

Summary

“Any action done without me is against me”. Modalities and conditions for the development of youth-led advocacy in Mali.

An exploratory study on the modalities, success factors and constraints of youth-led advocacy.

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FAWE Forum for African Women Educationalists
Forum des éducatrices africaines



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



KIT Royal Tropical Institute

Introduction and objectives

The meaningful involvement of young people in the development of programmes and policies that affect them is crucial for the success of programmes and the empowerment and civic engagement of young people. At the same time, studies in other contexts show that young people are well motivated to engage in advocacy efforts and programmes that affect them. As there is limited data available on youth-led advocacy, as well as its successes and constraints in Mali, this study aimed to explore how young people advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) at the regional and national level. The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) therefore set up a study as part of the Break Free! programme which aimed to understand the formal and informal structures of youth-led advocacy, how these groups operate, what characteristics make them effective, and to learn what may be holding them back, from the perspective of young people themselves. Particular attention was paid to the sustainability of initiatives.

Methodology

Using a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews with key informants (7) and youth advocates (3) and focus group discussions (3) with mixed groups of girls and boys belonging to youth groups working on SRHR, we collected data from stakeholders in the district of Bamako, and in the regions of Kita and Bougouni in Mali. These sites were selected following a mapping of youth-focused and youth-led SRHR advocacy stakeholders in Mali and in line with the implementation areas of the Break Free! programme. Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was carried out using Nvivo software.

Results

The study showed that the main actors in terms of youth advocacy on SRHR in Mali are generally NGOs that work with youth associations or groups. The state also intervenes through some structures but always relying on youth groups. The main areas of intervention are: the protection and defence of children's rights and duties, family planning, the fight against GBV and FGM, early and forced marriage, the empowerment of girls and women, the fight against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections as well as leadership.

According to our findings, when we talk about youth-led advocacy in Mali, it refers more to a set of actions aimed at improving reproductive health policies over time. Most youth groups work on this by raising awareness among decision-makers to better understand their reproductive health problems and

thus improve the texts to enable young people to enjoy their rights. Awareness raising is done through campaigns, often at the community level. Only a few participants lobby and advocate at the national government level, or even at the sub-regional or international level. Young people are motivated to participate in advocacy because they want to bring about societal change and feel that they have a primary stake in and knowledge of their SRHR issues.

Some youth-led advocacy initiatives in Mali have been successful, particularly through training and financial support from NGOs. Mechanisms for monitoring commitments have also been put in place, such as the "layidu-meter", which consists of monitoring the progress of the implementation of the commitments made as a result of youth-led advocacy. In Mali, the involvement of certain segments of the community was cited as a key factor for successful advocacy, specifically community and religious leaders. Barriers to advocacy activities mentioned by young people included young people's lack of self-confidence, fear of being misjudged by adults, financial needs and involvement at a late stage of the advocacy process. Youth participation is often not practised at all stages of the advocacy process and therefore cannot be considered as youth-led advocacy.

Conclusion

In Mali, a multitude of formal and informal structures and organisations, both youth- and adult-led, are actively advocating for the improvement of youth SRHR. While actors are trying to involve young people to be actors for their own well-being, there are not sufficient levels of youth involvement according to young people themselves and some key informants. The key phrase "*any action done without me is against me*" came up regularly in interviews and discussions with young people and key informants, as young people claim to be the best informed to understand their problems and propose solutions to the challenges they face. Therefore, the success factors for youth advocacy include the involvement of young people in all stages of the advocacy process, as well as technical and financial support from NGOs, knowledge of potential decision-makers, and trust from adults.