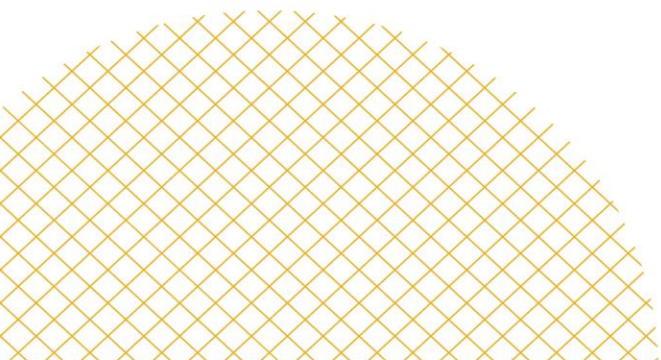


Right Here Right Now Mid Term Review Executive Summary

November 2023



RIGHT HERE
RIGHT NOW

Background

The Right Here Right Now (RHRN) programme is a strategic partnership between Rutgers (lead), ARROW, AMPF, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, Reproductive Health Uganda and RNW Media. IPPF Africa Region is a technical partner. The programme runs from 2020 to 2025, taking place in 10 countries in Africa (Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia and Uganda) and Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Nepal) and at a global and regional level. The programme is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Strengthening Civil Society for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) partnership fund.

The RHRN programme has formulated the following four Long Term Outcomes (LTOs):

- LTO 1: Empowered young people make decisions about their sexuality, voice their needs and claim their rights.
- LTO 2: A critical mass reinforces positive norms and values regarding young people's SRHR and gender justice.
- LTO 3: Governments adopt, implement and account for human rights-based policies and laws that enable young people's SRHR and gender justice.
- LTO 4: Strengthened civil society for young people's SRHR and gender justice.

Lobby and advocacy supported by mutual capacity strengthening are overarching strategies of the programme, which is aimed at tackling structural, systemic barriers in order to achieve sustainable change in connection with the programme's vision: young people in all their diversity enjoy and claim their SRHR in gender-just societies.

The mid-term review

This mid-term review (MTR) has four major objectives:

- Enable the RHRN Partnership to learn about its successes and areas for improvement to enable maximisation of its focus on young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and more specifically comprehensive sexuality education, (youth) inclusivity, and digitalisation.
- Inform planning for 2024-2025, including the adjustment of targets and indicator framework.
- Inform strategic decisions for prioritisation, and hence, increased impact and added value in 2024-2025 and beyond.
- Meet the accountability requirements of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as specified in the grant decision letter.

This MTR focused on evaluating the programme on the progress made in the first half of the programme (January 2021 to June 2023) in achieving its intended outputs and outcomes, and on learning to enable the RHRN partnership to learn about its successes and areas for improvement. The MTR covered the ten countries where the programme is being implemented - Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia, Uganda, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Nepal – as well as the global and regional level.

Joint learning was a key component of the MTR, offering input for internal reflection and stimulating learning. Validation meetings, both the in-country meetings and the global sensemaking session in Benin, were highly participatory. The global sensemaking session held in Benin from 10-14 July 2023 was particularly participatory and yielded valuable new insights, which have been integrated into the report.

MTR methodology

To answer the evaluation questions, formulated in the Terms of Reference, the evaluation team used a mixed-method evaluation approach, taking into consideration the complexity of the change processes leading towards the goals that the programme aspires to achieve.

The MTR was conducted using the following methodologies:

- Outcome Harvesting (OH) – We assessed and substantiated outcomes harvested by programme staff.



- Surveys – we used the Sprockler-tool to conduct surveys among programme staff and among young people involved in the programme.
- Interviews – We conducted interviews with staff of the consortium organisations and at country level. Also, some interviews were conducted with outside stakeholders.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held at country level, mainly with programme staff and young people involved in the programme.
- Most Significant Change (MSC)/Stories of Change – In four selected countries we designed and facilitated sessions combining the Most Significant Change methodology with the development (by young people involved in the programme) of Stories of Change.

For the country-based interviews, FGDs and MSC-sessions we engaged local consultants in each of the countries where the programme is implemented. Based on their country-level research, the harvested outcomes and the results of the surveys, each national consultant produced a country-level MTR report. Based on these reports, and the interviews at global/consortium level plus the OH and survey data, the 'global' evaluation team produced a consolidated MTR report.

Findings

Programmatic findings

Progress on the Theory of Change

Progress on Long Term Outcome (LTO) 1: Empowered young people make decisions about their sexuality, voice their needs and claim their rights

This pathway of the theory of change aims to ensure young people have access to SRHR information and education and the skills to navigate the social, physical, and emotional challenges associated with their sexuality and to ensure young people can act as active agents of change. Furthermore, the RHRN programme extended its focus to encompass the (immediate) environments and digital communities of young people, aiming to enhance their knowledge and competence in SRHR matters and foster positive attitudes toward these topics.

To date the RHRN programme has reached almost 662.000 young people with offline SRHR information and education across the ten countries, and online approaches had a reach of almost 140 million. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was the most common approach for all country coalitions in the RHRN programme, delivered both online and offline and in- and out-of-school. Activities under LTO1 also included SRHR information sessions, peer educator interventions and youth advocate training. Young participants who had taken part in these interventions reported increased knowledge and understanding of SRHR and changed opinions or beliefs on SRHR issues. The MTR research also emphasised the importance of CSE, both online and offline, in creating supportive environments and empowering young people to advocate for SRHR despite opposition and challenges in various contexts.

Employing **digital approaches** to engage and activate young people is a pivotal strategy for reaching young people across the ten countries. All country coalitions created engaging online SRHR content, including blogs, infographics, videos, podcasts, and more. One key success highlighted under digital approaches is the use of gamification in Morocco and Kenya, described by one young Kenyan participant as a way to “*help to brainstorm people’s mind out of the box.*” Whenever feasible, digital content was co-designed with young people from the target group. These digital approaches contributed to the considerable reach of the programme, although notably figures vary greatly between countries illustrating varying internet penetration rates.

Recognising challenges in measuring online reach, since 2022 the programme has also measured online engagement (likes, shares and comments). **In 2022, the programme achieved about 5,5 million engagements in 2022, which increased to over 7 million in the first half of 2023.** In a number of countries, the gap between reach and engagement rates is significant, suggesting a need for tailored strategies to optimise engagement efforts in recognition of country contexts.



Working with online approaches brings its own potential risks and challenges. Country partners grapple with several challenges, including digital safety and security risks, and online censorship in particular in Kenya and Bangladesh. Limited internet access was also a challenge in a number of countries including Burundi and Ethiopia, especially for young people in rural areas.

The RHRN programme faces growing **opposition to CSE** in many countries. This opposition often stems from deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs. However, anti-rights actors have been fuelling this resistance by spreading disinformation and by using narratives that exploit people's fears. RHRN partners respond to this growing opposition by adopting context-appropriate language and/or omitting sensitive content. In several countries, close collaboration with governments and religious leaders has supported context-appropriate CSE.

Overall, the MTR has shown a wide range of ways in which the programme has contributed to **enabling young people to voice their needs and claim their rights**, ranging from grassroots initiatives to advocacy at all levels. This empowerment involves gaining competencies in sexuality and leadership, which contribute to their ability to make informed choices, voice their concerns, and **act as agents of change**. Survey results indicate that **young participants not only increased their knowledge and awareness of SRHR issues, but also developed necessary skills to deal with SRHR topics (81% reporting a large increase) and gained confidence in making decisions about these topics (82% were very positive about their confidence in decision making)**

In various countries, harnessing **peer-to-peer** approaches emerged as a powerful strategy to empower young individuals for positive change in SRHR. In multiple country MTR reports, students express a preference for peer educators, finding them more relatable and comfortable sources of support. Peer-to-peer approaches can encourage young people to initiate discussions on topics they consider important and urgent, complementing curriculum-based SRHR education and addressing specific needs of young people. Some countries expressed the need for (more) peer educator training, especially where it is currently not provided, such as in Indonesia.

Efforts were also made to create **supportive environments** not only within schools but also in the wider community. Initiatives included educating parents about the importance of CSE, fostering dialogues on societal norms and attitudes related to SRHR, and engaging religious and cultural leaders.

Progress on LTO 2: A critical mass reinforces positive norms and values regarding young people's SRHR and gender justice

To create a critical mass reinforcing positive norms and values regarding young people's SRHR and gender justice, the RHRN programme aims to ensure that young people's environment and (digital) communities are positive towards SRHR, diversity and gender, and key influencers, media and young people speak out and mobilise others. Towards this aim, the programme deployed various approaches including targeted awareness campaigns, working with media and key influencers as well as radio and television.

On- and offline campaigns were organised across countries, targeting students, teachers, and government representatives amongst others, measuring **a reach of 139 million to date**. Of this reach approximately 208.000 represents the reach of offline campaigns, which included creative methods such as interactive theatre, to raise awareness particularly amongst young people. Online campaigns focused on a range of SRHR topics and had a reach of approximately 104 million in the first half of the programme. Programme staff were proud of their perceived impact on reinforcing positive norms and values regarding young people's SRHR and gender justice, and campaigns are reported to have encouraged discussions of taboo topics like menstruation, unsafe abortions, and emergency contraception. Similarly, to the finding in LTO1, an examination of online engagement rates compared to reach figures highlights a need to review communication strategies to boost engagement in some countries. There is an opportunity to draw valuable lessons from countries such as Nepal, where the relative engagement levels are notably higher. Challenges of variations in internet connectivity were also noted in many countries, underlining the digital divide. A regional presence and extensive social media engagement were noted as crucial for the programme's success.

Partnering with **journalists** has positively influenced **media reporting** on SRHR in a number of countries, with a total of **604 media articles/publications/reports promoting positive messages on SRHR and gender justice published** as a



result of RHRN interventions across the ten countries in 2021 and 2022. Programme messages were also disseminated through radio and television programmes, with a reported reach of over 26 million to date.

Country coalitions also extensively engaged **key influencers** both online and offline. Up to June 2023, over 500 influencers communicated positively on SRHR after working with the RHRN programme. Essential influencers identified throughout the programme include peers, youth leaders, parents, caregivers, educators, community leaders, faith leaders, religious organisations, local governments, public figures, celebrities, healthcare providers, and mass media. Key influencers, including religious leaders, emphasised the importance of integrating SRHR into faith and culture. In various countries, efforts have been made to build a pool of influencers, including popular artists and vloggers, in various countries.

According to the country MTR reports, these initiatives, coupled with an extensive dissemination of articles and online content, played a pivotal role in significantly enhancing the visibility, recognition, and overall interest in SRHR causes championed by the programme.

The programme also made efforts to garner public support in the Netherlands and globally through various events and campaigns. For example, multiple partners joined in campaigns related to 16 Days of Activism, Rutgers published a UNFPA State of the World Population report with a dedicated event and social media campaign, and ARROW led campaigns like #CSE4ALL aiming to amplify crucial messages on comprehensive sexuality education.

Progress on LTO3: Governments adopt, implement and account for human rights-based policies and laws that enable young people's SRHR and gender justice

The RHRN programme aims to influence governments and strategic bodies to implement and account for human rights-based policies and laws that enable young people's SRHR and gender justice at local, national, regional and international levels. In pursuit of this aim, in the first half of the programme, a total of 245 advocacy initiatives were carried out by RHRN partners. **Despite a context of increasing opposition including anti-rights and anti-gender movements, and shrinking civil space, to date, RHRN partners recorded a total of 52 policy outcomes at country level and 28 at international/regional level.**

At **country level**, comprehensive sexuality education was a priority advocacy topic in eight out of the ten country coalitions. Successes include removing discriminatory clauses from bills (Uganda), and historic agreements on sexuality education implementation (Indonesia, Tunisia). In relation to safe abortion, the Benin RHRN coalition together with other CSOs was instrumental in a law change permitting safe abortion under specific conditions, a significant step for reproductive rights in the region. Several countries achieved advocacy successes in promoting SOGIESC inclusion, for example removing discriminatory laws (Uganda), incorporating LGBTQI+ issues into education (Nepal), and promoting transgender rights (Bangladesh).

In **international advocacy**, RHRN operates in several spaces which are crucial for influencing global policies affecting SRHR. In New York, they participate in the Commission on the Status of Women, Commission on Population and Development and the High-Level Political Forum. In Geneva, their involvement includes the Human Rights Council and Universal Periodic Review processes. The RHRN partnership has contributed to a range of outcomes in these spaces where SRHR issues have been recognised and progressive language included in resolution documents and declarations, however increasing opposition has also limited the extent of progress.

At **regional level**, consortium partners, in particular ARROW and IPPFAR, facilitated engagement in regional advocacy spaces including the African Union, East Africa Legislative Assembly and the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD). IPPFAR's continental strategy for Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) marked progress in the African region and will support advocacy efforts for CSE at the continental and national levels. In Asia, ARROW established the APFSD Youth Forum and facilitated young people to contribute to recommendations on SDGs and young people's SRHR at international dialogues, paving the way for inclusive policies.

The RHRN programme places a strong emphasis on the **interconnectedness of advocacy efforts at the international, regional, and national levels**. One key mechanism is the use of Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) and holding national



governments to account on global SRHR commitments. Country coalitions in Indonesia, Benin, Burundi, Morocco, and Tunisia participated in UPRs with several recommendations made by country coalitions adopted by their country governments. In Nepal, building on the 2021 APFSD Youth Forum, the Nepal APFSD Youth Alliance was initiated, putting youth advocates at the forefront of discussions regarding the Nepali government's accountability for SDGs. Joint linking and learning events have also served as valuable platforms for exchanging insights into regional advocacy opportunities and challenges.

However, while some countries, like Kenya, Nepal, Tunisia, and Ethiopia, have shown strong engagement in regional and international advocacy, others, particularly newcomers to the programme, were less engaged. Challenges mentioned included limited travel in the first two years due to COVID-19, visa issues, limited capacity strengthening for global advocacy and competing national priorities.

One key element of RHRN's advocacy approach is the role played by the **Global Advocacy Group (GAG)**. The GAG, via its dedicated liaison persons linking the GAG with country teams, aims to facilitate effective communication and collaboration between countries and global advocacy spaces. The GAG has been instrumental in supporting member states during the negotiation process by offering language suggestions with a strong emphasis on inclusivity.

The programme has implemented various activities to ensure that **young people can meaningfully participate in decision-making processes** at national, regional and international level. Of the young people surveyed who had taken part in SRHR advocacy efforts, the majority said they would most likely not have taken action without the programme. At national level, young people were involved in engaging young people in advocacy initiatives, including meetings with government officials, input on protection policies, and local regulations, ensuring their active involvement in decision-making processes. At regional and international level, consortium partners built bridges for young people to engage in regional and international advocacy spaces through training, knowledge sharing, and online and in person engagement opportunities.

Progress on LTO4: Strengthened civil society for young people's SRHR and gender justice

Strengthening civil society serves as the cornerstone of the entire programme, providing a foundation for the achievement of its broader objectives. LTO4, focuses on bolstering the capacity of coalition members as well as the broader landscape of civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in SRHR and gender justice issues, aiming to create a resilient, connected and empowered civil society movement that can drive positive change in the realm of SRHR and gender justice for young people in all their diversity. The pathway embeds the programme's aim to ensure young people are at the forefront of this movement.

The programme, overall, has been successful in enhancing the **capacity of civil society organisations**. In the first half of the programme, **a total of 427 capacity strengthening and linking and learning events** were organised by the RHRN partnership. Staff surveyed unanimously reported an increase in capacity, particularly in areas related to SRHR, meaningful and inclusive youth participation, advocacy skills, and understanding social norms. Mutual knowledge exchange was noted by staff as the most popular way to strengthen capacity.

Mutual learning has been operationalised through linking and learning events as well as communities of practice on meaningful and inclusive youth participation, digitalisation, dealing with opposition and CSE. Programme staff expressed a desire for further capacity strengthening, especially in the face of growing opposition as well as enhanced cross-country linking and learning and platforms for partner communication.

The partnership has taken strides to place **youth at the forefront** of the programme, as indicated by young people being involved in decision-making structures, youth advocacy and a range of leadership opportunities. Further details including areas for improvement are provided below in the section on meaningful and inclusive youth participation. The partnership's commitment to enhancing resilience among civil society organizations has been operationalised in the face of substantial challenges in particular **an active anti-rights movement – opposing all aspects of SRHR, including CSE and gender equality - and shrinking civic space**. These challenges have necessitated a stronger emphasis on safety and security measures – addressed via technical assistance, advice, and essential training tailored to individual country needs and requests – as well as on strategies and tactics to increase resilience of the SRHR



movement such as legal assistance, setting up collaborations and mechanisms to jointly monitor and respond to opposition, enhancing communication skills and strengthening messages, and running a community of practice on dealing with opposition. Programme partners are now better equipped to collaborate with other civil society actors, governments, and development partners as well as increasingly resilient to work on SRHR in a context affected by opposition. Moreover, the programme has also improved organisational capacity and collaboration beyond the RHRN coalitions.

Reflections on the Theory of Change

The four Long-Term Outcomes (LTOs) exhibit strong and logical interconnections. Empowering young people through capacity-building, mentorship, and technical support equips them to make informed decisions about their sexuality and assert their rights (LTO1). This empowerment extends to their ability to use these skills to influence their peers and adults, reinforcing positive norms and values related to young people's SRHR and gender justice (LTO2). The influence of these empowered young people extends to advocating for policy change at both district and national levels, holding the government accountable for SRHR and gender justice (LTO3).

Strengthening civil society (LTO4) complements LTO3 (advocacy), and it provides the foundation for all other LTOs. By involving young people in decision-making roles within civil society (LTO4), the programme aims to create a critical mass of empowered individuals (LTO2). These empowered young people engage with community influencers, promote positive norms, and advocate for human rights-based policies and laws, further enhancing young people's SRHR and gender justice. The linkage between LTO2 and LTO3 becomes evident through the programme's communication and advocacy strategies. Empowering more young people with SRHR information and skills enables them to engage with duty bearers and hold them accountable for policies and laws supporting SRHR and gender justice. Moreover, continuous engagement and advocacy with government entities for accessible educational materials (LTO 3) complements the efforts of SRHR champions and CSOs in reaching young people with disabilities (LTO 2).

Digitalisation

The implementation of digitalisation initiatives is a great added value of the RHRN programme. The programme is making considerable strides in capitalising on that development. Overall young people have embraced the internet more than their elders. Many of them turn to social media for their information needs on SRHR. This has greatly extended the (potential) reach of sexuality education and information.

The emphasis on digitalisation encompasses aspects such as digital rights, digital reach, digital engagement, insights through digital data, digital movement building, and digital media. The programme is aware of the safety and security risks inherent in online activities, such as cyberbullying, harassment, technology facilitated gender-based violence, fake news etc., and has integrated a digital dimension into its safety and security efforts. Digitalisation has allowed country coalitions to disseminate SRHR information much wider than through offline dissemination methods. At the same time online platforms and social media are swarmed with information from less reliable sources. The digital divide is a serious issue; both between countries and within countries and requires continued attention.

There is great demand under country coalitions for more capacity training on digitalisation, both on operational and strategic level: digitalisation for advocacy; using digital means to help implementing the programme; training on how to capture the right images for publication; refresher training for all digital communication focal persons; training on data storage; how to analyse digital data (e.g. using Google Analytics); better tools and digital means of monitoring, evaluation and learning to measure impact; capacity building in digital security and digital archiving; digital media training; digital approaches towards filmmaking and storytelling etcetera. The Community of Practice on Digitalisation plays an important role in mutual capacity strengthening and disseminating of knowledge, capacities and insights in digitalisation within the RHRN programme.

As mentioned above, measuring reach of online channels comes with challenges. As noted in LTO1 and LTO2, in some countries a relatively low level of engagement compared to reach suggests a need for a more strategic approach to communications. It would be interesting to see how digital interactions lead to deeper levels of engagement like participating in programme activities or other types of (online or offline) activism related to SRHR.



Principles and values

Meaningful and Inclusive Youth Participation

The RHRN programme has strived to ensure meaningful and inclusive youth participation (MIYP) in all phases of the programme. Young people are a part of the RHRN governance structure. Within all country coalitions and in the global consortium, organisations that are youth-led or youth-focused play a central role. **In 2022, six out of ten country coalitions had over 50% representation from young people in their decision-making governance structures.** Several country coalitions and the global consortium include youth-led partners. Additionally, the Kenya, Burundi and Nepal coalitions established and strengthened youth committees where young people have formulated action plans and gained varying levels of decision-making authority.

On the whole, youth participation in RHRN is not tokenistic: the voices of young people seem to be valued and their opinions are taken into consideration. This approach allows for the integration of young people's perspectives and needs into the design of programme activities, ensuring their influence throughout activity implementation and monitoring. The survey of young participants indicates that the majority expressed a high level of confidence in their capacity to voice their needs and assert their rights as a result of participating in the programme. A majority of staff surveyed felt young people had freedom of choice regarding participation, access to relevant information and ability to voice opinions and be heard. However, although still broadly positive, areas of decision-making authority and level of responsibility granted to young people received more mixed results in the staff survey, suggesting a need for continued attention.

Other challenges related to MIYP include power dynamics between young people and adults, resulting in young people being reluctant to make their voices heard or feeling their perspectives are not consistently taken into account. This can apply both within the programme and externally in public activities and underscores the importance of educating adults about the advantages of recognising young people as valuable contributors to decision-making and community progress. There is a need to consistently ensure that MIYP is seen as not only an ideal but also a practice. Inclusiveness of youth participation is less comprehensively operationalised than meaningfulness. While positive steps have been made towards inclusivity (see section below), further attention can be paid to the involvement of a diverse range of young people.

One of the key learnings on meaningful youth participation includes that it takes time and investment for young people to be in positions of power and to build trust.

Inclusivity

In the realisation that young people are not a homogenous group in society, RHRN aims to actively reach out to different underrepresented and excluded groups of young people. The programme has focused specifically on intersectionality.

One key aim was to include organisations representing diverse groups in programme governance. In a number of countries, LGBTQI+ and disability-focused organisations were part of the country coalition from the start. Further, in response to an observation in the first year of the programme that partners representing marginalised groups dropped off or were sometimes not visible in the programme, in 2022 many country coalitions opened to include new coalition members that represented marginalised groups and young people. While youth-led organisations and women-led organisations are seen to have strong meaningful engagement in the programme, there is a need for greater attention to be given to the inclusion of LGBTQI+ and disability-focused organisations.

Regarding programme implementation, progress was made in terms of inclusivity regarding people with disabilities. Several coalitions, such as Ethiopia and Uganda, ensured accessibility for individuals with disabilities by producing materials in braille and audio-visual formats. They also made their events and venues accessible, providing sign language interpreters and accommodations. In Burundi, a braille document on sexual rights was developed to provide access to information for young people with visual impairments. In Indonesia, research was conducted to develop curricula and teaching materials for young people with intellectual disabilities and hearing loss.



Specific interventions were also developed targeting LGBTIQ+ young people, including a 'Queer Camp' in Indonesia and in Bangladesh an 'allyship guideline' with detailed descriptions for LGBTIQ+-relevant terminologies and steps on how individuals and organisations can be allies to LGBTIQ+ communities. However, in some countries, societal rejection of members of LGBTIQ+ groups challenged their full participation in the programme.

Other challenges related to inclusivity include ensuring sufficient budget to enable participation of diverse groups in the programme and ensuring that a full range of young people are participating in decision-making. Language has also been a barrier to inclusion, indicating a need for consistent attention to language-inclusion.

Sustainability

Sustainability was a key priority for the programme. It is defined at four levels: (i) sustainability of outcomes, (ii) sustainability of capacity strengthened organisations and individuals, (iii) sustainability of youth (youth-SRHR, youth-led and youth-serving) movements, and (iv) financial sustainability. The MTR focused on the first three levels.

The development of advocacy strategies working towards systemic changes in SRHR policies and establishment of good working relationships with government stakeholders were key approaches to increase the sustainability of policy outcomes. For example, strong government relationships were central in policy wins regarding CSE scale up and delivery. Most country coalitions engage in dialogues on SRHR with key influencers like religious leaders, community leaders, and public figures, aiming to create a more progressive environment to sustain outcomes. The engagement of young people in promoting their own SRHR was perceived by country partners as an important instrument for sustainability. However, a high efflux of young people involved in the programme acts as a limitation to sustainability. Sustainability is a key consideration in the programme's focus on capacity strengthening. Both on consortium and on country level, the programme has put considerable efforts into building inclusive, resilient and well-functioning CSOs. The research at country level for this MTR also identified many efforts to increase capacities and results thereof (see LOT₄). Regarding the sustainability of youth-led organisations and movements, country level MTR-research confirmed that the programme's investment in young people as active agents of change acts as a sustainability mechanism to build youth movements.

The sustainability of interventions in the field of international cooperation is to a large extent dependent on the 'ownership' of the programme by the people and organisations that are involved. See findings below regarding local ownership within RHRN.

The sustainability of the changes that are (partly) a result of the RHRN interventions is considered average to high, according to RHRN staff, with areas where sustainability could be enhanced including staff turnover; the delivery of comprehensive sexuality education; and capacity strengthening efforts.

Partnership findings

Collaboration within country coalitions

The staff survey indicated positive internal collaboration within most country coalitions with around half of the respondents describing collaboration as good or very good, and around half as moderate. Clear and complementary roles and responsibilities were cited as important sources of good collaboration. Conversely in some cases, a broad-spectrum build-up of the coalition produced confusion about roles and responsibilities. Other challenges include competition reported between coalition partners over available resources/funding, leading to limited sharing of ideas and opportunities among coalition members.

Power differences between bigger and smaller coalition members are identified. In some countries, differences between organisations focusing on implementation of sexuality education, that benefit from having good working relationships with government institutions and more activist, advocacy focused organisations were noted. At the same time, lead organisations depend on other coalition members to provide timely and quality input for data collection and other PMEL activities. This can put additional pressure on the lead association and requires a clear division of responsibilities and close coordination between all stakeholders to ensure a fair division of labour.



Collaboration between country coalitions and the consortium

Overall, programme staff consider collaboration between the country coalitions and the consortium partners as moderately good to very good and the level of support provided by global RHRN partners to country coalitions generally received favourable feedback.

Five working groups bring together relevant staff from across the programme to work together on themes of capacity strengthening, global advocacy, PMEL, communications and 'ways of working'. After 2021, the participation of country coalitions in these working groups was enhanced. A noted challenge is to consider how to avoid overburdening countries with numerous globally-led consortium activities.

Collaboration within the programme is also manifest in the Communities of Practice (CoPs) on digitalisation, comprehensive sexuality education, dealing with oppositions and meaningful and inclusive youth participation. The CoPs have proven to be quite useful in sharing experiences and best practices. Participating in a CoP, however, takes considerable resources for country representatives who also have a range of other demands within the programme. Additionally, further work can be done to better disseminate learnings from the CoPs. Collaboration also takes place at a global level via the global steering committee and global programme team, where two country lead partners (Uganda and Morocco) are part of the global consortium. In Uganda this global representation was seen as an advantage, enabling national issues to be discussed at the highest level.

Local ownership

Over the first half of the programme period, the RHRN programme has made considerable progress towards local ownership and the exploration of power dynamics. Programme ownership and the, sometimes, intricate power relations between civil society organisations at national, regional and global level require constant reflection on roles, on financing relationships etc.

The MTR shows that in many countries, country coalitions operate with a relatively large degree of independence. Local ownership is concretised by a number of principles and ways of working in the partnership. Work plans are collaboratively designed and created by country coalitions themselves, ensuring that activities align with the specific requirements and contexts of the given country. Further country coalitions have their own locally-led initiatives, strategies and grant systems.

One concrete measure taken to enhance ownership was the integration of country representatives into various working groups and Communities of Practice. To further advance this approach, it is advisable to elevate country representatives to leadership roles within these groups and transfer the management and administration of such groups to partner organisations in the Global South. An evident constraint in this process is the limited time available for the extensive involvement of country representatives in these groups considering the other country-level demands on their time.

Collaboration with MoFA, Dutch embassies

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is both the donor of the RHRN programme and a strategic partner. These two roles are sometimes at odds. The value of the collaboration with MoFA stands out in global policy spaces where the Dutch government shows political leadership on SRHR and promotes civil society and youth participation at the decision-making table. A MoFA representative recommended involving MoFA earlier in a global advocacy process to strengthen collaboration.

In countries where the programme is implemented, Dutch embassies play a supportive role, for example facilitating platforms to collaborate, align and find synergies on themes as well as on collaboration with respective governments. The quality of the relationships between RHRN coalitions and Dutch embassies varies from one country to another. Alongside these positive aspects of collaboration with the ministry, challenges were noted, particularly on the balance between local ownership and strict accountability procedures. On the one hand, the ministry pushes for local ownership, but at the same time the consortium is held accountable 'as far as the programme euro rolls'. Further, new information, such as revised audit protocol and guidelines, are shared mid-programme. The strictness of the



administrative procedures is seen by some country and consortium partners as a significant restraint. Finally, when faced with integrity challenges the ministry has been seen to transfer risk to consortium rather than engaging in shared risk management.

Prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and fraud and corruption

Country coalitions implemented measures addressing issues of prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment (PRSEAH) as well as fraud and corruption. With regard to PRSEAH awareness-raising initiatives were orchestrated to educate coalition partners about the risks and (sometimes conflicting) principles to navigate: zero tolerance to inaction, doing justice, the survivor-centred approach in case of SEAH, and confidentiality as a function of the 'need to know'. Further needs- and request-based support is being provided.

Preventive measures were put in place to pre-empt fraud and corruption including guidelines, annual letters of agreement including an emphasis on avoiding fraud and corruption, routine assessments and support to the coalition members by country lead partners and internal and external audit processes. With regard to both PRSEAH and fraud and corruption, attention needs to be paid to ensuring that all coalition members, in particular newer members, are aware of and are rigorously implementing these preventative measures.

The programme experienced one noteworthy case of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Following inadequate response to substantiated allegations, the RHRN Steering Committee ultimately decided to part ways with the organisation in question.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are summarised versions of full recommendations provided in the report below. In addition to the recommendations, five priorities for 2024 and 2025 were identified jointly with the programme team during the sensemaking session, based on the mid-term review findings and current context.

The following should be integrated into the programme's strategies for maximum impact: (i) Develop robust strategies to **deal with opposition**, collaborate with allies, and promote shared learning. (ii) Prioritise **visibility** by documenting and showcasing RHRN's work both externally and internally to support sustainability (iii) Continue to prioritise CSE and emphasise focus on **inclusive CSE** for all. Strengthen CSE advocacy with evidence on inclusive approaches including digital and offline CSE. (iv) to enhance **sustainability**, develop exit strategies and invest in programme visibility, CSE institutionalisation, policy advocacy, civil society strengthening, and digital approaches.

LTO1: Empowered young people make decisions about their sexuality, voice their needs and claim their rights

- **Sustain the engagement of young people:** Develop strategies to maintain and sustain the meaningful and inclusive participation of young people, prioritising long term involvement over one-off engagements.
- **More focus on inclusive CSE:** Amplify the programme's commitment to inclusive CSE and more strongly embrace and intersectional perspective. Address challenges related to online access of diverse groups. Optimise the blend of offline and online strategies through addressing safety concerns of minority groups.
- **Dealing with opposition:** Further develop strategies (online and offline) to address opposition and to create more supportive environments to SRHR education/CSE
- **More focus on and evidence for the quality of CSE:** Increase focus on assessing the quality of the various CSE interventions in the programme, including understanding the extent to which they are comprehensive, inclusive and effective.
- **Scale up CSE:** In order to ensure sustainability of CSE interventions, further strengthen collaboration with and advocacy towards existing local/national structures to ensure institutionalisation of CSE and proper implementation of laws and policies.



LTO2: A critical mass reinforces positive norms and values regarding young people's SRHR and gender justice

- **Increase focus on marginalised area:** Strengthen offline SRHR campaigns in marginalised areas, where internet penetration and digitalisation are lagging. Connect with traditional media to enlarge the reach of offline campaigns.
- **Structured digital communication strategies:** Develop and implement more structured digital communication strategies, taking into account young people's needs and internet usage.
- **Utilise journalist partnerships:** Maintain journalist partnerships to improve media coverage of SRHR and gender justice, building on existing good practice.
- **Enhance focus on engagement in and impact of digital campaigns:** Monitor and analyse engagement in digital campaigns and use data to inform and evaluate campaigns. Gather more robust evidence on campaign impact to inform future work.
- **Create/develop safe spaces for young people:** Develop safe spaces (online and offline) for all young people and equipping them with the needed tools, skills and mechanisms to be comfortable to articulate their issues

LTO3: Governments adopt, implement and account for human rights-based policies and laws that enable young people's SRHR and gender justice

- **Prioritisation and strategy at global and national level:** Adopt a more targeted approach driven by topic rather than process through: (i) prioritisation of the most pressing topics for global advocacy; (ii) focusing on ensuring the effective implementation of national policies and laws where wins have already been achieved, (iii) investing in advocacy capacity building particularly for young advocates and (iv) thorough reviews of advocacy spaces every 6 months to assess progress, identify emerging priorities and adjust strategies in response.
- **National priorities and budgets:** national advocacy strategies should have a clear delineation of priorities, with specific budgets attached to each priority area.
- **Linking national, regional and international advocacy efforts:** Further enhance collaboration, interaction and communication between the global advocacy group and country advocacy partners including through country-level advocacy contact persons and working groups and strengthen southern lead in global advocacy.
- **Capturing advocacy successes:** Emphasise capturing and sharing the process and the incremental gains in advocacy work. In the face of increasing opposition, review what counts as success.
- **Collaboration with other organisation and movement building:** Continue to foster collaboration with other organisations, campaigns, alliances and governments to create a stronger collective voice, in particular in the field of CSE and education more broadly.
- **Linking digitalisation to advocacy:** Investigate, formulate and document the linkages between digitalisation and advocacy. Formulate a digital media strategy to bolster advocacy efforts. Consider investment in digital capacity of country coalitions and encourage cross-country collaboration. Combine online and offline methods to strengthen SRHR campaigns within marginalised communities.
- **Innovative advocacy approaches:** Encourage the adoption of innovative advocacy approaches such as evaluating political decision-makers, implementing case studies, and leveraging digitalization to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of advocacy efforts.
- **Foster meaningful and inclusive youth participation:** Ensure meaningful and inclusive youth participation in decision-making processes related to SRHR policies, including creating spaces for young people, especially those from marginalised groups.
- **Balancing coordination and specialisation:** Optimise advocacy coalition effectiveness by striking a balance between coordination and specialisation, allowing diverse organisations to leverage their unique strengths while working together to achieve shared advocacy objectives.

LTO4: Strengthened civil society for young people's SRHR and gender justice

- **Global Communities of Practice (CoP):** Increase documentation of learnings from global CoPs and dissemination of learnings to all partners of the RHRN Partnership
- **Strengthen the visibility of successes and learnings:** In order to support advocacy and learnings at global level, strengthen visibility through improved communication internally and externally. Activate the global



communications working group, include communications in annual plans and budget, create (or promote existing) platform(s) where partners can communicate about learnings and consider a newsletter.

- **Strengthen mutual learning:** Use terminology of mutual learning instead of capacity strengthening, which can also include global partners learning from country partners. Focus on mutual learning on dealing with opposition. Continue to focus on cross-country linking and learning. Consider accessibility in terms of language and event format.
- **Address high staff turnover:** In order to increase retention of skills and knowledge transfer, focus on ensuring proper documentation and establishing effective handover periods within organisations.
- **Meaningful and inclusive Youth Participation / Youth at the Forefront:** Hold quarterly meetings with young people to evaluate MIYP, facilitate trainings on youth-adult partnerships, invest in comprehensive training and skill development for young people in the programme, create and strengthen learning exchange spaces for young people, ensure that young people have meaningful roles in the decision-making spaces and can provide feedback, ensure and document meaningful participation of young people from the beginning of implementation (including planning, evaluation and reporting).
- **Inclusivity:** Allocate need-based resources for country coalitions to facilitate participation of people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. Strengthen capacity on inclusivity and intersectionality.

Digitalisation

- **Address the digital divide:** Explore and invest in a clear digital rights agenda addressing the digital divide and digital illiteracy, the lack of access to affordable and reliable internet and lack of credible and trustworthy information online. Collaborate with the MoFA and their digital agenda, and lobby jointly for digital literacy, access to the internet and to information online.
- **Inclusive reach:** Invest in strategies that bridge the digital divide to effectively reach marginalised communities. Design digital interventions adapted to youth in all their diversity, particularly for marginalised young people and those with disabilities including visual and hearing impairments. Measure and analyse digital reach to ensure it includes underrepresented groups.
- **Data-driven approaches to digital engagement:** Intensify platform tracking and mapping and adapt strategies in response. Enhance use of social listening. Shift the focus from purely reach metrics to measuring how digital engagement leads to programme impact. Explore possibilities of integrating artificial intelligence to increase accessibility of SRHR interventions.
- **Capacity strengthening for digitalisation:** Address the significant demand for capacity training on various digitalisation topics from country coalitions.

Sustainability

- **Cascading training strategies:** Adopt train-the-trainer strategies to ensure the sustainability of capacity strengthening efforts.
- **Sustainability of outcomes:** Continue to prioritise local ownership as a foundation for sustainable interventions. To ensure this, address the challenge of high staff workload within country coalitions. Increase efforts to engage other CSOs and other organisations in the work and the mission of RHRN.
- **Sustainability of youth-led organisations and movements:** Assist youth-led organisations in the process of official registration to facilitate future funding opportunities. Collaborate with existing youth-led organisations that have demonstrated sustainability and initiatives of marginalised young people. Focus on power-sharing, fostering youth-adult partnerships, securing recognition within the coalition, ensuring youth-friendly funding and well-planned exit strategies.
- **Post-project sustainability:** Focus on sustainability post-project, e.g., revenue generating activities, business model, design thinking, youth-friendly funding, and attitude change. Give particular attention to investing in fundraising skills to strengthen long-term sustainability efforts and outcomes.

Partnerships, Power Dynamics and Localisation

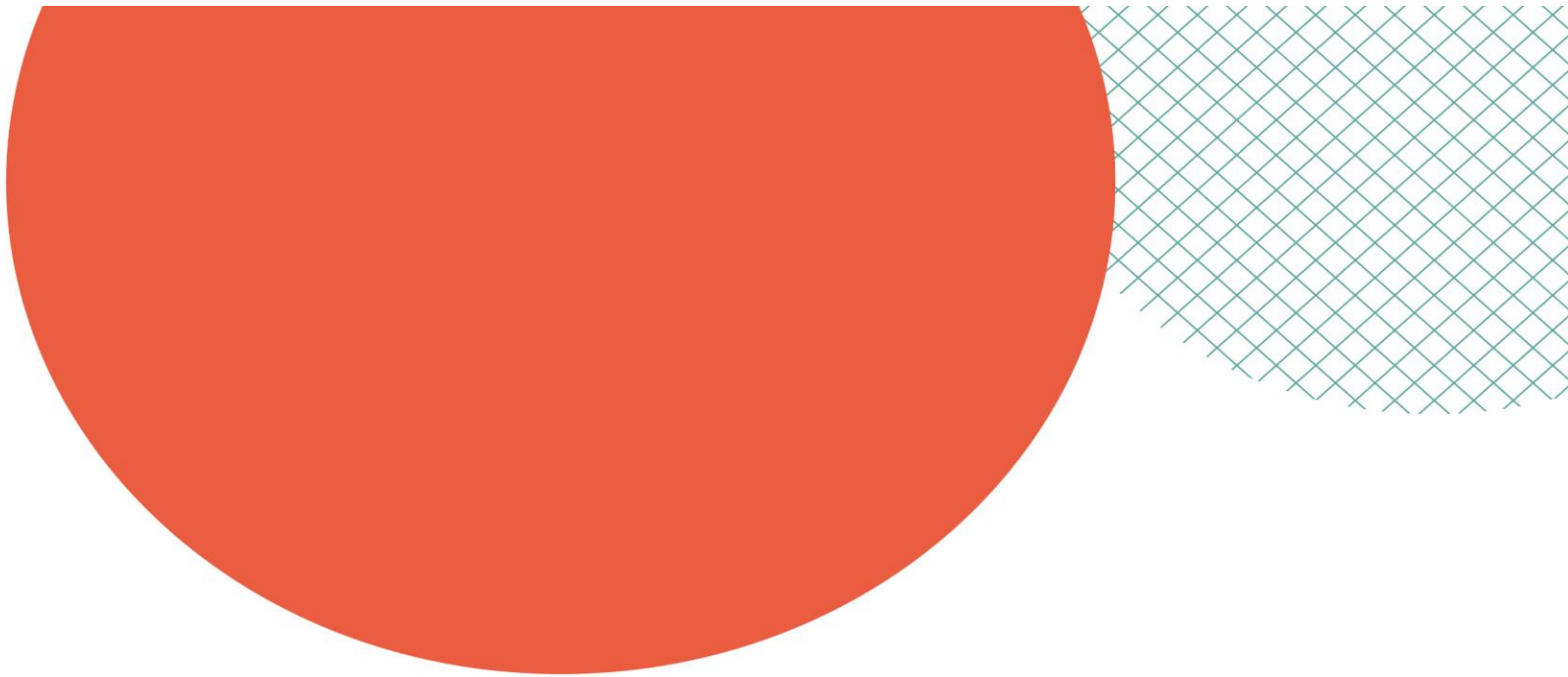
- **Empower local partners:** Continue to stimulate and expand the existing country ownership mechanisms and locally-led initiatives. Further strengthen a shared understanding of inclusive partnership and coalition



management at country and global level. Actively take steps to share power at all levels including dialogue with the Ministry on local ownership including shared risk management and lesser accountability requirements. Initiate dialogue on how to prevent dominance of one organisation within country coalitions.

- **Preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment:** (Continue to) Develop and implement Standard Operating Procedures to address sexual harassment. Ensure sufficient resources for case investigation. Leadership needs to make the topic a standing agenda item, together with other integrity issues.
- **Working groups and communities of practice (CoPs):** Further expand the membership of working groups to include more country coalition representatives. Transfer leading roles to country organisations. Foster a safe and inclusive environment for discussing sensitive topics in CoPs and encourage open dialogue and trust building. Link CoPs more with like-minded organisations and programmes through opening up membership of other exchange mechanisms.
- **Outcome harvesting:** Expanding Outcome Harvesting to cover not only LTO3 but the entire programme. Enhance outcome descriptions to emphasise change pathways, intermediary outcomes and collaborative efforts with other actors including their contribution and role in achieving the outcome. Capture negative outcomes to provide critical information on how external opposition and challenging environments affect programme effectiveness.





We are a global advocacy partnership in pursuit of the fulfilment of young people's SRHR – free of stigma, discrimination and violence. In our partner countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America, and at international level, we strengthen the capacity of young people and civil society organisations for joint SRHR advocacy. Ultimately, we want to reinforce institutional accountability, and realise the adoption, budget allocation and implementation of SRHR-progressive and inclusive policies.

