

**GET UP
SPEAK
OUT** for youth rights



“I am empowered, committed, and proud advocate for youth SRHR”
Read Maxwell's Story

GHANA

MEET THE GHANA SRHR ALLIANCE

Young people are supported with reproductive health education and youth-friendly services through the Ghana SRHR Alliance for Young People. **The Alliance advocates to increase young people's access to right-based, gender-sensitive and youth friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in Ghana, building consensus and partnership by convening relevant stakeholders for policy discussions and actions.**

To strengthen the Alliance and support sustainability, they focus on attaining their shared ambition, financial sustainability, visibility and favourable reputation and open culture. **They are the national alliance focused on young people's SRHR.**

The Alliance has been exploring sex-positive approaches to sexuality education, the impact of COVID-19 on young people's SRHR, and how youth-led accountability can improve SRH services for young people. By using social accountability scorecards and talking openly with health workers, **young people have gained the confidence to demand quality SRH services and become empowered as SRHR advocates. Health centres have even expanded their opening hours to make it easier for young people to visit.**



*We stand,
we speak,
we live our
rights.*

Winning motto of Ghana by
Max Ayamber



Before I joined GUSO, I had very little information about my SRHR rights and my head was filled with misconceptions and myths, for instance I viewed Young People who accessed abortion services as wayward people. I never felt comfortable to discuss anything about sexuality because I thought it was wrong and unacceptable. But after being trained by the GUSO project I have realized the importance of SRHR education.

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GUSO has the overall objective of improving young people's SRHR, through the provision of SRHR information and education, increasing the uptake of quality and youth-friendly SRH services and creating an enabling and supportive environment.

125.374

Young people reached with SRHR information & education

54%

Young people meaningfully participating in decision-making processes

351.449

SRH services provided to young people

5.1 M

People reached by campaigns and (social) media

KEY LEARNINGS:

- Reproductive health educators are more likely to be positive towards SRHR if they have seen or experienced violations of sexual rights, have had positive experiences related to sexuality, have received repeat trainings on sexuality and reproductive health rights that helps question negative socio-cultural norms on gender and sexuality, or are surrounded by other gender-sensitive and rights affirming persons.
- Young people are interested in having education on their Sexual and Reproductive Health, particularly on their sexuality and healthy relationships.
- Young people see that using scorecards has improved the quality of SRH services. During the scorecard process, health workers speak directly with young people and learn to stand in their shoes. When they understand the challenges young people face, they are motivated to improve their performance.
- Facebook Live is a key channel to provide young people in Ghana with a needed platform to discuss key SRHR issues and obtain feedback from reliable sources during situations such as Covid-19.
- Social media platforms, especially Twitter, are useful for SRHR advocacy, even during Covid-19, by targeting the accounts of key stakeholders and key media channels to project the SRHR causes for which young people are advocating.



To read more about research and learnings from the Alliance scan this QR code



“What I learned overhauled my entire perception about sexuality education”



“I was so excited to start providing SRHR information to young people”

MAXWELL'S STORY

My name is Maxwell, though many call me Max. I am 26 years of age and a resident of Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region of Ghana. My childhood was spent in a small village in the Upper-east Region. Though it is relatively better now, the attitude of most people towards sexuality education, contraception and family planning in places like my village was very 'hostile'. I grew up immersed in these attitudes and I believed them myself -- perceiving young people who were open about their sexuality as promiscuous and disgusting, particularly those who used contraceptives.

As a young man, I constantly wondered why unmarried people would even think of “doing” family planning, and wanted nothing to do with girls who were on contraceptives because I felt they were “bad girls”. I was an “against ambassador” for contraceptive use, in charge of despising and mocking people who used it.

By May 2018, I had completed university and didn't have a job or work experience so I was interested in volunteering opportunities. My big brother told me that young people were needed to train in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), so I contacted the officer in charge and was given the opportunity to participate in a 5-day intensive

training held in Tamale. What I learned there “overhauled” my entire perception about sexuality education, contraception and family planning. The science-based information provided during the training cleared many misconceptions I had, and helped me see other perspectives. Some of the girls shared how they struggled with their first menstruation experience, because no one had ever prepared them for it. Other girls discussed instances of sexual abuse and harassment they had experienced in their previous schools. It struck me that a lot of young people are going through abuse and other struggles and may have no one to talk to. The training taught me how important sexuality education and family planning is, especially for young people, and I was so excited to start providing SRHR information to young people — and also to serve as a confidant and an advocate.

For the past 16 months, I have zealously provided Comprehensive Sexuality Education to young people in and out of school and also talked to adults about family planning. The once 'hater' of sexuality and family planning is now an empowered, committed, and proud advocate for youth SRHR, leading other young people to fight for this cause.

COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

IMAMS IN THE NORTH OF GHANA STAND UP FOR YOUTH SRHR

Religious leaders in the northern parts of Ghana often hold negative views towards young people's SRHR and are outspoken about this in their communities. Their high levels of influence means their attitudes present a major barrier to advancing young people's SRHR.

The Alliance set about to change this. They engaged religious leaders in a series of meetings about young people's SRHR. **With greater knowledge and understanding, religious leaders began to change their attitudes. Many Imams in the area have now become advocates for young people's SRHR, providing space for a short discussion on youth SRHR issues with health workers before commencing religious services.** This has the knock-on effect of changing parents' attitudes too, who are now more open to talking about SRHR with their children.

By educating religious leaders and securing their support, the Alliance has diffused fear and stigma, and created an environment in which young people are able to voice their SRHR.



MAKING SRHR MORE ATTRACTIVE

The Alliance uses many different strategies to provide SRHR education and services to young people. **One of the most important factors is to ensure young people feel safe and confident to learn, ask questions and use services, free from judgement.**

The Alliance uses school-based CSE clubs with both computer- and paper-based courses. *The World Starts With Me and My World My Life* are formed of 14 lessons which use games, presentations, group work and homework to engage students in a child-centred and youth friendly way. Teachers and peer educators deliver these fun sessions together.

The Alliance also uses Sports Days to engage young people and provide a platform for health providers to educate young people about SRHR. Football contests and athletics competitions attracted young people, either as participants or spectators. Peer educators make their way through the crowds, chatting and talking to people about SRHR issues. Health staff set up around the sports field to provide first aid, and SRHR information and services, including condoms and contraceptives. These events draw a large crowd and provide a safe and engaging environment to learn about SRHR.

Creating a positive environment is important in order to ensure young people have access to the information and services they need, feel comfortable and adopt positive attitudes.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IMPROVES SRHR SERVICE QUALITY

Fostering open discussions between young people and health workers can be an effective way to improve access to SRH services. The Alliance helps young people monitor how youth friendly services are and initiate change.

Young people use scorecards to rate services and indicate their concerns. Together with health workers, health management teams and community members, they openly discuss their issues and develop a joint action plan to improve services. Topics which frequently come up include negative attitudes of health workers, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, long waiting times and high costs of services for young people.



Young people feel empowered through these activities.

They now have the confidence to go to sexual and reproductive health services without fear. **Now, young people know the health workers personally and feel more able to approach them and visit the facility when they have problems.** Young people know they can go to the clinic and ask for condoms without being judged, and girls find it easier to discuss menstruation with nurses. Young people now know their rights and feel empowered to demand quality services that meet their needs. **Young people have become advocates for their SRHR, working with local health authorities and other duty bearers to remove barriers to SRH services.**

In the Northern region, the Alliance took action to stop health workers asking young people to pay unapproved fees for services. Having empowered young people with social accountability, the Alliance organized meetings with young people and district authorities. Together, they secured commitments from the District Health Management Teams to develop and implement youth friendly SRH service plans. The Alliance has also introduced a league table for best performing health facilities on youth friendly services. Young people are also taking matters into their own hands – they know their SRH rights and feel empowered to refuse any unreasonable costs at the health centre.

SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE ALLIANCE

GHANA ALLIANCE YOUTH ADVISORY BODY

Young people's meaningful engagement in decision-making is at the heart of the GUSO programme. Looking for ways to engage young people, the Alliance turned to their colleagues in Uganda for inspiration. The success of the Youth Advisory Body in the Uganda SRHR Alliance encouraged the Ghana Alliance to try this too.

The Youth Advisory Body was to become the mouthpiece for young people in the Alliance. A Youth Advisory Body of youth leaders representing each partner organization was formed, who then outlined their vision for the Alliance. They have their own budget, ensuring they are truly in charge of their direction and influence the SRHR issues that matter to them.

Since its creation, the Youth Advisory Body has been involved in planning and decision making of the Alliance and has improved meaningful youth engagement in the Alliance. **The Youth Advisory Body champions the interests of young people and ensures the Alliance is by young people, for young people.**



“who would better contribute to the growth of an economy than an young person empowered to make sound reproductive health decisions!”
Sandra Tom Dery



“Young People must be at the centre of every initiative that is meant to serve them; not negotiable anymore”.

Alhaji Mohammed Awal
Alhassan, Chairman
– NGB Chairman



FUTURE OUTLOOK

Working together helps the Alliance to reach more young people than when working alone, and the Ghana SRHR Alliance for Young People is committed to continue their work beyond the GUSO programme. They have registered as an Alliance, developed a five-year strategic plan and a resource mobilisation strategy to support their financial sustainability. All partners will play their role to make the Alliance a self-sufficient organisation and a thought leader on youth SRHR policy issues in Ghana!

