

# SUMMARY

## “ADVOCACY IS FIGHTING FOR OUR RIGHTS BY TEACHING THE SOCIETY”

YOUNG PEOPLE ON THEIR SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES, AND  
MOTIVATIONS FOR YOUTH-LED SRHR ADVOCACY IN ETHIOPIA



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# INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

**YOUTH-LED ADVOCACY AS A CONCEPT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY FAMILIAR IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES, AND IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) PROGRAMMES SPECIFICALLY. YET, RESEARCH ON THIS TOPIC IS RATHER SCARCE.**

Youth-led advocacy is usually understood as young people meaningfully involved in every aspect of the advocacy process, from selecting the issue, the audience, the advocacy strategies, to conducting advocacy themselves, and to monitoring and evaluating. Youth-led advocacy can be more effective than adult-led advocacy on matters that are relevant to youth, and can support young people in civic engagement and representation. However, more studies are needed to fully grasp how youth-led SRHR processes unfold in practice in different contexts. In Ethiopia, youth-led SRHR advocacy is on the rise only since very recently, particularly since the lifting of legal restrictions in 2019. This study aimed to **explore how young people advocate for SRHR in Ethiopia**. Study objectives included to understand the formal and informal structures of youth-led advocacy, characteristics that make them successful, and to learn what may be holding them back, from the perspective of young people themselves. The study was conducted as part of the Break Free! programme, which aims to increase adolescents' access to SRHR information, education, and services in nine African countries by supporting civil society.



# METHODOLOGY

The study engaged three sequential methodologies:

1

Mapping youth  
advocacy  
institutions

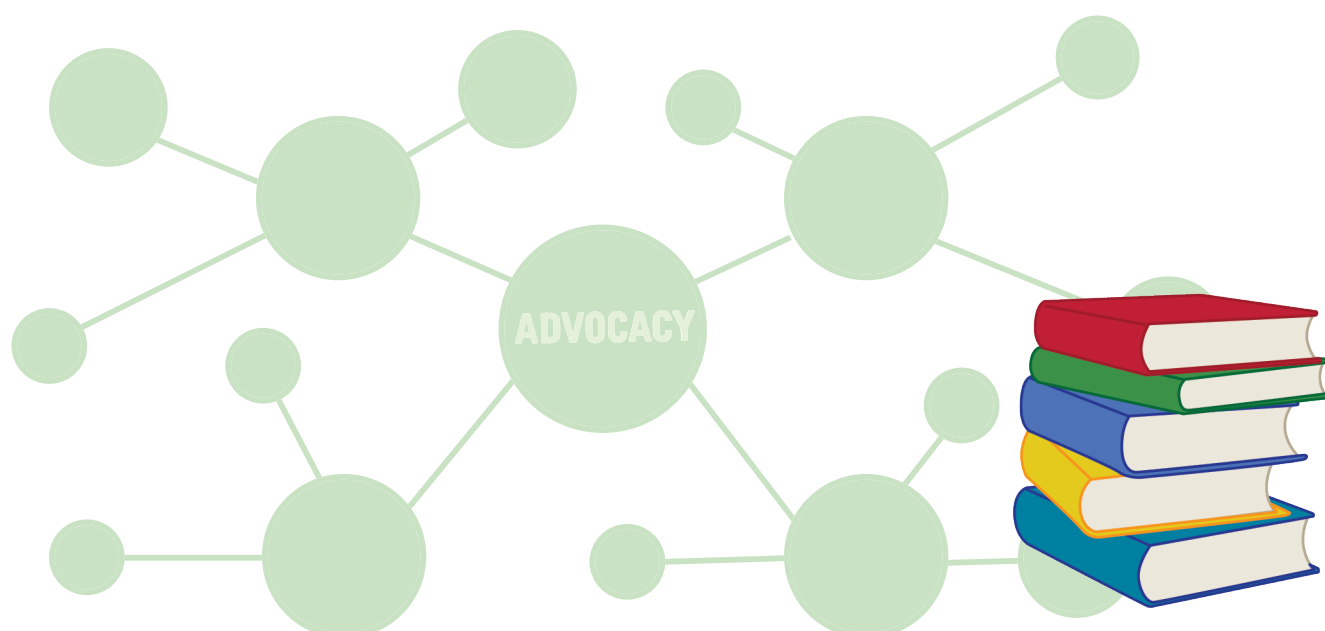
2

A desk review on  
youth advocacy  
initiatives

3

Interviews and focus  
group discussions (FGDs)  
to understand the context  
on the ground.

Interviews and FGDs were held with key informants and youth advocates (15–29 years old) to understand the landscape of youth-led SRHR advocacy in Ethiopia, the challenges, successes, and motivations of young people. In total, ten in-depth interviews were conducted; 5 with key informants, and 5 with youth advocates; and four FGDs were held with young people in both Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa. Data was analysed by both researchers using a pre-defined coding scheme based on the research objectives, and using NVivo software.

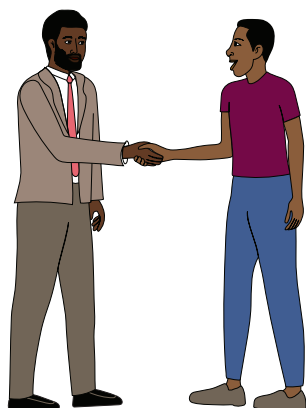


## RESULTS



Youth-led advocacy is understood by the participants as young people pushing for change and being at the forefront on issues concerning young people, at both community and policy level. Young people indicated that a prerequisite to youth-led SRHR advocacy was to raise awareness among communities and duty bearers on the importance of both youth opinions and SRHR. The findings indicate that there has been increasing attention to youth-led advocacy and SRHR advocacy in Ethiopia over the past few years. Yet, initiatives are at an infant stage and due to this, youth engagement in advocacy initiatives is not always optimally used, meaningful, or inclusive. Most youth-led advocacy activities were focused on community level work, such as awareness-raising and information-sharing activities.

The most popular form of organizing youth advocacy is youth councils that are associated with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), who are also identified as a major ally to youth-led SRHR advocacy. Being associated with an NGO increased the legitimacy of youth advocates, particularly towards government actors. At the same time, there is a high NGO dependency that makes youth-led advocacy reliant on outside funding. As such, youth-led advocacy is sometimes labelled as buying into a 'Western agenda', especially on SRHR topics. Furthermore, the majority of initiatives are not mainstreamed into existing government or community structures, possibly hindering its sustainability.



Young people particularly highlighted good youth-adult partnership, skill building, collaboration with allies, and organisation as a youth group as success factors to effecting youth-led SRHR advocacy. However, especially around the youth-adult partnership, young people were critical of the intentions of adults and mentioned to often feel misunderstood, underrepresented, or used tokenistically. Motivating factors among young people to take part in advocacy included the importance of SRHR, youth participation, and personal gains/incentives. Young men tended to participate more dominantly in NGO-initiated projects, whereas young women were more actively involved in school-based youth groups.

## CONCLUSION

In Ethiopia, there is growing space for young people to be involved in SRHR advocacy, particularly since the legal environment has recently changed to allow for more civic engagement and advocacy. While actors are increasingly intending to involve young people to be actors for their own well-being, this is not always meaningfully done or inclusive, according to young people and some key informants. Moreover, youth advocates face a “double burden” of breaking taboos in both SRHR issues as well as paving the way for youth voices to be taken seriously. Largely supported by NGO structures, young people are finding ways to engage, although the NGO-affiliation restricts their independence (in terms of budget and content decision making), and hampers the sustainability of their initiatives. Current and future programmes should actively plan to mainstream initiatives into existing government or community structures, while continuing to challenge social values to appreciate and value young people’s opinions and openness to discussing SRHR issues in government offices, communities, and NGO structures themselves.



# Break Free!



**FAWE** Forum for African Women Educationalists  
Forum des éducatrices africaines



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



**KIT** Royal  
Tropical  
Institute