside other stakeholders and the programme implementers. Representatives of Addis Ababa's City Administration, Health Office, Bureau of Finance and Economic Cooperation, Youth and Volunteerism Office, and its Women & Children Office participate in quarterly meetings under a memorandum of understanding, which states the AC will:

- Provide a means for involving people/government bodies who are willing to give assistance but have limited time
- Provide a way to keep the government bodies connected to the GUSO programme
- Create a direct link to important professional and technical expertise
- Help them to energise advisors to be ambassadors for the alliance and the programme's suitability in the community

Benefits and lessons learned

The research highlighted that the ACs led to space for advice on improving policies and practice, for improved youth engagement in planning and monitoring youth-friendly services and for building trust and attitudinal change among key stakeholders. Specifically:

- The ACs helped achieve an enabling environment for the alliance, in which its members have experienced low levels of opposition from the government
- The GUSO alliance members have become stronger in dealing with SRHR barriers through their close collaboration with government in the ACs
- Thanks to the evidence-based dialogue of the ACs and their collaborative engagement, the city council allocated funds for youth SRHR in its budget
- The ACs voiced the issues and concerns of youth to policy and decision makers and ACs delivered more effective CSO engagement with government and the public on issues that matter to youth; young people and their functional structures have achieved representation in the process of revision and amendment of youth-focused policy and strategy

2 INDONESIA: DEALING WITH HOAX NEWS ATTACKS

The challenge

One of the key obstacles to improving SRHR for young people in Indonesia is an increasingly conservative opposition, supported by Islamic fundamentalists and politicians with their own visions for Indonesian society. This is hampering the work of the alliance of Indonesian CSOs working on SRHR. The campaign to ratify a draft Policy on Elimination of Sexual Violence has been a focus for this alliance, its members and supporters. In January 2019, members of a conservative group launched an online campaign attacking both the anti-sexual violence policy and the alliance, spreading hoax news on WhatsApp and Facebook to promote a petition against the draft policy. Using the alliance's own digital footprint to fuel public concern, the conservative group made false accusations about the alliance's agenda and appeared to justify these with links to its mission and members. The initial WhatsApp message, falsely conflating the alliance's support for the anti-sexual violence policy with promotion of 'free (premarital) sex' was shared 7,912 times within one day. This campaign against the policy also included infographics and messages from religious and professional leaders appealing to people's sense of religious or moral responsibility, framed in accessible language. Coinciding with the presidential elections, this fundamentalist campaign benefited from being politicised and borrowing respectability and credence from sympathetic 'family values' academics.

The strategy

Responding to this organised attack was made easier by the degree of preparation already made to counter opposition. At a regional meeting in Kuala Lumpur the previous month organised by Rutgers and ARROW, the Indonesian CSOs started to map their opposition, revealing the extent to which opponents were connected with each other and driven by fundamentalist ideology. But the nature of the attack highlighted how the alliance members were exposed: the conservative group could access and share information on the alliance and its members because it was all available online. In an urgent meeting with its members, the alliance decided to suspend its website and deactivate its social media accounts. Deleting its digital footprint like this had an immediate impact in mitigating the effects of the hoax news. Almost simultaneously, alliance members started to make public responses using their own social media accounts, sharing infographics, videos, and posts made by various organisations that supported the policy. One of the videos directly contradicted the false claims made about free sex. In their efforts the alliance collaborated with the National Commission on Violence Against Women. This Commission used its own network to share correct information about the anti-sexual violence policy and hosted a press conference attracting national media. Within two weeks, the alliance had held its own meeting to tighten procedures for sharing members' information and within two months had organised training on digital security that was soon embodied in a new Standard Operating Procedure.

Lessons learned

- The alliance's good standing with its existing networks facilitated a swift and unified response
- Members have to commit to working collaboratively on communications
- Networks and spokespeople must have broader appeal to reach beyond the educated classes that are the alliance's natural supporters, and be from the broadest possible base
- Preparation should include training and protocols for online security, and awareness that at particular times, like election campaigns, the campaign is more vulnerable

3 UGANDA: IN DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

The challenge

One of the sources of opposition to SRHR work in Uganda derives from religious traditions, teachings and beliefs. As the country's religious leaders view many aspects of sexuality and sexual life as sins that have to be addressed in society, they are keen that religion and public policy should be largely entwined. Religious institutions consider themselves the 'custodians of morality' who must be consulted by anyone who wants to teach sexuality education. In 2016, following a newspaper article which stated, falsely, that 100 schools in Uganda were being tricked into teaching homosexuality, religious leaders mobilised communities and ministries to ban every component of school-based sexuality education. The impact of this opposition to sexuality education has been felt on the country's projects regarding the SRHR of young people, in and out of schools. Our operational research examined whether finding and using entry points for discussion with religious leaders was a useful strategy to limit the influence of this opposition.

The strategy

This case focuses on the advocacy work of two alliances of collaborating CSOs that implement SRHR programmes in Uganda: the Get Up Speak Out, GUSO, programme working at district level and the Right Here Right Now, RHRN, programme focused at the national level. Both benefited from a learning meeting, facilitated by Rutgers, on how to map SRHR opposition and how to meet it, resulting in a deeper understanding of where the opposition comes from and how best to limit its influence.

Recognising the power of religious groups – as community leaders, influencers, changemakers, and gatekeepers with control of a large proportion of schools and clinics – the alliances resolved to work with them on certain occasions rather than against them. With the encouragement of one CSO, itself a faith-based organisation, partnering CSOs came to appreciate that "working with religious leaders is not such a big thing, they are ordinary people with ordinary challenges. You can meet them, engage them and have a lot more with them."

In the strategy, the CSOs focused on engaging with religious groups and leaders at district and national levels, including joint working, training and advocacy. Nationally, they hoped to make headway with national approval for curriculums and policies that would help more districts embrace sexuality education and young people's SRHR. Locally, CSOs focused on practice and practical interventions. Local actions included: inviting opposing groups to public meetings to discuss SRHR issues, encouraging debate around the facts of the programme's plans rather than spurious claims; offering training to religious leaders, particularly on how to support young people in church who experience different SRHR challenges; encouraging Youth Sundays in church to cover SRH; engaging youth and adult church leaders to act as change agents/champions, e.g. in radio talk shows; using testimonies of young people who have gone through teenage pregnancy or discrimination because of lack of access to and/or opposition to access to services, e.g. in documentaries, to appeal to religious leaders' emotions; social media campaigns targeted at religious leaders opposed to SRHR issues; and monitoring religious opposition in places of worship.

Benefits and lessons learned

The GUSO programme has clearly benefited from its strategy, with acceptance and active involvement in their work from religious leaders at the district level. Those who know their communities, who deal on a day-to-day basis with young members of their congregation who are directly affected by sexual health and sexual rights, were found to understand the relevance of the alliance and the role they could

play. To them, the case studies of young local people featured in GUSO documentaries are both real and familiar.

At the national level, advocacy has been harder. By targeting the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, CSOs have had initial success brokering agreement on programme content only to be tripped up by individual members withdrawing their cooperation when it mattered, citing powers above the national level that must be answered to. There is clearly scope for using national commitment to facilitate and sustain local action, but only with the recognition that not all faith groups will be supportive across all aspects of the sexuality education curriculum. The project's success in engaging with senior leaders over the country's proposed sexuality education framework shows it can succeed in engagement and advocacy at the highest level.

CONCLUSION

These three cases describe a variety of approaches to limiting the influence of opposition to SRHR in a specific country context. The approaches were found to be largely effective in the contexts in which they were used. The opposition forces described in these cases are very different from each other: in Ethiopia the alliance tried to prevent any possible opposition coming from (local) government through the advisory committees, while in Indonesia there was a very specific group targeting the alliance and its work which asked for a swift response.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach towards opposition as opposition forces and country contexts vary greatly. Therefore, it is important to analyse opposition forces (who is behind the opposition, is it a threat we need to address, etc.) and to make strategic decisions on what approach to use in what context.

Overall, in these cases, working in an alliance and leveraging the experience of other partners was an important advantage and gave a strong voice to the alliance members.