

CHOICE FOR
YOUTH &
SEXUALITY

My Stories of change:

Inspiration for
Innovation



RIGHT HERE
RIGHT NOW

Inspiration for Innovation

RHRN2 & Power to You(th)

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KEEKE ART

With thanks to the team who developed the '5 YEARS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP' booklet and content.

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Acronyms

AGYW	Adolescent girls & young women
CoP	Comuunity of Practice
CPD	Commission on Population & Development
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSW	Commision on the Status of Women
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation & cutting
GTA	Gender transformative approach
GUSO	Get Up, Speak Out program*
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICPD	International Conference on Population & Development
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex & other sexual orientations, gender identities, & sex characteristics



Acronyms

MIYP	Meaningful & Inclusive Youth Participation
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning
RHRN2	Right Here Right Now 2 program
SGBV	Sexual & gender based violence
SRHR	Sexual & reproductive health & rights
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
YAP	Youth Adult Partnership
YID	Yes I Do program*
YLO	Youth Lead Organisation



* GUSO and YID are previous programs in which CHOICE was a consortium partner. You can find out more about these programs on the [‘Stories of Change’ website](#)

Inspiration for Innovation

Foreword

As I write these words, we are living in terrifying times. After around a decade of increasing opposition and slow erosion of fundamental rights, the last few years have seen a rapid and brutal deterioration of human rights across the globe: the rise of right-wing regimes, policies pulled from dystopian nightmares, genocides –some unfolding silent, others streamed in real time– all equally horrific, sudden and severe funding cuts globally triggering the collapse of SRHR infrastructure, and the list goes on.

But WE STAND STRONG!

Young people's SRHR is more urgent than ever. Nothing will pull us out of this darkness except radical imagination of a just society and the commitment to make it a reality. This a job that young people know how to do.

This booklet is living proof of that power. It is the echo of many young voices, a glimpse into what these two programs have made possible. It is just a fragment of what is possible when young people are truly trusted to lead. As an Executive Director, this piece has brought me hope and inspiration to continue in this fight. I believe it holds the same power to inspire you, too.

Beyond a testimony this is a call for action. This is an invitation to continue supporting the youth movement. A plea to finance youth SRHR initiatives driven by and for young people, to trust young people with big responsibilities. A reminder to give us the seat at the table that has

always been ours, to value our ideas and meaningfully include us in shaping the world and the decisions that directly affect our bodies and our lives.

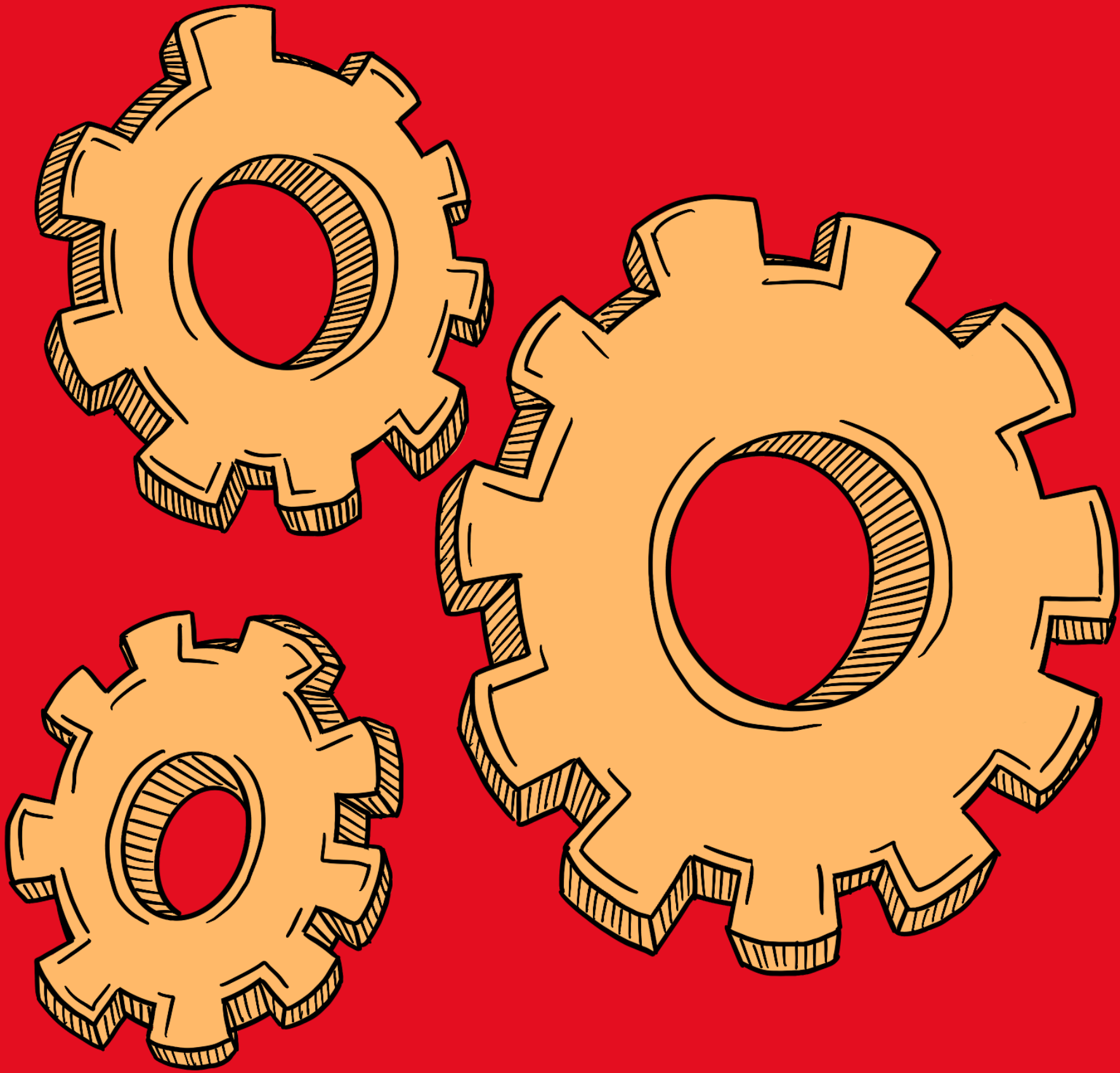
We are young, we are brave and we stand strong.

I can't close without expressing my deepest gratitude to the incredible young people who brought this project to life. Lizzie – thank you for leading with heart and vision. I'm so proud of the powerful legacy you have made real. Ilayda, Helena, and Weston – thank you for your dedication to capturing these powerful stories and transforming them into this beautiful booklet. And thank you, Shivatmicaa, for your thoughtful and meticulous editing. To Sazzad, Eugène, Hanna, Faizatu, Tirza, Quinter, Godfrey, Nir, Weston, Ci Laa Bokk, Brenda, and Mumina – thank you for sharing your stories, for your strength and your immense contribution to the youth moment.

Here's to many more years of collective work and to the day we stand in the just world we dared to imagine and create!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Arguello Ximena". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and is written over a faint, light blue grid background.

Ximena Arguello
Executive Director,
CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality



Programs



As the second phase of the RHRN program, the vision of this partnership continues that of its' predecessor, that young people in all their diversity enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in gender just societies. Along with Rutgers (lead organization), AMPF (Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale), ARROW (Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women), RHU (Reach a Hand Uganda), and RNW Media, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality works as a consortium partner in this MoFA funded program. RHRN2 operates in these 10 countries across the African and Asian continents: Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Tunisia and Uganda.

As consortium member, CHOICE's role is:

- 1) Supporting the capacity strengthening of Youth-Led Organizations (YLO) in the country coalitions
- 2) Overall integration of MIYP
- 3) Co-responsible for the international advocacy, where we support youth-led advocacy at global level and advocate for increased space for young people in international development and international decision-making spaces.



**RIGHT HERE
RIGHT NOW**



Initiated in 2021, the Power to You(th) program seeks to contribute to more adolescent girls and young women being meaningfully included in decision-making processes regarding harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and cutting (FGMC), sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and unintended pregnancies. Along with a consortium of three organizations, AMREF Netherlands (lead organization), Rutgers and Sonke Gender Justice, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality works as a technical partner, providing expert advice, tools and trainings on how to integrate MIYP within the program and its activities.

The program is active in 7 countries across Africa and Asia: Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Indonesia, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda.

As technical partner, CHOICE's role is:

- 1) Engagement in the Power to You(th) governance structure
- 2) Capacity Strengthening of YLOs
- 3) Technical support for youth-led advocacy at the global level





Key Activities

Connecting Youth-Led organizations: Connector Week



CHOICE's work in capacity strengthening and advocating for MIYP and SRHR has made us a champion in connecting young people and YLOs. As a connector, CHOICE seizes the opportunity to bring together our far-reaching network to collectivize youth voices on the SRHR of young people worldwide.

Since its' inception during CHOICE's previous programs, Get Up, Speak Out and Yes I Do, the Connector Week has had five editions: 2017 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2019 in Entebbe, Uganda, a digital version in 2020, 2023 in Lake Navaisha, Kenya and 2025 in Grand Popo, Benin. Each edition, the number of participations grew, including representatives from YLOs across different programs. During the Connector Weeks, participants had the opportunity to link and learn from each other and strengthen their capacity. Each Connector Week had a needs-based program, and included topics that were the most relevant for the participants, such as diversification of funding, strategic planning, MIYP, SRHR advocacy, and sustainability of the youth movement. Sessions were facilitated by the CHOICE team, country partners and the participants.

Over the years, the Connector Week has provided a platform for genuine connections, youth movement building and important dialogue between young people coming from different programs, working in different contexts and living across the globe.



What particularly struck me was the strength of the collective, the benevolence of the exchanges, and the shared determination to move forward together despite the challenges. There was a real sense of positive energy and commitment from everyone

- Connector Week 2025 participant

Innovation for MIYP: Seedgrants for New Ideas



After years of working on meaningful youth engagement, CHOICE is always eager to support new and innovative youth-led initiatives to catalyze action for MIYP.

In 2018, the CHOICE seed grant was established through the Get Up, Speak Out program to inspire inventive, meaningful youth participation strategies. Since then CHOICE has managed 11 innovative seed grants in the GUSO, RHRN2 and Power to You(th) programs. With grant partners in Ghana, Uganda, Indonesia, Malawi, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tunisia the seedgrants have covered a range of topics and methods such as strengthening Youth Adult Partnerships (YAP) to using innovative and inclusive methods to advocate for SRHR and MIYP.

In each cycle of the seed grant, YLOs in the programs sent in proposals on ways to improve and sustain MIYP within and after the programs. In the last cycle, CHOICE applied a Participatory Grantmaking approach to the selection process. There has been a focus on sustainable activities that can continue to create an impact once the seedgrant and the program has ended. We have been inspired by the incredible outcomes that have been reported, and how these projects have created lasting change in community attitude and structures.



For instance, through the project of the Girls Advisory Council in Ghana, community elders committed seats for 2 elected young people to participate in and contribute to their weekly meetings with chiefs and sub-chiefs. Additionally, the Youth Executive Board of RHRN Kenya has used the skills gained in the seed grant process to secure other grants and further their initiatives at community-based organizations. To celebrate and learn from the successes and challenges of the seedgrants, CHOICE hosted a Townhall where representatives of the CHOICE seedgrant shared their best practices and advice for other YLOs seeking to secure small grants.

MIYP calls for innovative approaches that adapt to dynamic community landscapes and changing contexts. This is why CHOICE will continue to support efforts for innovative meaningful youth participation that will push boundaries to improve SRHR!



**We hold the
conviction that art
possesses the
capability to bridge
the gap between
adults and young
people, as its
versatility transcends
age boundaries**



- Youth Executive Board of Kenya

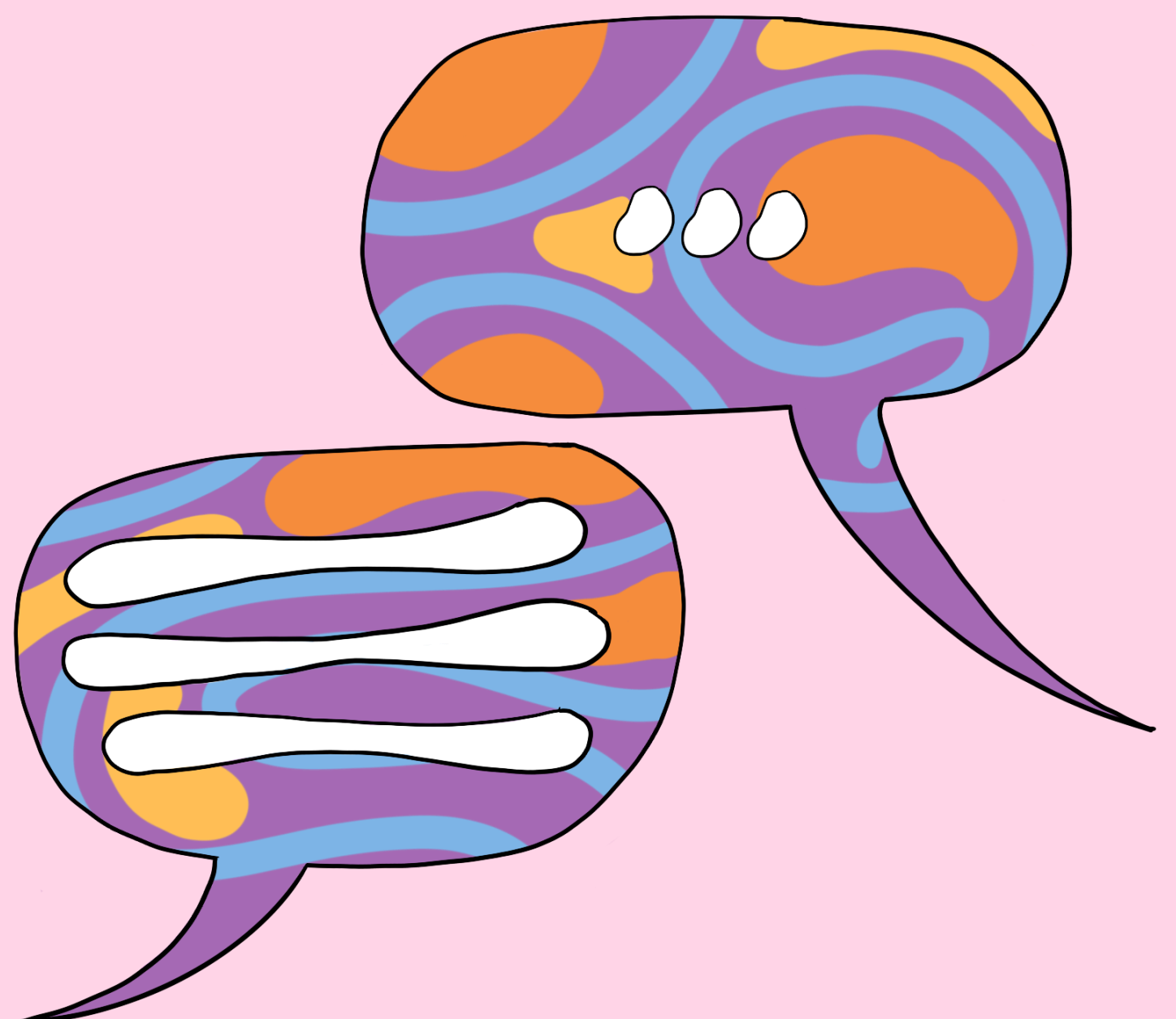
Stronger together: harnessing the power of online spaces for cross-programmatic linking & learning



CHOICE recognises that for a strong youth movement to grow and sustain itself, we must invest in spaces to connect and learn with fellow young people! For example, a cross-programmatic endeavour that CHOICE has championed has been the Youth Engage Community of Practice (CoP), merged from two separate working groups on MIYP from the RHRN2 and Power to You(th) programs. Through the Youth Engage CoP, youth and YLOs in the programs are connected at multiple levels and provided a platform to learn through shared expertise, tools, capacity building, background knowledge and best practices! Members developed resources that can be used and implemented within the programs to support MIYP mainstreaming. These resources include informative and creative visual notes that have captured the key learnings from the sessions in a concise youth-friendly manner. The Youth Engage newsletter, for example, shares MIYP tools, stories from Youth Engage members and upcoming events and opportunities.

And we haven't stopped there! During the COVID-19 pandemic CHOICE moved all our learning and connection opportunities online, and after assessing how inclusive and accessible this has proved, we have continued to provide online sessions to more effectively nurture the youth movement! These initiatives include our Advocacy Learning Extravaganzas, where we have reached thousands of young people from around the world to discuss SRHR advocacy avenues such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), and more! Young activists attending these Learning Extravaganzas have gone on to attend and deliver statements at the United Nations (UN), take part in high-level UN roundtables, and submitted reports to the UN to hold their governments accountable. Our Townhall sessions also provide a space for learning from expert youth through panel sessions on various topics, from setting up sustainable youth structures to designing innovative youth-led projects.

So far, we have facilitated 60+ online sessions and managed to reach over 1,824 young people through these platforms





The way the CoP is set up, it is actually very difficult for you not to get anything new or not to learn anything. It's not only in-country learning, it's learning from young people from different countries and different programs.

I was able to pick those learnings, things that I have just been observing as a CoP member and take them to the ground, to young people who go to the community and teach them how to be a safe space facilitator



- Mumina Mohamednur, RHRN2 Kenya

Sustaining youth voices: Toolkits for Every Topic!



Sustainability is not just about managing funding, but also managing knowledge! That's why CHOICE has worked hard to create toolkits for young people that address a wide variety of challenges or opportunities YLOs come across. Over the past 10 years, CHOICE has developed 40 toolkits, 14 of which are available in multiple languages, and can all be found on the [CHOICE Resource Hub](#).

Sustaining a mission, a program, or even a team can be an uphill task. Despite the plethora of resources available on organizational sustainability, there are very few that tackle the unique challenges faced by YLOs working on SRHR. That's why CHOICE developed the toolkit "[Sustainability for YLOs](#)" to provide activities and tools that encourage reflection on their internal sustainability practices and processes and develop realistic strategies. Interactive and engaging formats have been used to simplify and streamline often arduous and tiresome conversations. This toolkit has been utilised by partners across the 2 programs, including in Bangladesh, where members of the country team attended a week-long workshop focusing on fortifying their organizations in tumultuous and trying times.

Further, CHOICE knows first-hand how difficult it is for youth activists to gain access to advocacy spaces and get their voices heard. That's why we reflected on our own experiences, trials and tribulations to create a wide array of advocacy toolkits to guide young advocates through their advocacy work in a youth-friendly way! Topics range from engaging with UN spaces to writing a statement or influencing a resolution at the UN. With step-by-step guides (and our own experiences shared) these toolkits have been used by young advocates from RHRN2, Power to You(th), and beyond to support their advocacy work.

Find our toolkits on the [CHOICE resource hub](https://www.choiceforyouth.org/resource/hub):
<https://www.choiceforyouth.org/resource/tools>

Retaining MIYP knowledge: Training of Trainer formats for MIYP workshops



In 2017, CHOICE launched the Flower of Participation 2.0 through the GUSO and YID programs. Based on scientific research and the experiences of partners and CHOICERs, the existing Flower of Participation was redesigned to create one comprehensive model on MIYP. Building on the Flower, CHOICE then launched the training manual that forms the core of all of our MIYP activities: The A-Z of MYP – How To Integrate Meaningful Youth Participation Into Your Organization & Program. Since then, the MIYP manual has been implemented through trainings in 11 partner countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Ghana, Uganda, Bangladesh, Nepal, Morocco and Indonesia), and more than 212 people through the RHRN2 and Power to You(th) programs have attended CHOICE workshops on MIYP.

However, an unavoidable challenge with YLOs and structures is high turnover and the loss of institutional knowledge and experiences. This makes it challenging to retain the learnings and knowledge strengthened during MIYP trainings. To mitigate this, CHOICE has been utilizing a Training of Trainers (ToT) format to create a generation of MIYP experts who can facilitate their own trainings.

By creating a safe space for the participants, we support them in deepening their own MIYP understanding while also practicing facilitating a session, often for the first time. By providing this space to make mistakes, ask questions and learn facilitation methods and tips, we create a team of competent MIYP facilitators who are able to run these MIYP sessions in their organizations and programs. Through 12 MIYP ToT, we have trained more than 160 trainers who have consequently trained their in-country alliances and partners.



International Advocacy: Youth-Movement Building at the Centre



Strengthening the youth movement is critical for successful advocacy. CHOICE has been committed in providing multiple avenues for this endeavour! For example, we are very proud to have hard-launched the YouthUpUN campaign, which focuses on ensuring MIYP throughout the Human Rights mechanisms of the UN. This campaign advocates for the mainstreaming of youth-inclusive language throughout HRC resolutions, increasing the youth presence at the HRC, and sensitizing relevant stakeholders on the importance of youth inclusivity so that MIYP is streamlined throughout all instruments of the UN in Geneva. Activities included releasing a toolkit for decision-makers to learn more about being youth-inclusive in their decision making, launching the [YouthUpUN website](#) with resources for both government workers & youth activists, and holding a side event at the 57th session of the HRC to promote the YouthUpUN Campaign & bring MIYP to the forefront of the Council!

Additionally, CHOICE is a co-facilitator of the International Conference on Population & Development (ICPD) Youth Platform, which is a space for youth-led advocacy, action and accountability to deliver the promise of the ICPD Program of Action. This involves building the capacity of young advocates and fostering a space for mutual learning and support, strengthening mechanisms for youth-led accountability on commitments, and influencing agendas across the UN to uphold and secure the SRHR of young people!

The platform is an excellent example of youth movement-building in an advocacy space. During the CPD 2025, the ICPD Youth Platform successfully facilitated daily youth sessions with 20-40 young people from different global regions attending each session. We focused on connection & support, strategizing and learning from each other in terms of language advocacy, local SRHR contexts and best practices regarding youth participation, and creating an action plan for sustaining and strengthening the youth movement going forward!



Youth SRHR Leaders: Direct advocacy at the United Nations



CHOICE has been a youth SRHR leader in UN advocacy spaces for over 10 years. We have engaged with the CSW, HRC and CPD and been instrumental in ensuring youth SRHR is protected throughout outcome documents. We have mainstreamed MIYP and SRHR throughout numerous resolutions at the HRC, and supported youth human rights defenders to keep their governments accountable through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism. We have been on high-level UN panels on the importance of protecting the SRHR of young people, particularly on safe abortion, and we have given countless statements at the UN encouraging states (and not taking no for an answer) to promote, protect and fulfil human rights (that young people are so often excluded from).

In spaces like the Human Rights Council, our tools are not just policies or strategies, but our energy, unique experiences and fresh ideas that breath life into the UN

- Lisa Philippo, CHOICE Secretary of the Board

And our approach is simple; young people are curious, capable and creative, and we strive to find opportunities where they can conduct advocacy and fight for their own rights at the UN level. What does this look like? Well, we start by providing trainings and workshops, for example, CHOICE gave a training to Ethiopian youth advocates on how to hold their government accountable with the UPR. Prior to an advocacy event, we always host an online training Extravaganza about what the process is and how youth can engage - young people have gone on from attending these trainings to giving statements at the UN! Knowledge is power, and CHOICE makes sure to support youth advocates throughout their advocacy engagement to achieve their maximum potential.





Trainings & Countries

Overview

Since the start of the RHRN2 and Power to You(th) programs, CHOICE has successfully conducted over 41 in-person trainings attracting more than 754 participants. Along with the 59 online trainings and mutual learnings spaces we have facilitated, CHOICE has helped strengthen the capacity of more than 2,156 young people and 200 adults.

CHOICE provides a wide range of MIYP, Advocacy and organizational trainings, as well as Training of Trainers workshops.

Throughout the span of the programs, over 18 inperson and 16 online MIYP trainings have been facilitated and 20 inperson and 29 online Advocacy trainings have been conducted. Additionally, CHOICE has led 4 MIYP ToTs and facilitated 4 organizational trainings, for instance on PMEL, strategic planning and YLO sustainability.

Through the programs, CHOICE has implemented trainings across 10 different countries throughout the African and Asian continent.



Malawi

Between 2021 to 2024, CHOICE facilitated 3 trainings through the Power to You(th) program. In November 2021, an ACAT training was conducted online to 10 young partners in Youth Wave Malawi. Then, in 2022, CHOICE facilitated an Advocacy Strategy training for Youth Wave Malawi, and in 2024, co-facilitated, along with Youth Wave Malawi and Sonke Gender Justice, a week long MIYP & Youth Leadership ToT for 11 young + 3 adults Power to You(th) partners.



Kenya

In September 2021, through the Power to You(th) program, an ACAT training was conducted online to 10 young partners in Y-ACT, Kenya. At the GTA Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) Symposium in April 2024, CHOICE facilitated a session on the intersections of MIYP and the GTA to 36 representatives of the 7 different Power to You(th) country teams.



Benin

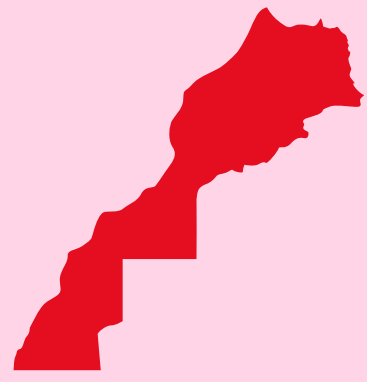
In April 2025, CHOICE facilitated a one-day training on strategic planning for 16 young and 5 adult partners from ABB, under the RHRN2 program. During this training, we worked with Association des Blogueurs du Bénin to initiate the process for developing their new Multi-Annual Strategy.



Ghana

At the start of 2024, CHOICE travelled to Tamale, Ghana, to conduct an MIYP workshop for 12 young partners from the Power to You(th) program.





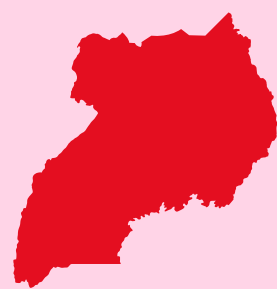
Morocco

In April 2023, CHOICE (in collaboration with Rutgers) facilitated an advocacy strategy workshop for the RHRN2 Moroccan coalition (AMPF, CDG, AJJ, AJAK, YPeer). During the training, knowledge about dealing with opposition and international advocacy was shared and contextualized with partners. Since only 2 of the partners were YLOs, and of the 15 participants, 6 were young people and 9 were adults, this was also an opportunity to foster youth-adult-partnerships in SRHR programming.



Bangladesh

In December 2022, CHOICE, along with Dance4Life, jointly facilitated a Juncture and Youth Leadership Skills workshop through the RHRN2 program. In attendance was 24 young people and 4 adults. In February 2025, a four-day workshop on MIYP and YLO sustainability was facilitated for Bangladesh coalition partners in RHRN2. There was 21 young people attending and 3 adults.



Uganda

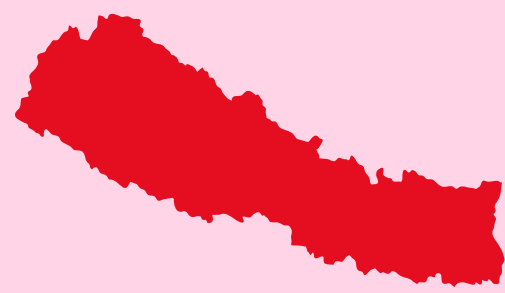
In September 2021, CHOICE conducted an online MIYP VCAT training for 1 adult and 5 young persons of the Ugandan coalition, within RHRN2. In November 2021, through the Power to You(th) program, an ACAT training was conducted online to 10 young partners in Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum (UYAHF).



Ethiopia

Between 2021 - 2024, CHOICE designed and hosted 5 trainings in Ethiopia. In 2021, CHOICE led an online PMEL training for 6 youth and 1 adult under RHRN2. In 2022, a follow-up online fundraising training was conducted for TaYA partners. In October 2023, CHOICE and TaYA co-facilitated an in-person ToT on MIYP and advocacy for 17 youth and 1 adult. In January 2024, CHOICE trained 14 Ethiopian partners on the UPR to strengthen coalition advocacy; they developed a strategy and began drafting a shadow report. By June, they lobbied at the UN, resulting in the acceptance of two of their recommendations—demonstrating the power of international advocacy on national policy. In November 2024, CHOICE and TaYA held another MIYP ToT for 20 youth and 2 adults. Since then, participants have delivered multiple MIYP sessions, highlighting the lasting impact of these trainings.





Nepal

In 2023, CHOICE co-facilitated with Rutgers an online MIYP and GTA workshop, with 8 participants in attendance, and the same year held inperson MIYP Consultations with RHRN2 partners in Nepal. In September 2024, CHOICE facilitated a week long MIYP training for 6 adult and 11 young people, followed by a fundraising training, co-facilitated with RHRN2 partners, ARROW, for 20 participants, of which 12 were adults and 8 were young people. The training strengthened the coalition's knowledge and skills on fundraising (including on the donor landscape, how to engage with donors, and proposal writing skills) and they developed a clear fundraising strategy. A collective fundraising strategy and proposal has also been in the works to ensure their sustainability after RHRN2. Most recently, in January 2025 CHOICE facilitated a week long training to 18 young people and 5 adults on youth-friendly advocacy skills.



Indonesia

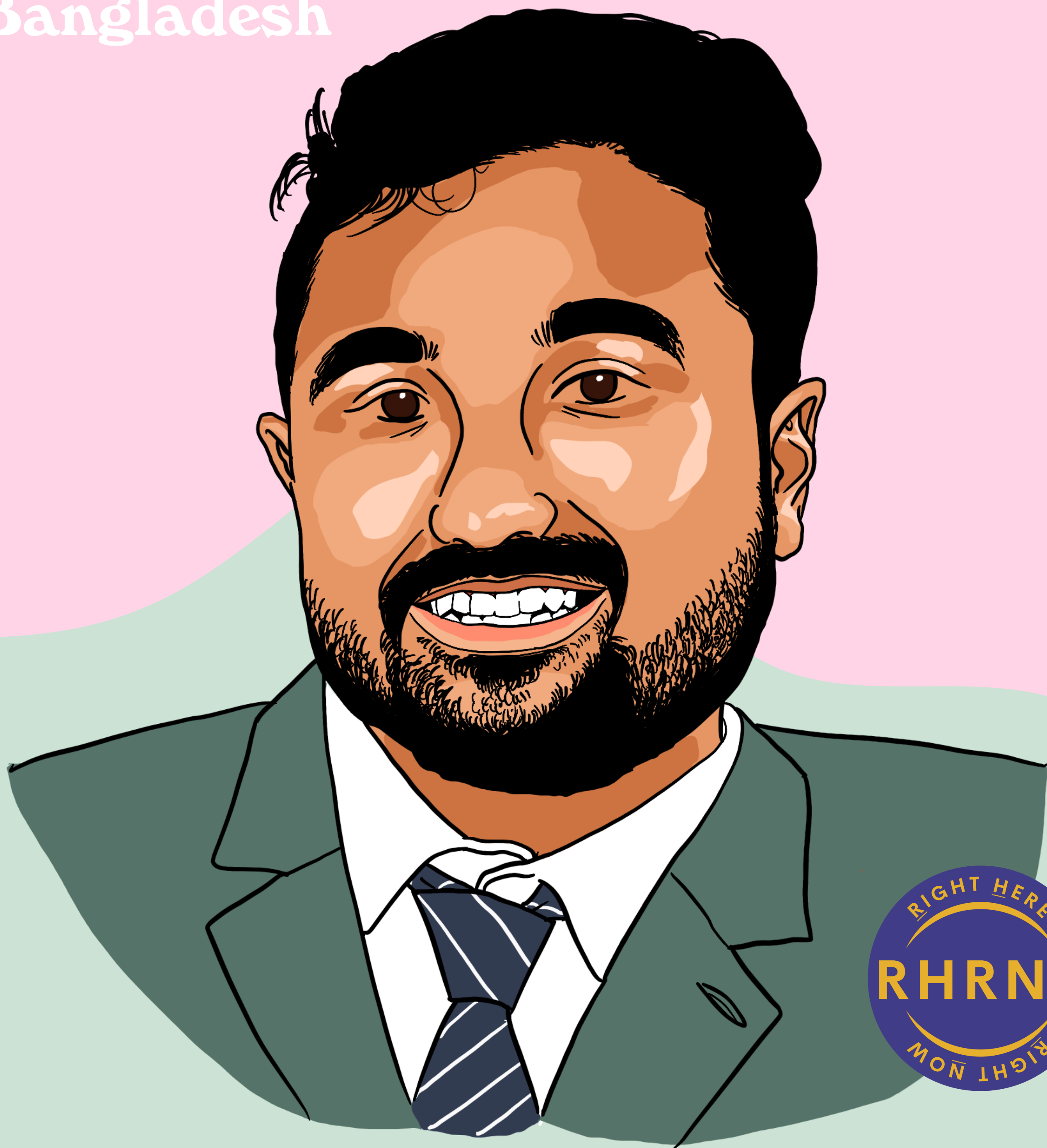
In October 2022, CHOICE facilitated an MIYP training in Bogor with Power to You(th) Indonesia. There were 19 participants (14 aged <30), from Rutgers Indonesia, Youth Force Indonesia, Suar, Rutgers Lombok, Tanoker and Semak. This particularly focussed on the principle of MIYP and understanding the history of young peoples' political participation in Indonesia. We also explored strategies to put the learnings into action.



Stories of Change

Sazzad Ul Islam

Bangladesh



**Empowering Communities:
Sazzad's Journey to Advance
Comprehensive Sexuality
Education in Bangladesh**

As an agriculture student with a passion for community development, Sazzad's journey as a youth leader in Bangladesh has been shaped by both challenges and remarkable successes. Through his efforts to promote comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the RHRN2 program, he has empowered other youth and built collaborations with teachers, district education officers (DEOs), and policymakers to create lasting change. As Sazzad put it, this is "a story of connection, a story of inspiration and a story of motivation."

As a young person, Sazzad is all too familiar with the challenges youth face accessing accurate sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information. Through RHRN2, Sazzad and his team in the Bangladesh coalition organized interactive knowledge fairs in urban schools, using engaging tools like board games to make CSE accessible and youth-friendly. At one event, two students thanked him: "My mother and sister never talked to me about these things," one said. "You made it so simple and clear." It reinforced the need for safe spaces where youth could speak openly and learn from peers.

In Bangladesh, discussing SRHR remains sensitive. While CSE is part of the national curriculum, many teachers skip or censor related content due to taboos, pressure from school management and parents, and personal discomfort. Some educators believed parents should handle these topics—yet, as Sazzad's experience showed, those conversations often don't happen at home either. This silence perpetuates stigma and leaves young people misinformed.

Through RHRN2, Sazzad worked to change that. One key initiative involved gathering data from nearly every school in his district, revealing a major disconnect among teachers, parents, and students on SRHR. Using this data, Sazzad and his team engaged DEOs in seven districts, co-hosting events like knowledge fairs and meetings. Their efforts led to official endorsement letters from DEOs across 7 different districts, giving teachers confidence to teach CSE despite community resistance. One teacher shared that the DEO's letter served as a "valid government document" supporting their efforts in class. But securing this support wasn't easy. It required persistent engagement and powerful storytelling.

By creating connection and making space to empathise with young people, we can find common ground

Sazzad knew that to overcome skepticism, young people had to share personal experiences that illustrated the urgency of the issue. Recognizing that systematic change required more than just policy endorsement, Sazzad and his team also ensured CSE educators were motivated, inspired and equipped to succeed. Working with SRHR trainers, his team built the confidence of teachers in addressing sensitive topics and helping them become CSE champions. Students, in turn, gained critical SRHR knowledge that prepares them for healthier futures.

His advocacy extended beyond schools. Sazzad facilitated meetings with district commissioners and marginalized groups, including Bede (river communities) and transgender individuals. In one powerful moment, a district commissioner was moved to tears after hearing firsthand about the struggles these groups faced accessing healthcare. Through creating this

connection and giving space for community leaders to share their stories, they saw tangible change, including dedicated hospital entry points and plans for religious spaces tailored to these communities' needs. "It made me proud to work as a youth leader, raising awareness and helping communities," Sazzad said.

Young people trained by CHOICE, like Sazzad, don't just impact SRHR—they extend their influence into other sectors. Through RHRN2, Sazzad developed skills in digital literacy, participatory theater, and youth advocacy, building his confidence to lead in diverse contexts. These experiences have empowered him to apply his new skills beyond SRHR, founding climate resilience and waste management initiatives.

Sazzad's story is a vivid example of how youth can challenge cultural norms and systemic barriers. By sparking conversations, building partnerships, and advocating for

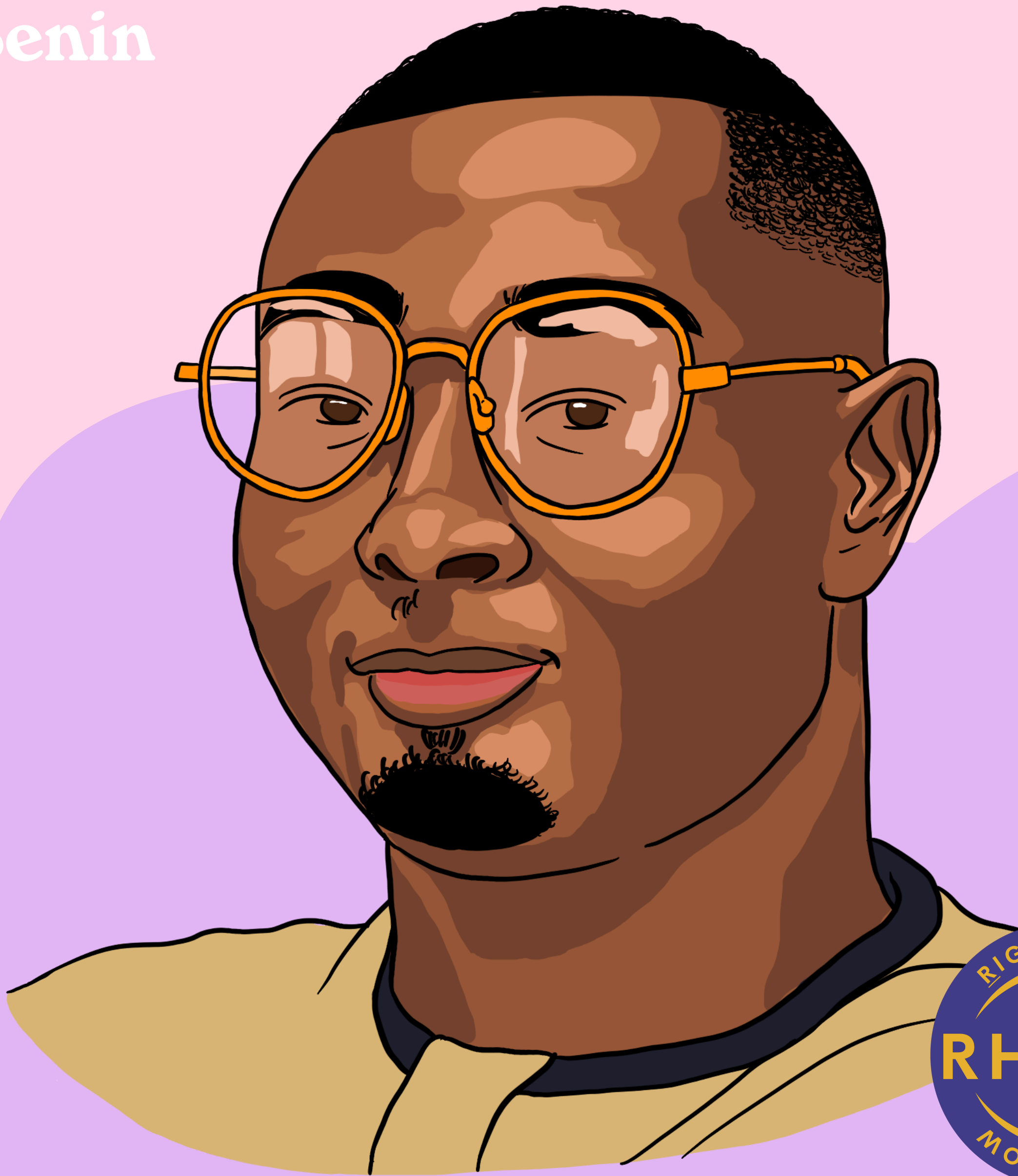
their rights, young people like him are laying foundations for long-term progress. His work reminds us why youth must be included in decision-making spaces—and why their ideas and lived experiences must be valued.

“The training and capacity-strengthening sessions from CHOICE revealed my inner potential... Now, I’m not only advocating for SRHR but also creating impactful initiatives in other areas”



Eugène Deguenon Cocou

Benin



**Eugène's Odyssey: When Words
Open New Horizons**

Taïwo Eugène DEGUENON COCOU is passionate about digital technology and human rights. With a degree in Social Mediation and Development Facilitation, he combines digital expertise and civic engagement to contribute to social transformation in Benin. With his experience in training in the use of digital tools for sexual health and peace rights and in running high-impact digital campaigns, Eugène is dedicated to developing innovative and inclusive initiatives. As a committed blogger and digital communications consultant, he plays a key role as an active member and Community Manager of the Benin Bloggers Association (ABB), mobilising young people and promoting digital, sexual and human rights.

The Benin Bloggers Association is a non-profit organization founded in March 2015 with the mission of uniting and defending the rights of bloggers in Benin. The association works to promote digital inclusion, train young people in the responsible use of social media, and empower them to amplify their voices online. As a true citizen watchdog movement, the association advocates for freedom of expression, women's

and children's rights, and education on sexual and reproductive health. It is actively engaged in democracy and human rights issues and continues to make its mark in building a digital world that is inclusive, safe, and secure for every young person in Benin.

It all began in 2022, during a training workshop on content creation for SRHR. At the time, discussing these topics seemed like something reserved for experts, seasoned activists. Eugene? He was just a curious observer, intrigued by the power of words to shape conversations on such sensitive issues.

That workshop was a turning point. A spark. Alongside the Benin Bloggers Association, Eugene immersed himself in a world that was both captivating and unfamiliar. They had never written an article on these subjects before, but fueled by encouragement and passion, he took the leap. Eugene's first article tackled a question as complex as it was fascinating: "Are people born LGBTQI+ or do they choose to be?"

Writing that piece was a journey in itself. Eugene listened to testimonies, gathered stories, and explored different perspectives. Every conversation challenged his assumptions, broadened his understanding, and amplified voices that often go unheard. But what struck him the most was the impact a single piece of writing could have.

Years later, an organization advocating for minority rights reached out to the Benin Bloggers Association, inspired by that very article. They wanted to organize a working session to develop a new project. That moment was an awakening—Eugene realized that beyond words, a single voice could spark a movement, ignite change, and open doors to real transformation.

At the same time, his journey continued through managing the social media platforms for the RHRN2 project. From content creation to community engagement, every post, every X Spaces discussion, and every blog article became an opportunity to raise awareness. It was no longer just about learning digital skills; it was about contributing to something bigger than himself.

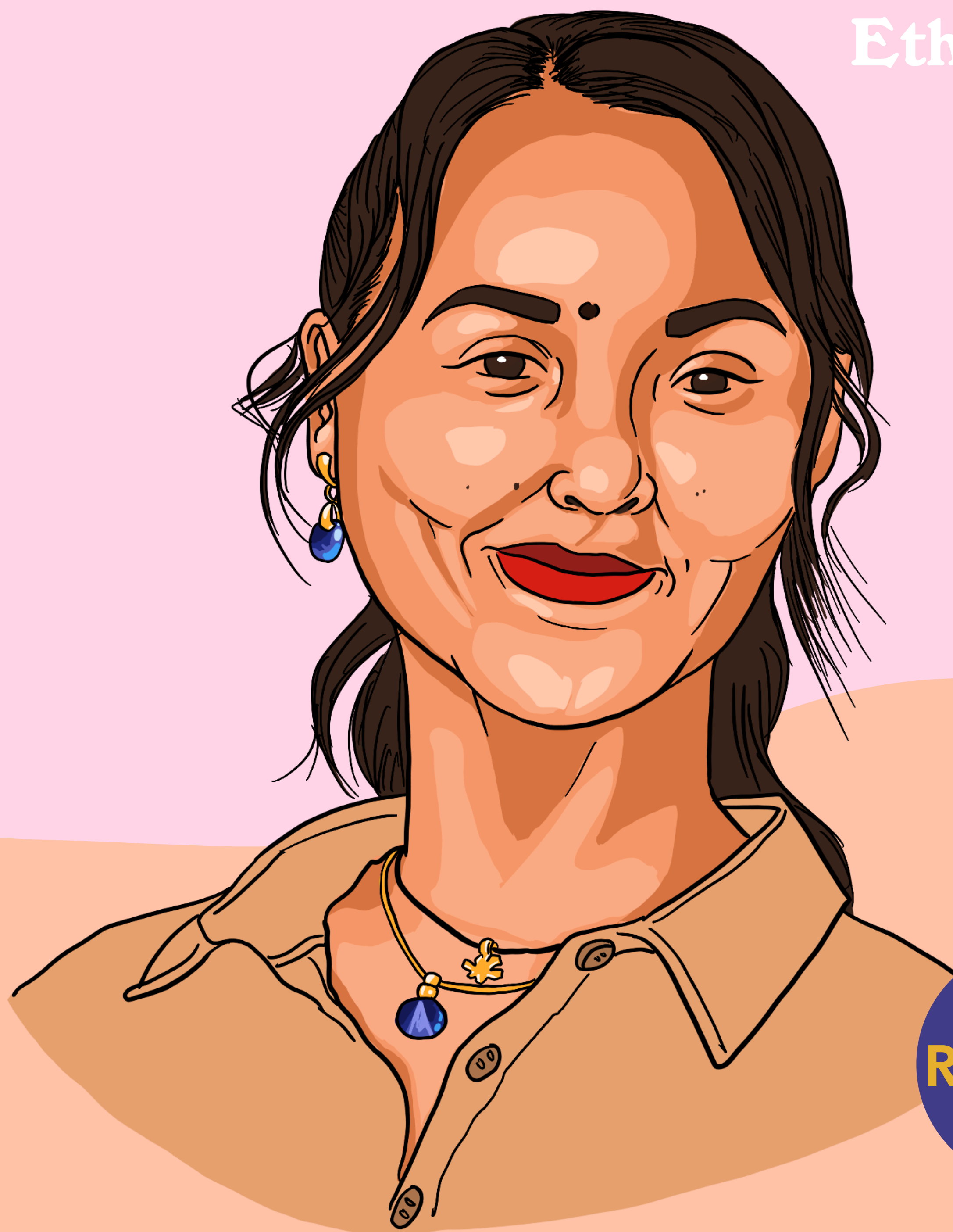
Today, in 2024, Eugene shares that “the journey feels surreal”. What started as a simple workshop participation has evolved into something far greater. From a novice blogger, he has grown into a digital communications and SRHR consultant, now training others to use social media as a tool for advocacy. He leads sessions on crafting messages that educate without offending, that illuminate without alienating.

Through his words, Eugene is a catalyst for change and an inspiring young leader, and this experience has instilled in Eugene a deep conviction:

Information and dialogue remain our most powerful tools for breaking taboos, dismantling prejudices, and building a more inclusive world. Every word written, every conversation sparked is another step toward meaningful change. And this journey is only just beginning

Hanna Mulugeta

Ethiopia



**From Local Advocate to Global
Voice: A Youth Leader Representing
the Next Generation at the
International Level**

Hanna Mulugeta, a dynamic young advocate from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has become a key figure in the RHRN2 program. Her journey began at the inception of RHRN2, which she was involved in setting up through her role as a youth council advisor in TaYA, a youth-led organization in Addis. Now, 3 years later, she has grown into her role as the Youth National Coordinator for RHRN2 Ethiopia, within the Development Expertise Centre (DEC) and she is renowned for her unwavering commitment to youth inclusion in global advocacy efforts!

A passionate advocate for youth rights and gender equality, Hanna has consistently pushed for the inclusion of youth perspectives in global human rights discussions. Youth, particularly from the Global South, are often overlooked or tokenized in these global spaces, and so, despite the critical issues youth face, their concerns may be heard but not really listened to. Hanna saw a need to push for the inclusion of youth-specific issues, particularly within the framework of international bodies like the United Nations.

Through RHRN2, Hanna attended workshops from CHOICE on Youth Leadership and Engaging with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which empowered her to address head-on the challenges youth face in being under-represented in decision-making spaces. Hanna has brought the voices of Ethiopian youth and persons with disabilities to the forefront of global advocacy through her collaboration with CHOICE in the UPR at the 57th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland.

As part of the RHRN2 Ethiopia team, she worked closely with local and international partners (such as



It was a transformative experience to see firsthand how international advocacy intersects with local issues

CHOICE and Sexual Rights Initiative in Geneva) to draft a youth-led UPR report that outlined actionable recommendations on gender-based violence, menstrual health management, and gender-responsive budgeting. The outcome of Hanna's involvement in the UPR process was both impactful and far-reaching.

The team's advocacy efforts were strategic and well-prepared, grounded in evidence-based recommendations that reflected both global human rights frameworks and the lived realities of youth in Ethiopia. They focused not only on raising awareness but also on pushing for concrete commitments and actions. On the local level, there was a noticeable shift in the engagement of government representatives, who demonstrated increased interest in the inclusion of youth concerns in policy development. Eventually, the recommendations towards the Ethiopian government on improving menstrual hygiene management and tackling gender-based violence were taken forward in the official report by the Ethiopian government!

International engagement, particularly with state diplomat

in Geneva, led to commitments of support for the recommendations presented by the RHRN2 Ethiopia team. From participating in CHOICE's workshop on the UPR, to attending the Human Rights Council and advocating for change, Hanna is an example of how young people are the right people to advocate for their rights. She worked relentlessly to ensure that youth voices were at the center of the discussions, even when faced with challenges such as the formal, bureaucratic nature of international spaces, the slow pace of decision-making, and resistance to change.

Hanna Mulugeta's journey through the RHRN2 program, and close working relationship with CHOICE, is a powerful testament to the potential of youth-led advocacy in shaping global discourse. Hanna credits CHOICE's technical guidance and emotional support with enabling her to navigate the complexities of international advocacy and for instilling in her the belief that youth can—and should—play a central role in global decision-making processes.

Although policy change is often a slow process, Hanna and her team were able to plant the seeds for long-term impact. The UPR process, in her view, was not an isolated event but a critical starting point for ensuring sustained youth engagement and policy accountability. Hanna's work has proven that youth involvement in global human rights advocacy can be crucial in driving the conversation on critical issues at the highest levels of international policymaking. She serves as an inspiration to young people globally, showing that youth can be key agents of change in creating a more inclusive and equitable world.



Faizatu Sualisu

Ghana



**Power in Play: Creative Strategies
for Sparking Intergenerational
Dialogue in Community
Decision-Making**

Originating from a city deeply rooted in traditional beliefs, Faizatu Sualisu always appreciated the cultural norms that shaped her community in Tamale. However, she grew increasingly aware that the same traditions—especially those expecting youth to be obedient and silent—were excluding young people from decisions that directly affected their lives. With elders dominating decision-making spaces, Faizatu saw how young voices were overlooked and the intergenerational gap was widening.

Faizatu's personal experiences witnessing the consequences of youth exclusion inspired her to act. Her journey began with involvement in the Power to You(th) program. Her active work with the Girls Advisory Council (GAC) was recognized by NORSAAC, leading to her appointment as the young focal lead on the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) in the program. Now serving as GAC's Regional Coordinator, Faizatu transforms her passion into action, empowering girls in Tamale and advocating for their rights.

Through Power to You(th), Faizatu received training in advocacy, fundraising, proposal writing, and MIYP—the latter facilitated by CHOICE. The training emphasized youth empowerment and equipped participants to pitch MIYP effectively across diverse contexts.

Yet, Faizatu understood that traditional beliefs and entrenched power dynamics still limited progress. While national laws addressed issues like unintended pregnancies, they were poorly communicated and often ignored at the community level. Young people knew what they needed—but without a stronger bridge to elders, their voices would remain unheard.

Faizatu realized that lasting change would only come through collaboration and mutual respect between youth and elders.

In 2024, after successfully applying for a CHOICE seed grant, the GAC put their training into action. Their project focused on building youth-adult partnerships and bridging the generational divide through intergenerational dialogues and

engagement. The goal was to strengthen youth participation in local governance and empower young women to confidently take on leadership roles.

Unlike previous formal engagements, the project introduced creative approaches to open dialogue. The GAC hosted an inception meeting where youth were introduced to traditional council members during a strategic session.

This laid the foundation for mutual understanding and identified ways for young people to engage in governance.

To deepen the relationships, the GAC organized interactive events, including Sip & Paint sessions and art exhibitions, where youth and elders could share experiences informally. These fun activities sparked meaningful conversations about perceptions, expectations, and opportunities for collaboration between the generations.

Faizatu and the GAC also used drama and theatre to powerful effect. Their team performed two contrasting scenarios for traditional leaders: one showing a

community where youth were excluded from decisions, and the other showing young people as active participants. The performance resonated deeply, prompting discussion among leaders about the importance of MIYP.

Through storytelling, the GAC further raised awareness about the negative impact of youth exclusion while highlighting the benefits of youth involvement. These performances inspired community leaders to commit to more inclusive practices, including conducting community engagements using CHOICE's Flower of Participation tool.

I am particularly happy about this initiative as it challenges the young people and gives them a sense of responsibility. On behalf of the chief, we are very appreciative of the initiative

Following these engagements, community elders began to recognize the need to mentor youth in traditional and leadership roles. They committed to reserving two seats for elected youth representatives in weekly meetings with chiefs and sub-chiefs where decisions on community development are made.

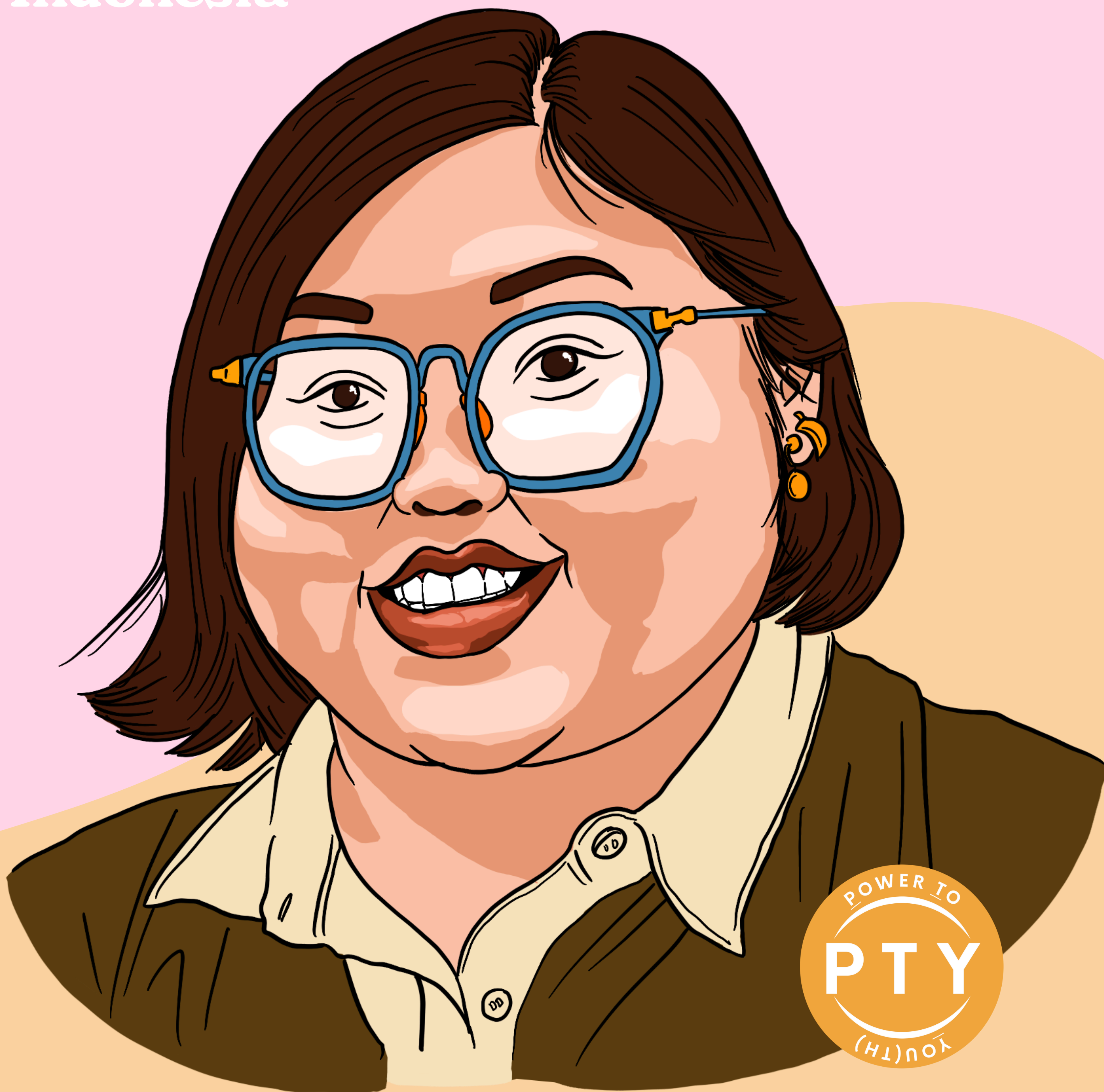
In recognition of the GAC's impact, the community awarded them a chieftaincy title—a powerful symbol of respect and cultural integration. Additionally, although the GAC was not a registered organization at the start of the project, the CHOICE seed grant enabled them to apply for official registration, boosting their legal status and credibility within the civic space.

Through Faizatu's efforts, creative engagement sessions and the GAC's commitment, there has been a clear increase in the empowerment and participation of young people in governance. In just six months, they've showcased the strength and potential of youth advocacy in Ghana. By embracing their creativity, they've used art, theatre, and informal conversations to foster trust, evoke emotion, and build bridges between generations and create tangible, lasting impact.

Young people now feel more confident to speak up, and elders are more open to listening and engaging. So, think outside the box, get artsy, and build those bridges!

Tirza Listiarani

Indonesia



**Uniting for Change: 2030 Youth
Force Indonesia and the Power of
Youth Advocacy**

In 2023, a group of passionate young advocates in Indonesia identified a major gap in efforts to end child marriage. While many YLOs were tackling related issues, they were operating in isolation. To address this, 2030 Youth Force Indonesia, with leaders like Tirza, united these groups to form the National Coalition for Young People to Prevent Child Marriage. The idea was simple but powerful: collaboration could amplify impact and push for systemic change.

As a founding member, Tirza was instrumental in organizing meetings, setting up a secretariat, and ensuring shared decision-making. Together with fellow advocates, she helped choose a name, design a logo, and draft a work plan. What began as a vision quickly became a structured movement that challenged traditional advocacy models and demanded MIYP in policymaking.

From the start, the coalition faced two significant hurdles: funding and commitment. Many youth organizations had limited resources, making sustained engagement difficult. Balancing coalition duties with their own work also posed a challenge.

Externally, navigating government partnerships came with its own roadblocks. Some ministries welcomed youth input, but others only offered symbolic participation. Building credibility and influence within policymaking circles required persistence, creativity, and strategic thinking.

Rather than relying solely on formal lobbying, the coalition adopted creative advocacy to raise awareness about child marriage. During Jakarta's Car-Free Day, they set up an interactive space where the public could play with board games, sign petitions, and engage open conversations around child marriage and SRHR.

A standout initiative was a Pokémon©-inspired card game, which used playful learning to educate the public on child marriage prevention. While the game engaged youth and parents, the coalition also used imaginative methods to reach decision-makers. They created a karaoke carpool video about the Sustainable Development Goals and organized a flash mob, making their advocacy fun, memorable, and visible.

Creativity is what brings us to different parts of society, from young people to parents and even policymakers. We need to use creative approaches to engage stakeholders and make sure our voices are heard.

These efforts helped the coalition build relationships with policymakers and increase their credibility. Parallel to these creative campaigns, they maintained pressure on the Ministry of Women and Children's Protection, pushing for stronger legislation. Initially met with hesitation, sustained engagement led to official recognition, and the coalition was eventually invited to monitor implementation of the national child marriage prevention strategy—a key milestone in institutionalizing youth participation.

Despite major strides, policy change remains slow. While youth advocates contributed to proposals, comprehensive reforms are still pending. However, their relentless advocacy has revived national dialogue on stronger legislation. Political changes in 2024, including a new president and ministry reshuffles, disrupted previous gains. The coalition lost

some established connections and had to rebuild from scratch. Yet, the youth advocates had prepared themselves for such an event, by securing commitments from key officials to connect them with incoming policy makers prior to the transition, protecting the continuity of their advocacy efforts.

Through this journey, Tirza has developed strong skills in policy analysis, lobbying, and leadership. By working directly with government actors, she has become more strategic in crafting recommendations and advocating for MIYP. Her leadership has also grown through coordinating coalition activities, enhancing her project management and problem-solving abilities. She's helped secure the coalition's long-term sustainability by nurturing partnerships and promoting resource-sharing among youth groups. With the Power to

You(th) program ending in 2025, Tirza and her peers are already thinking about creative ways to sustain their work beyond it.

Having experienced the impact of youth collaboration firsthand, Tirza is committed to advancing systemic change. Her time with the coalition has deepened her belief that young people must shape the policies that affect their lives.



**Collaboration is always the key ...
Many youth organizations tend to work
independently, but sustainable change
requires collective action. If we want policies
that truly support us, we must work together
with governments, other youth organizations,
and women's rights groups**



The National Coalition continues to grow, proving that youth-led coalitions are crucial in tackling child marriage and other pressing issues. Their work shows that young people's voices and leadership deserve to stand alongside adults in shaping a better, more inclusive future. Through collaboration, creativity, and persistence, advocates like Tirza are laying the groundwork for meaningful, lasting change.

Quinter Awino

Kenya



**Leading Change: Quinter's
Journey for Inclusive SRHR**

For Quinter, being a young woman with a disability meant struggling to have her voice heard, especially when it came to SRHR. Talking about these issues felt impossible but joining the Power to Youth Kenya program through the Husika Dada Initiative changed that. As a youth-led advocacy platform, Husika Dada provides a safe space for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) to discuss socio-economic challenges, amplify their voices, and participate in decision-making. Through them, Quinter gained the knowledge and confidence to speak up for herself and others, and through Power to You(th), she developed SRHR knowledge and practical skills in beadwork that aided her journey to financial independence

“Before joining Husika Dada (as a volunteer), it was very hard for me to even understand myself and express myself well... But now, I know my rights as a woman with disability on matters of sexual health and empowerment.”

During her time in the Power to You(th) program, Quinter has observed that sensitization and awareness have brought about a shift in societal attitudes toward people with disabilities, particularly in healthcare settings. While pregnant women with disabilities have always faced judgment and discrimination, she now observes a new sense of respect and acceptance.

Quinter has noticed meaningful changes, such as greater awareness of rights and legal protections among women and girls with disabilities, and a perceived reduction in cases of rape, forced marriages, and defilement. "People now know that if they mistreat us, there are consequences."

Quinter's involvement in the program went beyond awareness sessions; she actively participated in policy discussions and budget-making processes. She also joined benchmarking activities with neighboring counties, engaging in knowledge-sharing, linking, and learning sessions to exchange best practices and advocate for disability inclusion.

As an advocate, she has been sensitizing stakeholders on gender equality and inclusion, leading to important policy changes, including the establishment of safe spaces and gender policies at the county level. However, challenges remain. People with disabilities still face systemic barriers, including inaccessible meeting spaces and a lack of resources such as sign language interpreters which prevent crucial information from reaching all people with disabilities.

Beyond advocacy, Quinter has embraced mentorship as a means of ensuring lasting impact. She participates in a paid mentorship program, where she shares her knowledge with others and fosters new leaders in SRHR

advocacy, who can then mentor a new generation of leaders.

Her economic empowerment efforts have also flourished. Through beadwork and basketry, she sustains herself and also supports a group of fellow persons with disabilities. Together, they engage in table banking, a micro-lending system where members contribute funds and offer small loans to each other, fostering financial independence.

Before, spaces for people with disabilities in decision-making didn't exist. Now, we meet duty bearers face-to-face and say, 'Nothing about us without us.' Our voices are being heard

Reflecting on her journey, Quinter acknowledges the significant influence Husika Dada, along with Power to You(th), has had on her personal and professional growth. "For me to speak in board meetings without fear and be part of policymaking tables, it shows how much I've grown," she said. Her experiences even led her to participate in the Young African Leaders Initiative, a leadership program that further improved her advocacy skills.

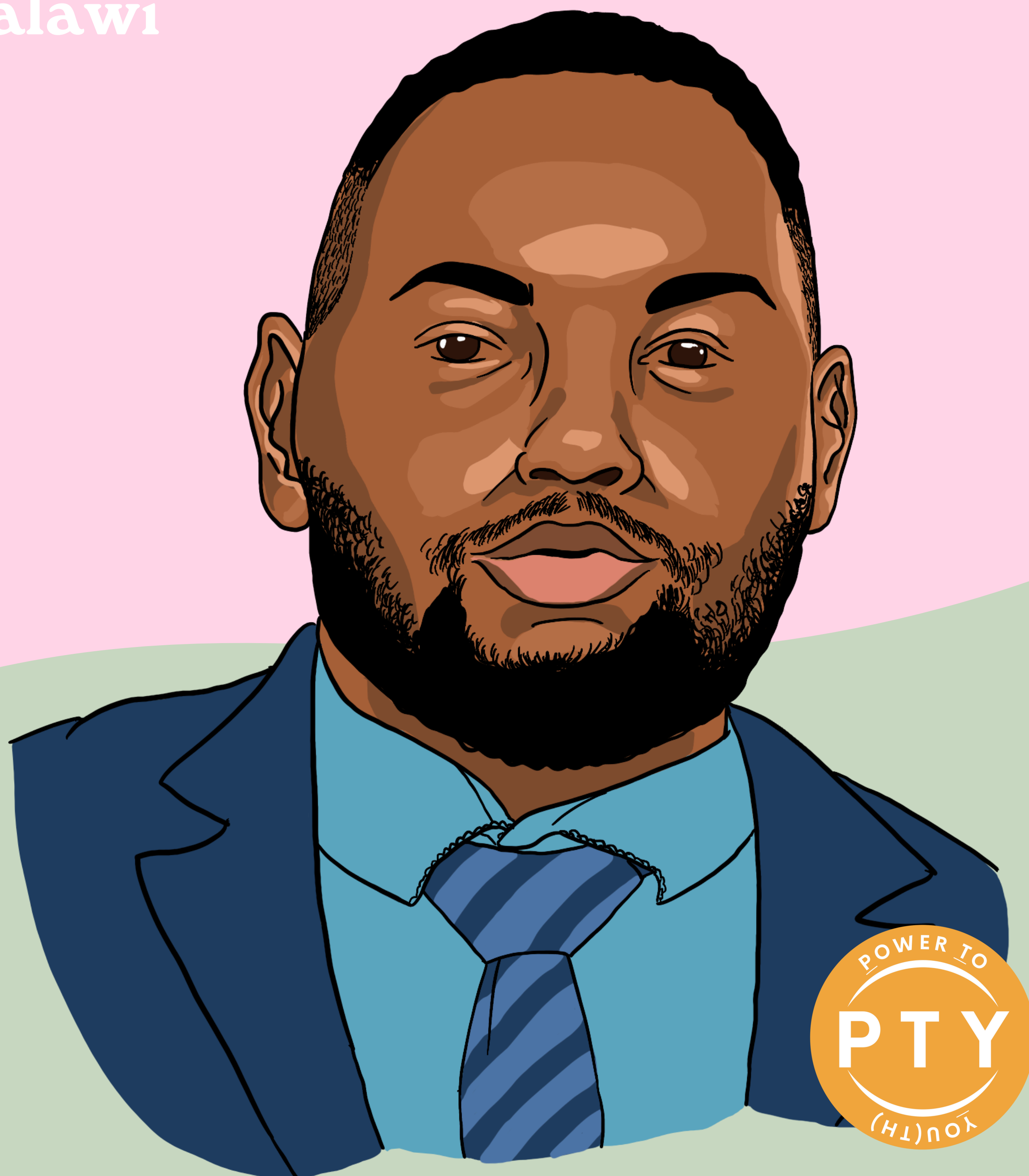
Looking ahead, Quinter stresses the importance of continued support and expansion of inclusive programs. "If more partners join, we can have an even greater impact on young girls, women, and persons with disabilities," she said. For young people passionate about SRHR, she offers:

Life doesn't end with challenges. There's always something for you. Believe in yourself, stay connected with others, and keep learning. Every day is a learning day! By sharing our experiences, we learn from each other and become stronger

Quinter's story shows what happens when we understand that inclusion is more than just a buzzword, and what young people, in all their diversity, can achieve when they are given the space to lead. Her dedication and advocacy are opening doors and ensuring that other young people, including those with disabilities, can step through them and engage meaningfully once inside.

Godfrey Malongo

Malawi



**Bridging Generations: Godfrey's
Journey to Transform Youth
Leadership in Malawi**

Godfrey, a 25-year-old youth leader from Malawi, has always been passionate about MIYP. This passion took him to the youth-led organization Youth Wave Malawi, where he works as a Youth Inclusion & Engagement Officer. In this role, Godfrey led the development and implementation of a seed grant project funded by CHOICE through the Power to You(th) program. This initiative was designed to bridge the gap between young people and older leaders in decision-making spaces. At just 22 years old, Godfrey proposed the idea of fostering intergenerational dialogues throughout the project; an idea that was not only novel but also transformative for his community.

“Being able to see that idea come to life was my proudest moment”

In Malawi, leadership roles are traditionally reserved for older individuals, leaving young people excluded from decision-making processes. Cultural norms and systemic challenges such as tokenism and limited opportunities for capacity-building reinforced these barriers

When Godfrey and his team began the project, they encountered resistance from older leaders, many of whom doubted the capability of youth to lead. Despite these challenges, Godfrey remained determined to create change.

The project started with targeted training sessions for both young people and older community leaders. These sessions equipped participants with essential leadership, MIYP and advocacy skills. The training culminated in intergenerational dialogues where young and older leaders came together to discuss how they could collaborate to promote youth leadership within their communities. Godfrey ensured inclusivity by ensuring young persons with disabilities— a group often sidelined in such initiatives—were invited and accommodated. These dialogues became a turning point, fostering mutual respect and understanding between generations. For many older leaders, it was the first time they truly recognized the potential of young people.

The impact of the project was immediate and significant. During the dialogues, older leaders committed to reserving quotas for young people in community leadership roles. This led to the election of a young man and woman to their district's Development Committee, marking an important milestone for MIYP. The ripple effects of the project have extended beyond its immediate goals and timeframe. Many of the young leaders trained during the initiative have continued to advocate independently for issues such as youth-friendly health services and digital access. They have collaborated with local politicians and councillors, demonstrating their own capacity and commitment to address pressing community needs. The inclusion of young persons with disabilities also set a new standard for inclusivity in community projects.

For Godfrey, the experience was transformative. Coordinating the project deepened his understanding of how to form, strengthen and sustain youth-adult partnerships and refined his leadership skills.

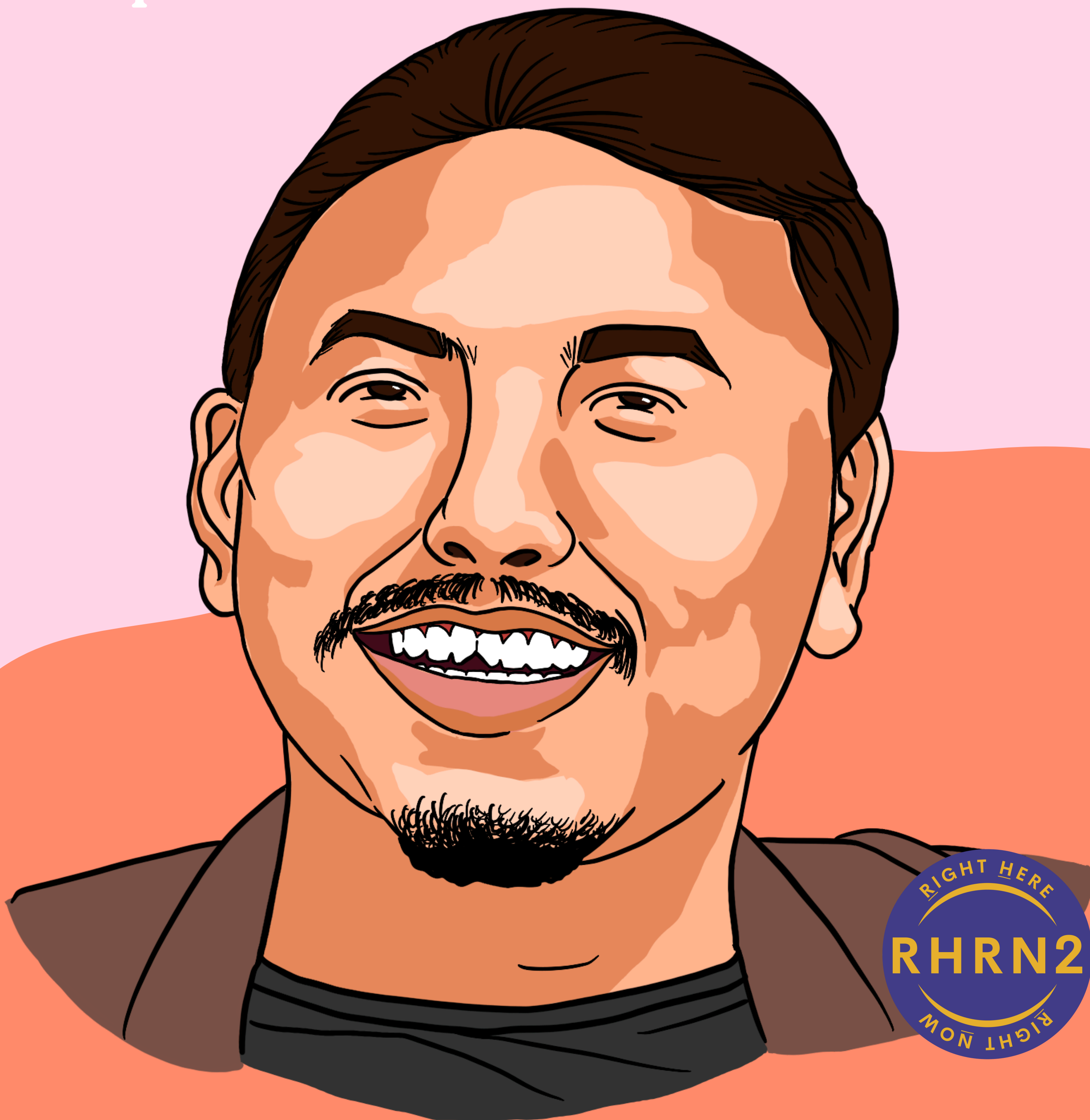
I learned facilitation skills and how to bring different demographics together for a common goal

This journey also reinforced his commitment to advancing MIYP, a cause he now advocates for with strengthened determination and expertise.

Godfrey's story highlights the impact of collaboration and persistence in addressing deeply rooted cultural norms. By bridging generational divides, the CHOICE seed grant offered a hopeful step toward more inclusive and ingrained youth leadership in Malawi. Godfrey's efforts show that when we finance, trust and support young people, they can lead with purpose, creating meaningful change in their communities.

Nir Shrestha

Nepal



**Putting the I in MIYP: Why
Inclusivity is Key to Meaningful
Youth Participation**

When Nir started volunteering in 2016 at the the Blind Youth Association Nepal (BYAN), a youth-led organization focused on empowering young people with disabilities, little did he know that in 7 years time, his hard work would propel him to the role of Director. As a young person with a disability, Nir demonstrates a strong dedication to advancing disability rights and championing disability-inclusive development initiatives.

This is what drew him to BYAN, an organization that envisions a world where people with disabilities enjoy a dignified life in an inclusive society. Through their role as partners in the RHRN2 program, they strengthen the capacities of young people with disabilities on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and SRHR. BYAN also focuses on empowering them to be vocal about their rights and engage in policy discussions and advocacy at subnational, national and regional level.

Young people with disabilities are not a homogenous group, and Nir faced challenges in addressing the diverse needs of different disability groups to ensure accessibility and inclusivity in their programs. Many of them were excluded from CSE and lacked access to crucial information about their rights and health because materials and education are not created or provided with a disability inclusion lens. BYAN therefore sought to work with different disability groups, including physical, hearing, visual, intellectual and autism disability groups. For Nir, the challenge of balancing diverse needs of people with different physical and intellectual impairments was complex, but motivating.

Nir and his team ensure that the youth they are working with are actively and meaningfully involved throughout the process of planning, implementing, and monitoring activities so that they can create inclusive spaces and resources.

For us, we always believe in the global principle called ‘Nothing About Us Without Us.’ That's why, since the very beginning, we have done our best to ensure the representation of all the disability diverse groups whom we have been directly working with

Working to remove barriers to participation BYAN ensures that their events are in accessible venues, provide sign language interpretation when necessary, and reimburse travel costs. Easy-to-read, large format materials are used to make texts more accessible, and they have developed pictorial materials dedicated to children with autism. When required, they provide preparatory sessions so specific groups get up to speed and they can move at a regular pace. In some cases they provide materials prior to training sessions, so people can familiarise themselves with the content. There is no one-size fits all approach to accessibility, so they tailor the work to meet the different needs.

In his role as lead of the RHRN2 program, Nir has spearheaded several initiatives:

- Capacity-building training for young people with disabilities
- Developing accessible educational materials
- Partnering with thematic disability organizations
- Providing training and support to partner organizations on disability inclusivity and accessibility

- Engaging young champions to advocate against harmful practices
- Advocating and collaborating with the relevant government agencies for the promotion of disability inclusive initiatives

BYAN has had a profound impact on the RHRN2 program, leading to notable improvements in partner organizations' attitudes and practices concerning accessibility and inclusivity. Events and digital content were made more accessible to people with diverse disabilities, fostering a more inclusive environment. Additionally, young champions, including those with disabilities, actively worked to challenge harmful social norms, such as discrimination against menstruation or sexuality of people with disabilities.

Nir experienced significant growth in his personal and professional life, gaining valuable international exposure and enhancing advocacy skills. One of his proudest achievements was the increased visibility and engagement of young people with disabilities. Nir's journey underscores the importance of a holistic approach to disability

inclusion. He emphasized that disabilities should not deter young people from pursuing their goals and that we have a responsibility to make our spaces accessible and inclusive to youth in all their diversities.

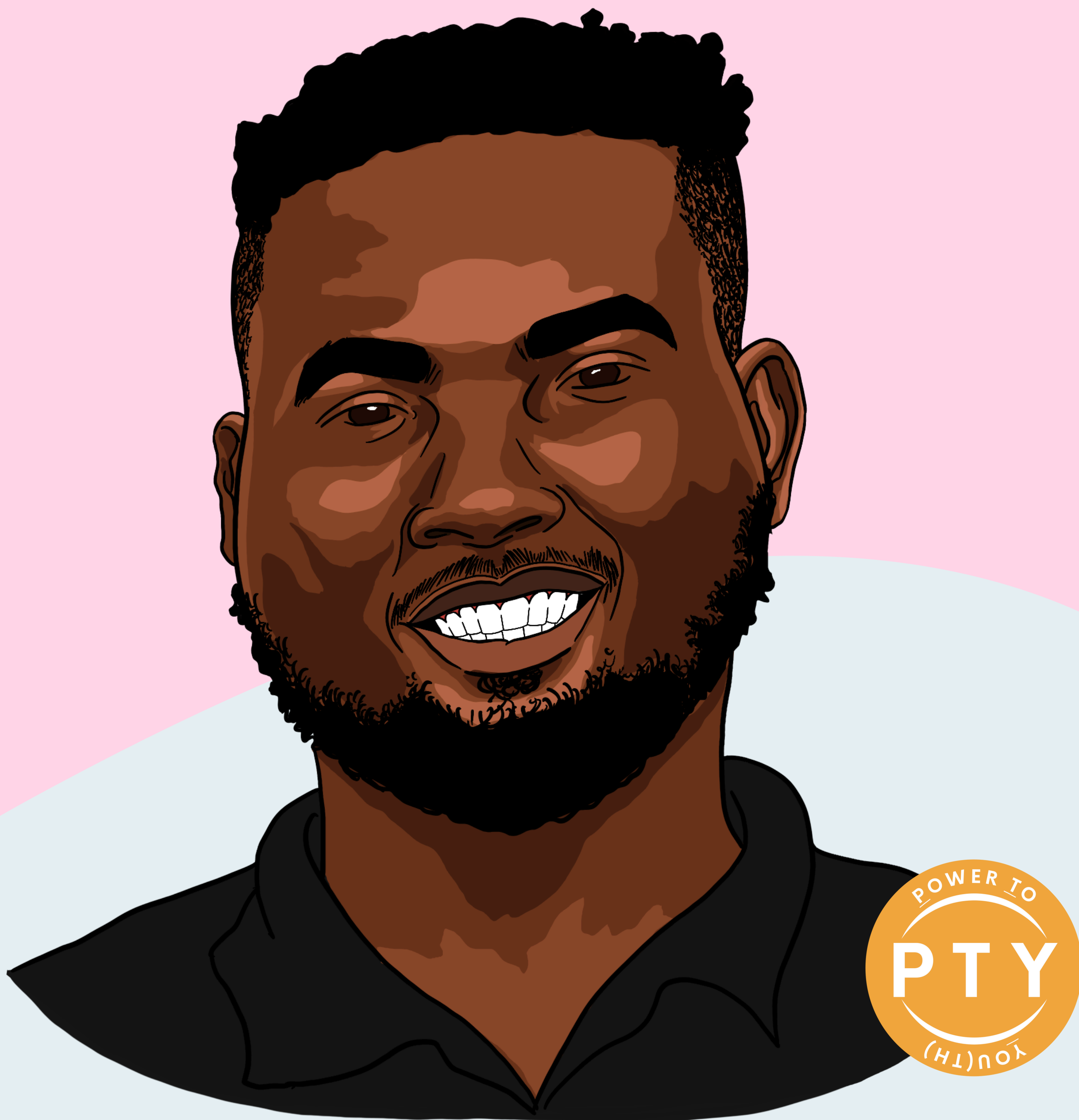
Nir's story demonstrates the power of dedicated advocacy and inclusive programming in advancing the rights and well-being of young people with disabilities and ensuring they have access to information, resources and regarding their SRHR.

“Young people really have the power and if we can utilize that power that can ultimately lead you to success”

Nir and his team's focus on accessibility, education, and empowerment, have helped ensure that young people with disabilities are seen as equal and capable partners who can provide valuable input for the betterment of all!

Weston Mfunya

Programmatic Governance



**A Voice for Youth: Weston's
Journey in the Power to Youth
Program**

When Weston first joined the Power to You(th) Global Supervisory Board (GSB) as Youth Representative, his goal was clear: to ensure that young people's voices weren't just heard but actively shaped decisions. As someone deeply involved in youth work, Weston had witnessed too many programs where youth participation felt superficial. This wasn't enough for him.

I've seen tokenism, even symbolic involvement of young people, and the way society defines young people often affects their involvement ... I wanted to contribute something meaningful to Power to You(th) and add value through my skill

In his home country of Malawi, the challenges young people face are immense. Early child marriage, for example, affects 42% of girls before the age of 18, cutting short their education and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Weston knew that addressing issues like these required programs that not only supported young people but actively involved them in shaping solutions. That's what drew him to Power to You(th)

The idea of having Youth Representatives sit in the programmatic decision-making spaces was initiated in 2022 by CHOICE with the goal of upholding and mainstreaming the programme's commitment to MIYP, and having the youth voice represented in important

programmatic discussions. Since then, CHOICE has mentored the 4 Youth Representatives to feel confident, capable and empowered to engage and speak up in the Power to You(th) decision-making spaces. Weston was on boarded into the role in 2023, and from the start, he took his role in the GSB seriously. He worked to ensure that the program's decision-making aligned with the needs and priorities of young people across Power to You(th) countries. This wasn't just about policy discussions—it was about creating tangible pathways for youth-led accountability and advocacy. He reflected, "The program focuses on MIYP. It gives young people the chance to align program goals with their real needs and concerns."

The mentorship Weston received from CHOICE through Power to You(th) was a turning point for him. As well as learning new skills, Weston built the confidence to use them effectively. Public speaking, advocacy, and program design became essential tools as he engaged with national-level policymakers and contributed to shaping Malawi's National Youth Policy. He described it as transformative.

When I started with Power to You(th), I wasn't confident in public speaking or advocacy, but through the program and its capacity-building, I've shaped my skills and even learned how to influence decisions

But the impact of Weston's involvement extended beyond himself. His organization grew stronger and more stable through the Power to You(th) programme, securing funding and building partnerships with international organizations. "We've built capacity and gained opportunities to partner with others, it's helped us grow to where we are today."

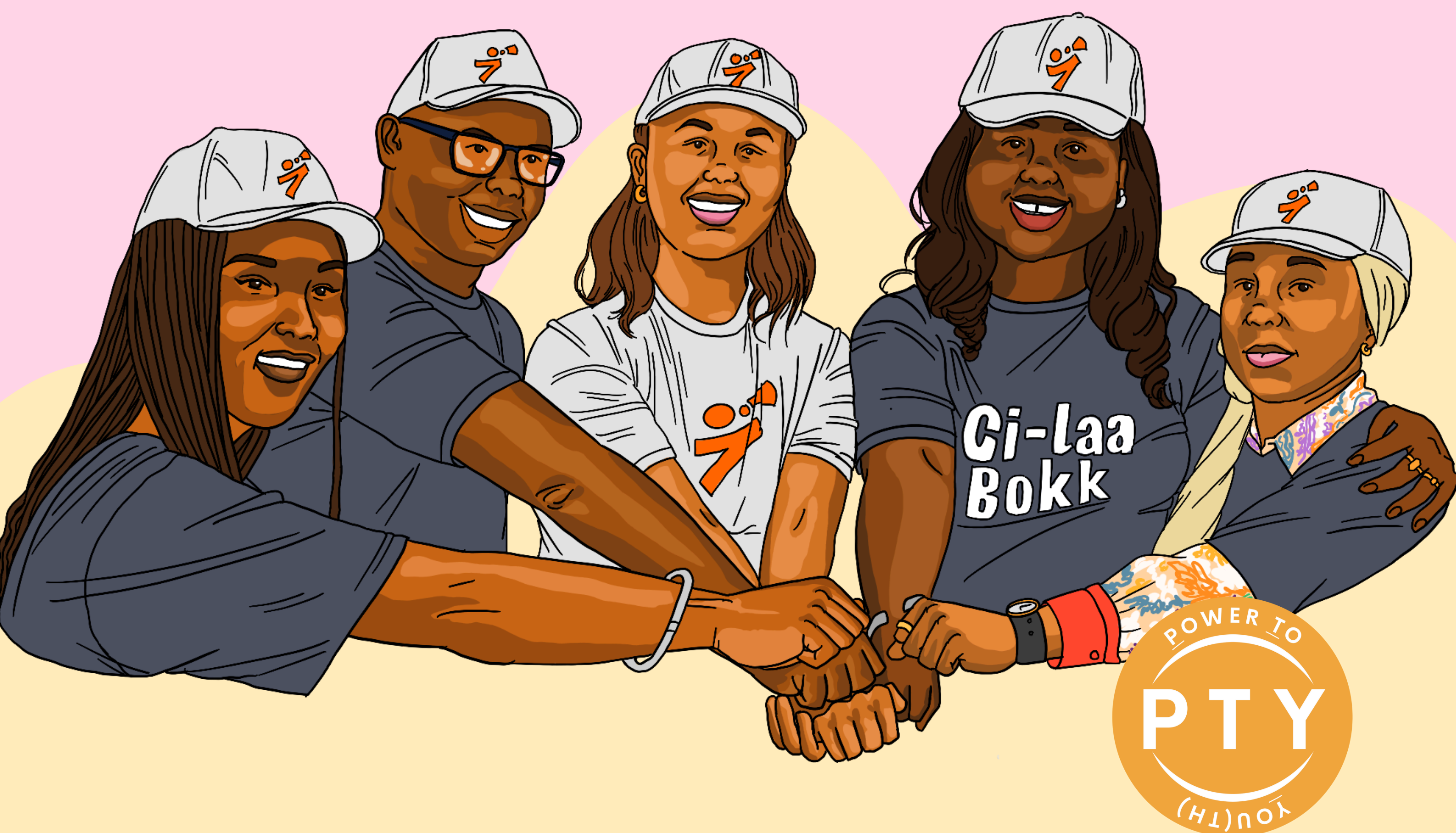
What stood out most to Weston was how Power to You(th) approached youth participation. The program didn't just include young people in decision-making; it treated them as partners and experts. Weston valued the mentorship approach and the structure of the GSB, which fostered youth-adult partnerships. "I've learned from them, and they've also learned from me. Through that, we have built a partnership that really works in addressing issues affecting young people."

For Weston, this journey has been both personal and professional. He sees youth participation not as a buzzword but as a way to create lasting, meaningful change and partnerships. But we can't do this without collaboration with adults who can share their knowledge and experience.

As he looks ahead, Weston is optimistic about what's possible when young people are given the tools, platforms, and trust to lead. His advice to young advocates reflects his experience: "Be willing to learn, do your research, and make sure your advocacy represents the broader youth population."

CI LAA BOKK

Senegal



**CI LAA BOKK: Youth are the
driving force behind Senegal's
growth**

Born out of a pressing need for youth representation in Senegalese decision-making spaces, the CI LAA BOKK platform was launched in 2005 by young elected representatives, parliamentarians, and civil society leaders. With 75% of Senegal's population under 35, yet only 2% of decision-makers being young, it was clear something had to change. Even in matters directly impacting youth—health, education, employment—their voices were largely absent. CI LAA BOKK aptly means “I’m part of it,” which reflects the platforms’ mission: to promote MIYP in leadership and governance.

Since joining the Power to You(th) programme, the platform has strengthened its capacity, particularly in MIYP, advocacy, and leadership. What started as a grassroots initiative has grown to influence regional and national levels, collaborating with key ministries, including the Ministry of Health. CI LAA BOKK is now a pioneering force in youth participation, equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to speak up and be heard.

Why is this crucial? Despite being the majority, young Senegalese face major barriers in accessing employment, education, healthcare, and social services. Policies that ignore their needs are ineffective. MIYP ensures that youth are central to the decisions that affect their futures, particularly in areas like sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality.

CI LAA BOKK unites young parliamentarians, councillors, civil society actors, and activists, building a dynamic network for experience-sharing and dialogue.

We want to make sure that the authorities listen to what young people are saying, and that they are better represented at different levels

Through their work, young parliamentarians have been empowered to raise critical issues and push for rights-based policy reforms. The platform has advocated for legislation establishing a minimum youth representation in government bodies and called for lowering the age limits for parliamentarians (currently 25) and the presidency (35). They also support youth leaders already inside government to amplify youth voices in influential spaces.

And this is having a real impact. More young people are being invited into high-level discussions—including budget planning—and are influencing decisions alongside key stakeholders. A proposed law mandating 30% youth representation in the National Assembly is currently under review, a major milestone championed by CI LAA BOKK and Power to You(th). If passed, it would mark a groundbreaking shift in youth political representation in Senegal.

But their work doesn't stop at policy. CI LAA BOKK also strengthens youth skills in MIYP, leadership, and advocacy, while

educating them about local governance, laws, and decision-making structures. This person-centred approach not only builds confidence but prepares them to represent diverse youth perspectives effectively.

A turning point came in 2022, when an unprecedented number of young people were elected into government positions. A networking luncheon for these new leaders—including mayors, entrepreneurs, and CSO representatives—became a powerful moment of unity. Despite differing political, cultural, and religious backgrounds, the young people present rallied around the shared cause of MIYP, determined to challenge manipulative tactics and push for genuine inclusion in governance. A united youth voice is a strong one.

Since then, youth representation across sectors—political, educational, private, and civil society—has continued to grow. In May 2024, four young leaders were appointed to key governmental roles by the Senegalese President.

Among them is Sokhna Ba, a CI LAA BOKK member and current MP, who leads the Commission on Urbanisation and Transportation. As the only female commission head, she is breaking barriers for both youth and women in governance. Another success story is Ibrahima Thiam, a former platform member and now Secretary of State for Enterprise and Small Business. Identified and mentored through CI LAA BOKK and Power to You(th), Ibrahima developed into a committed and capable advocate for MIYP.

Looking ahead, CI LAA BOKK plans to expand its reach to 14 additional districts, further scaling its efforts to build sustainable youth engagement nationwide. Its success proves that when young people are given tools, confidence, and space, they don't just participate—they lead. Embracing youth leadership is key to building a more inclusive, responsive, and resilient Senegal.



Brenda Nowelline

Uganda



**Brenda's Story: A Journey of
Growth and Advocacy in Uganda**

Brenda's journey with the RHRN2 began in 2022, sparked by a conversation with Leah, who introduced her to the work being done at Hope Mbale. Brenda realized how much young people in her community lacked access to accurate information about SRHR. Inspired and eager to make a difference, she joined the program as an SRHR champion and peer educator, determined to help bridge that gap.

One of the first things that stood out to Brenda was how the program gave young people like herself a real platform. She wasn't just a participant; she was given opportunities to lead activities, facilitate discussions, and speak directly to other young people.

It's so meaningful when young people speak to other young people... They listen and open up more easily when the message comes from someone like them

Brenda is particularly proud of her role in training others on menstrual hygiene. Before joining the program, she had her own misconceptions. "I used to think reusable pads weren't good," she admits. But the program changed her perspective. She learned how reusable pads can be a healthy and sustainable option if properly cleaned and cared for. Not only did she change her own habits, but she also started teaching others how to make them. For many young people, this skill was life-changing, offering an affordable alternative to expensive disposable products.

The training went far beyond just developing practical skills. As Brenda learned more, her confidence grew. "Before, I was too shy to even ask for services at health centers," but by sharing her knowledge with others, she found her voice, becoming more self-assured in standing up for her own needs. "Now, I know my rights, and I'm not afraid to advocate for myself and others." This shift changed how Brenda saw herself, and what's more, she saw it influencing those around her too. As young people became more informed,

they grew more comfortable accessing services. Even service providers, once hesitant to serve young people or key populations, began to listen. Brenda and her peers' advocacy helped shift their thinking, making services more inclusive and accessible.

Another milestone for Brenda was being trained to facilitate sessions for the Ministry of Health, focusing on menstrual hygiene, especially for key populations. Through these sessions, she and her peers shared their knowledge and heard directly from people about their concerns and experiences, making the discussions even more impactful.

Through her journey, Brenda has grown both as an advocate but also as a person. Public speaking, once an intimidating task, is now something she embraces. Facilitating workshops and engaging with diverse groups has built her confidence and strengthened her belief in the power of young people to create change.

But it hasn't always been easy. Cultural beliefs and traditional practices still present significant challenges.

I've learned to speak openly, to say what I want, and stand my ground. This program taught me that I have a right to my autonomy, no one should influence me to do something without my consent

Brenda has encountered resistance from adults and community leaders who are skeptical of her work. "It takes time to change a deeply rooted mindset" she explains, and despite the challenges, she remains determined. Armed with the right information, she is now able to engage with cultural leaders, helping them see the importance of breaking down myths and misconceptions for the benefit of young people.

Looking ahead, Brenda is committed to sustaining the impact of her work. Together with her peers, she continues to train others on menstrual hygiene and advocacy, making sure that even after the program ends, the skills and knowledge they've gained will keep spreading. "We want the change to continue."

Brenda's message to other young people is clear: Know your rights and stand by them. "We all have the right to good health," she says. "No one should intimidate you into giving up access to the services you need."

For Brenda, this work expands beyond the program. She sees herself as part of a growing movement of young advocates determined to keep pushing forward, making sure that young people continue to have a voice in decisions that affect them.

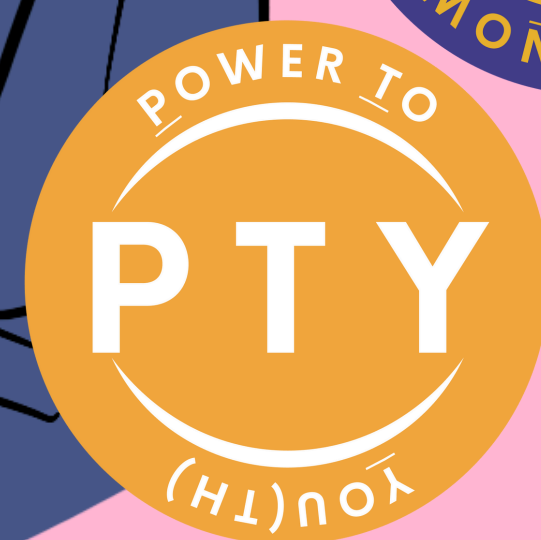
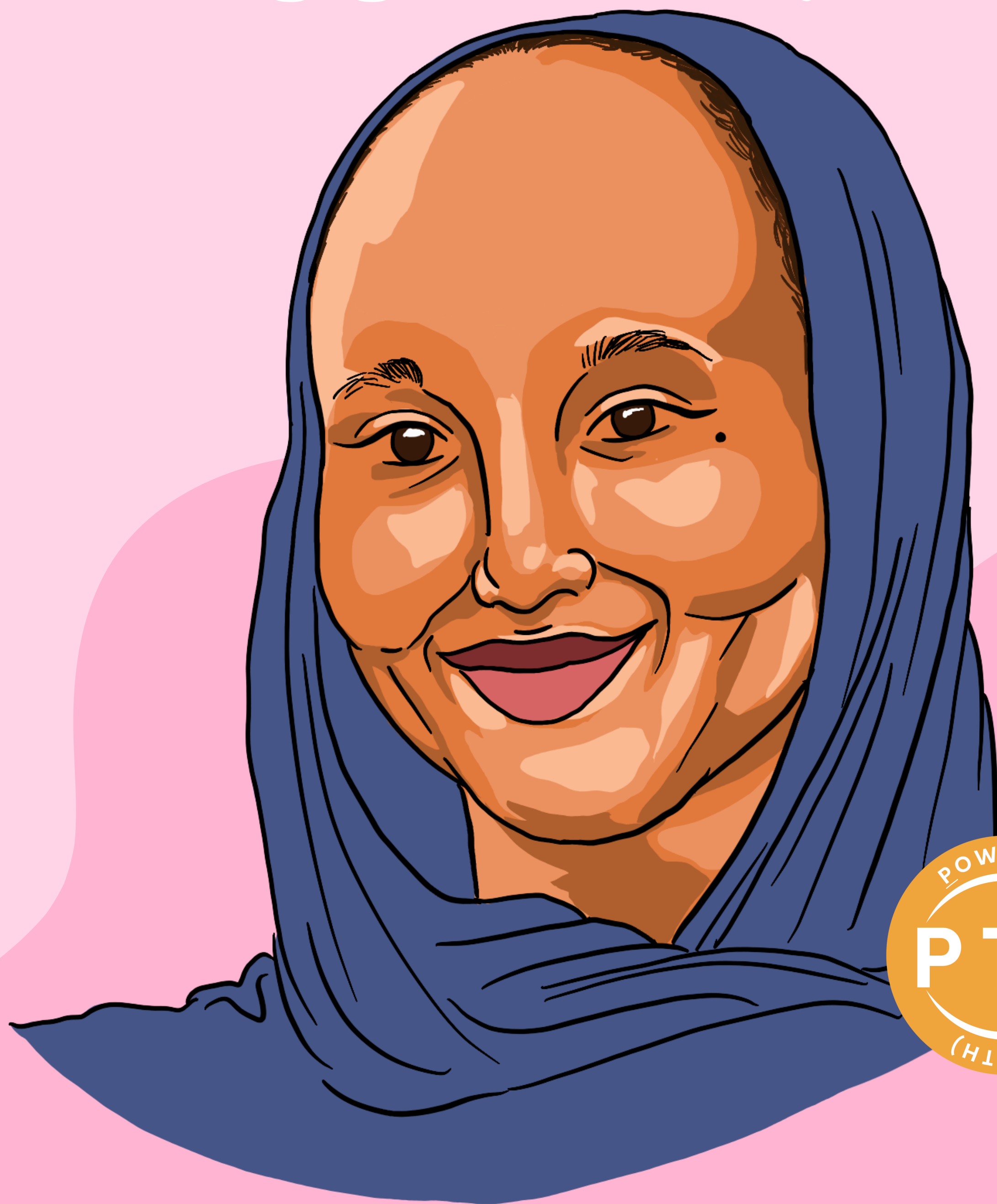


We need to continue advocating and teaching young people that they have a right, and that they should know how to make informed decisions for themselves



Mumina Mohamednur

Youth Engage Community of Practice



**Stronger together: How and why
we should build sustainable and
powerful youth movements**

Created to bring together passionate young people from both the RHRN2 and Power to You(th) programs, the Youth Engage Community of Practice (CoP) has become a dynamic, inclusive, and safe space to drive MIYP. Formed by CHOICE in collaboration with Y-ACT, this cross-programmatic community amplifies youth leadership through quarterly online sessions focused on key MIYP topics. By sharing challenges, lessons, and innovative tools, the CoP fosters collaboration and builds a united movement for change. This collective strength proves that the true power of youth leadership lies in embracing the experiences and diversity of our young members.

One such member is Mumina Mohamednur. Since the age of 9, Mumina dreamed of empowering young, diverse, and vulnerable communities. As the RHRN2 Kenyan Youth Country Coordinator, she now brings that dream to life. Coming from a community where female genital mutilation is common, Mumina is particularly driven to address SRHR challenges faced by women and marginalised groups. Her role has allowed her to implement creative ideas to improve SRHR for youth.

Seeking connection and knowledge sharing, Mumina joined the Youth Engage CoP. Rather than working in isolation, the CoP encourages mutual learning and brings youth together to explore best practices, challenges, and innovations in MIYP.

Each session deep-dives into a new theme—ranging from Youth-Adult Partnerships to sustaining youth movements.

Mumina co-facilitated a session on the latter with CoP member Rafiatu from Ghana's Power to You(th) program. Mumina, who is passionate about shifting away from traditional "aid" models, helped lead a discussion challenging outdated structures and identifying pathways to more self-reliant youth movements.

So how can we sustain youth movements? One strategy is a member-led structure. The CoP includes Chairs (CHOICE and Y-ACT) and a Core Group of 8 volunteer members who co-create sessions. As a Core Group member, Mumina values the ownership this structure fosters.

"This is by young people, for young people. So I'm definitely more motivated to work on it and contribute to it" she shares. This participatory model boosts motivation and ensures long-term engagement.

The CoP also promotes South-to-South learning, offering a youth-friendly, cross-programmatic space for participants from diverse Global South contexts.

I feel like we are growing towards a better direction in terms of facilitating South to South learning

Despite differing contexts, youth realize they face similar struggles. "We fear the same thing when it comes to sustainability for young people in the Global South." For Mumina, that fear drives her to create safer, more inclusive spaces for future youth leaders.

The CoP supports skills development, from facilitation to understanding diverse perspectives.

The way the CoP is set up, it is actually very difficult for you not to get anything new or not to learn anything. It's not only in-country learning, it's learning from young people from different countries and different programs

Mumina has deepened her MIYP expertise, adopted new facilitation techniques, and applied these lessons elsewhere. "I was able to pick those learnings, things that I have just been observing as a CoP member and take them to the ground, to young people who go to the community and teach them how to be a safe space facilitator".

To sustain and share the CoPs' learnings, a Youth Engage newsletter was launched, which disseminates resources, success stories, and youth-friendly visual notes capturing CoP session outcomes. Mumina considers these valuable knowledge products, as she would receive

requests for information and resources from other young advocates, and she was able to disseminate these notes in response. By harvesting outcomes, capturing them in these notes and circulating them with partners, the CoP contributes to the sustainability of the programs work and gains.

For Mumina, the CoP has been a space to grow her passion for human rights advocacy. It has empowered her to build meaningful connections and lead on the issues youth care about. "This is what we feel matters to us. This is what we feel is important to us." Looking ahead, she calls on programs to strengthen grant-writing skills of young people as a key strategy for sustaining the movements of youth.. She also encourages peers to seize growth opportunities:

Scale up, increase your value and make good use of the opportunities you have been given

“ Young people are at the heart of what we do and showcasing the inspiring work and power of young people has been a real privilege. With these Stories of Change, we hope to highlight the innovation and creativity that young people bring to SRHR programming, as well as the passion and lived experiences that strengthen the programs and align them to the real needs and realities of diverse young people.

Through meaningfully engaging young people in all stages of programming, we see that there is positive and lasting impact, as young people have autonomy, ownership and decision-making power. Not only are young people empowered to participate, but the programs become more effective, leading to greater change at all levels, from community, national, regional and global.

We hope these stories encourage adult partners to realise the power of youth through the meaningful participation of young people in all their diversity, as well as inspire other young people to be changemakers and young leaders.

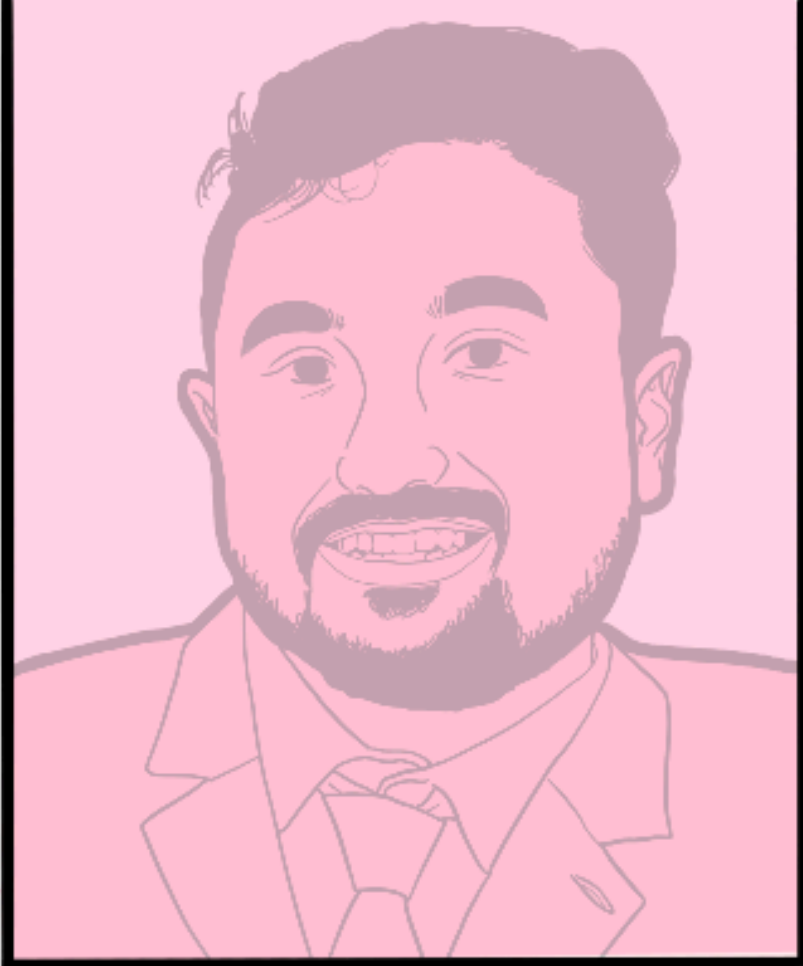
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**- Lizzie Jackson,
Program Coordinator**



With special thanks to our amazing programmatic partners, and particularly the inspiring young people who agreed to be interviewed for this project. We hope we have justly captured the incredible work that you have done, and will continue to do for youth SRHR!

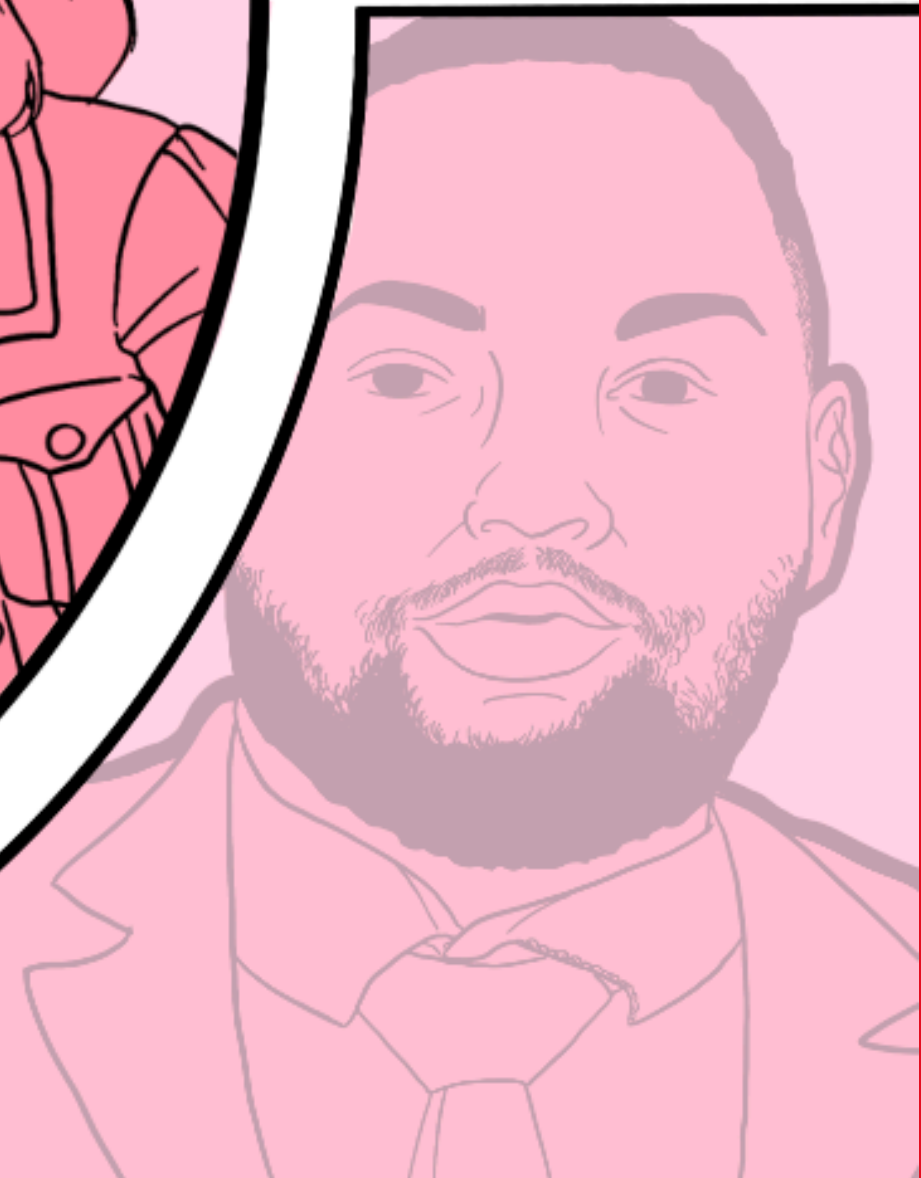
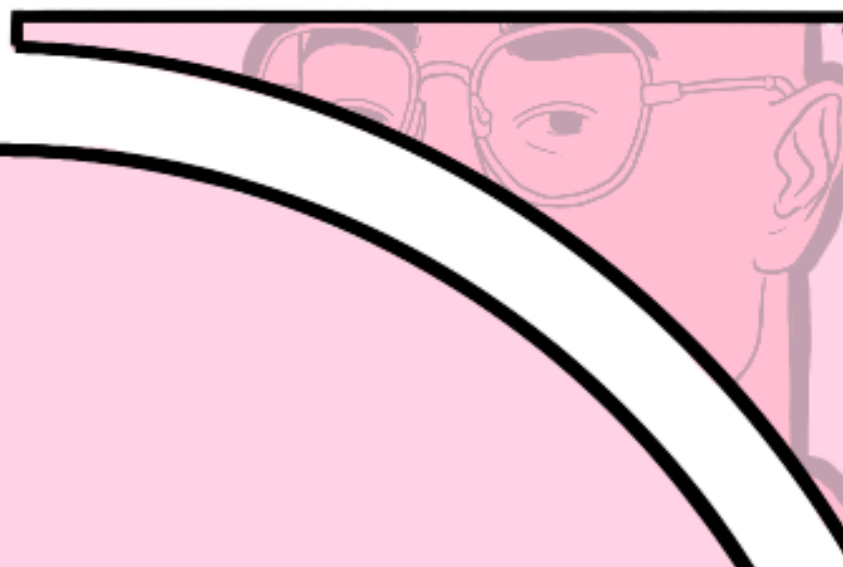
The logo for CHOICE FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY. The word "CHOICE" is in large, bold, black capital letters. To its right, the words "FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY" are stacked in smaller, bold, black capital letters.

**Learn more about our organization at
www.choiceforyouth.org**



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