

Evidence and Action

Special Issue

GOOD PRACTICES

Ghana Country Office 5th Country Program (CP5) 2006-2011

Children and Youth in Broadcasting (CYIB) Curious Minds





DESCRIPTION & CONTEXT

In a nation where half the population is under the age of 24, there is a critical need to ensure that young peoples' sexual and reproductive health needs are fully addressed. Effective interventions targeting young people will have a direct effect on sexual and reproductive health assessments, HIV/AIDS prevalence, fertility rates, literacy rates, and other measures of socioeconomic wellbeing. When young people lack knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, they engage in risky behaviours that leave them vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies. Therefore, young people must be properly educated to make the best decisions on their sexual and reproductive health—for their protection as well as the health of their partners. The Millennium Development Goals and the Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy both aim to use the media as an advocacy platform and to empower young people to highlight issues that concern them.

(CYIB) - Curious Minds is a youth media - based advocacy organization which primarily uses radio to champion youth issues across Ghana. The show is unique in that the presenters are youths between the ages of 8 and 18 who speak about topics relevant to children's rights and empowerment. Curious Minds has its origins in 1996, when several young people were asked to present issues pertinent to them on the radio for National Children's Day. Realizing that Ghana lacked a regular platform for discussing children's issues, they encouraged the creation of Curious Minds. When originally established, it was a 15-minute weekly program. However, the program's popularity quickly earned it more airtime. Initial efforts to engage youth through poems and songs evolved into more robust discussions on issues including sexual health, reproductive health, water, hygiene and sanitation, education, and more.

Curious Minds broadcasts have grown to include multiple broadcasts in several languages. Three national shows are broadcast from Accra (2 in English, 1 in Ga), four more are broadcast from other regions: Northern, Central, Western,

and Brong-Ahafo (all in English). National English-language programs are one hour and geared to children (under age 18), while the Ga program is 45 minutes and geared to youth (aged 15-35).

Since its inception, the programs' presenters have all been children under the age of 18, allowing the show to maintain its credibility as an advocacy platform "for youth by youth." Moreover, the program holds quarterly colloquiums and out-of-studio broadcasts from communities to elicit feedback from everyday Ghanaians. Consequently, the radio broadcasts have become a prominent Ghanaian civil society institution and important forum for bringing attention to topics often overlooked or ignored by policymakers but highly relevant to the nation's youth.

THEMATIC AREA

Reproductive Health, Population and Development.

PRIMARY KEYWORDS

Sexual and reproductive health, adolescents, youth, community, civil society, media, radio, capacity development, participation, knowledge-sharing, HIV/AIDS, child rights.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective is to address issues affecting Ghana's youth and to advocate on their behalf. To do this, Curious Minds has four priorities:

1. To encourage local and national governments to address child and youth rights issues. As an advocacy platform, Curious Minds seeks to shape and influence national development policy and programs.
2. To build the capacity of young people to engage with government and be independently motivated to effect positive change across Ghana. Curious Minds aims to empower young people to solve their own problems and rally them to participate in civic activity.
3. To raise Ghanaian youth's awareness of social issues—such as reproductive health, hygiene, education, employment, and child trafficking—through the routine communication of information.
4. To facilitate the capacity development of youth-centric organizations by collaborating with international and national partners to deliver training specific to such organizations' needs.

STRATEGY, KEY CHALLENGES, AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy

The Curious Minds strategy is centered on legitimately representing and advocating on behalf of Ghana's youth (children, adolescents, and young adults). By maintaining this legitimacy, Curious Minds aim to sustainably engage audiences, inform listeners, and draw attention to issues affecting youth.

Key Challenges

There are a number of key challenges affecting the program:

- Funding remains a major obstacle. Much of the core and administrative staff are volunteers. While Curious Minds is interested in advancing youth advocacy, financial constraints often prevent them from retaining high quality personnel in the long run. To address this, Curious Minds continually seeks national and international financial assistance. A related challenge is the late release of quarterly funds, interrupting work-plans and program implementation.
- Language proficiency in Ga remains a key communication challenge. Many of the hosts were speaking Ga as a second or third language, making grammatical errors that were criticized by listeners calling in. This often overshadowed the themes for the program. Language training for hosts helped ameliorate this problem.
- Breaking taboos surrounding public discussions of sexual and reproductive health was difficult for Curious Minds; but hosts were able to break the national and cultural silence. Since the establishment of Curious Minds, Ghanaian culture has become much more open to freely discussing matters pertaining to sexual and reproductive health.
- There also continues to be no reliable quantitative statistics to measure Curious Minds' audience, other than word of mouth and attendance at community outreach involvement. Ghana does not have a metric to count radio listeners, thus evaluation efforts rely largely on anecdotal evidence.
- During trainings, there has been a high rate of attrition among young people. In response, Curious Minds held more regular capacity-building sessions and strived to ensure that knowledge was shared among and between communities.
- Listener phone participation remains highly dependent on families and cultures. Many families prevent children



from calling into the program because of the cost of using a cell phone. For instance, in the Ga language program, primarily adults call in because they own cell phones.

Implementation

Curious Minds trains youth broadcasters from across the country to present and discuss issues important to them based on a 1-hour show format. The training is concentrated on substantive issues (particularly sexual and reproductive health), but also includes presentation style. Program content is primarily focused on informing and advocating for healthy child and youth development. Messages are tailored to their target demographic to ensure effective communication. For instance, Curious Minds introduces concepts through cartoons and storytelling for its child-centred programming.

Broadcasters also solicit feedback via several methods: listener call-in, out-of-studio broadcasts in communities and colloquia. Listener call-in is the primary method with which Curious Minds brings attention to youth issues. Listeners can call the station to bring attention to issues affecting them. The program also has high-level key stakeholders in youth welfare, such as regional ministers, unexpectedly calling into discussions.

To better respond to the needs of various communities across Ghana, Curious Minds hold quarterly “outside broadcasts” where they move the studio to communities across the country and hold a live broadcast. Members of the community come to listen and directly voice their concerns to the nation and local stakeholders. These outside broadcasts serve as an additional forum for reaching communities unable to call into the regular

program. At these broadcasts, issues discussed with local stakeholders are tailored to meet the specific needs of the community.

Similarly, Curious Minds partners with other organizations to hold community outreach colloquia in various regions throughout the country where hundreds of members of the community can participate. These events bring together traditional authorities, municipal representatives, District Assembly members, and other leaders. Importantly, they engage marginalized and neglected groups, including special-needs youth, who may especially lack information and knowledge tailored to their situation, and whose issues rarely receive national attention. Colloquia are not broadcast but still provide a vibrant civil society platform for community development, the provision of salient advice and training delivery by Curious Minds and partners, and the development of material for future broadcasts.

PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Curious Minds has become a Ghanaian institution and an important advocacy platform for youth because it continually seeks out youth voices and social engagement. The organization has represented youth and advocated on their behalf with government and civil society vis-à-vis:

- The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and Ghana's Children's Act of 1998.
- National Youth Network on Population and Development (KRAPA).
- African Adolescents and Youth Network on Population and Development (AfriYAN).
- National Youth Policy (NYP): A colloquium devoted to the NYP was instrumental in ensuring that the policy was passed in 2010. Youth from various political parties as well as representatives of various stakeholder institutions participated in the colloquium. Prominent among them was the then-coordinator for the NYP.
- The National Strategy Plan for HIV and AIDS 2011-2013, Universal Access 2010 (hosted with the Ghana AIDS Commission), and the Maputo Plan of Action.
- International Conference on Population and Development.
- Medium Term Development Framework (today, the Ghana Shared Growth Development Agenda).
- UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)-sponsored public awareness programs on human trafficking in the Volta Region.

Curious Minds has also achieved the following successes in youth development and participation:

- Conducting two annual capacity building trainings for young people since 2008.
- Sponsoring the participation of 30 young people to attend the African Youth and Governance Conference in Accra.
- Between 2008 and 2011, holding 48 sessions of community outreach reaching approximately 16,800 people with information on sexual and reproductive health.
- Assisting 250 young people to acquire life-skills through trainings.
- Facilitating voluntary HIV testing for 2,000 (mostly young) people at outreach events.
- (Anecdotal evidence suggests) Increasing youth's knowledge of HIV/AIDS, STIs and other issues of sexual and reproductive health, as well as their participation in society.
- Ensuring young people were able to discuss the national budget and share their thoughts regarding aspects concerning youth directly as well as health, education, employment, and other relevant components.
- Ensuring youth organizers from different political parties debated ideas on how to improve health and education in the lead up to the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

Curious Minds has had success engaging partners and support from a wide cross-section of society:

- Community leaders (including chiefs, Queen Mothers, and District Assemblymen) became sexual and reproductive health advocates, helping to bring pertinent emerging issues to the attention of policy makers
- Youth attending community outreach events wrote letters to the program and joined Curious Minds themselves
- About 6,500 people participated in colloquiums
- In the Central Region, a Distinguished Chief and Representative of the Omanhene of the Oguaa Traditional Area, Nana Kwamena Nyimfa, Adontehene, participated and chaired one of the colloquia.



LESSONS LEARNED

The most essential lesson learned was that efforts must be made to ensure that implementing partners continue to engage input and solicit feedback from target audiences and program beneficiaries.

As a radio broadcast, scaling up the program to meet demands has been done at a local level with regional broadcasts across four regions in Ghana. However, local partners are limited in their ability to carry out outside broadcasts and colloquia because it requires a threshold level of audience awareness and logistics capacity. However, the costs of radio broadcasts remain very low with a high demand by audiences, thereby enabling Curious Minds to be an effective platform for youth advocacy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Curious Minds has established itself as a vital advocacy and knowledge-sharing platform for Ghana's youth. By actively seeking out marginalized voices and opinions, Curious



Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG) and the Ghana Health Service (GHS).

SOURCES AND LINKS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

This good practice was produced with technical input from the following experts:

Esi Awotwi, Ben Treveh, Bernard Coquelin, Dennia Gayle, and Doris M. Aglobitse, all of UNFPA, and Mr. Kingsley Obeng Kyere of Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC).

For more information about this practice please contact:

coquelin@unfpa.org and aglobitse@unfpa.org or send an email to ghana.info@unfpa.org.

Mailing Address:

P. O. Box GP1423 Accra, Ghana.

Street Address:

No. 7, 7th Rangoon Close, Cantonments Accra, Ghana.

Office Email:

ghana.info@unfpa.org

PARTNERS

UNFPA, UNICEF, Plan International, Government of Ghana, National Population Council, National Youth Authority (NYA) Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Theatre for a Change (TFaC), Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), Planned

Minds has established itself as a legitimate forum for youth participation. As a result, its programming has disseminated sexual and reproductive health knowledge to young people, contributed to greater openness to dialogue on these matters publically, and reduced youth vulnerability to risky behaviours. Curious Minds has also done a noteworthy job at actively encouraging communities to raise awareness on issues important to them—including through the use of colloquia to allow communities to collectively identify specific needs.

Moving forward, the main hurdle for the program is long-term financing and budget sustainability. Curious Minds is currently heavily reliant on donors and volunteer staff, posing limits to both growth and responsiveness. It is therefore recommended that Curious Minds seek strategic partnerships with private businesses through sponsorship and advertisement to increase its revenue to cover operating costs.