

# FIVE YEARS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

GET UP SPEAK OUT & YES I DO



**CHOICE** FOR  
YOUTH &  
SEXUALITY

# FIVE YEARS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

GUSO & YID

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# FIVE YEARS OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

## FOREWORD

Nothing about us, without us. A strong motto which resonates in so many situations depending on the meaning you give to it. Ever wondered who is 'us'? For CHOICE, it has always been about young people. In 2019, young people between 15 and 24-year-old comprised of 1.2 billion of the world's population. This number continues to grow and is expected reach 1.3 billion by 2030. To make it more concrete, this is about one out of every six people worldwide. In our eyes, this is a number that can't be ignored and reflects all kinds of stories and voices. If we want to continue making progress concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights, we need to invest in young people's health. To ensure young people's voices and concerns are heard and catered to, we need to involve them in all the processes and decision making about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. CHOICE passionately believes that policies and programs can only be more effective and impactful if we include youth all the way: from planning and designing to implementation and research and so on. When it comes to investing in youth, we need to shift the power to young people themselves.

As the Get Up Speak Out and Yes I Do programs come to close after 5 glorious years, at CHOICE, we continue to strengthen our work and impact by reflecting on previous programmes and looking forward to the future. Looking back, I feel an immense sense of pride in what we've been able to achieve together: from strengthening youth-led

organizations to connecting young people all over the world - we've built a strong global youth movement on which everyone can rely on, now and in the future. With the Sustainable Development Goals, we have made an agreement with each other, and with the world. Nothing about us, without us. I am honored to introduce to you to the stories of the young people behind the 'us'. This is what real change is about.



**Lindsay Vogelzang**

*Executive Director, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality*

# Programs



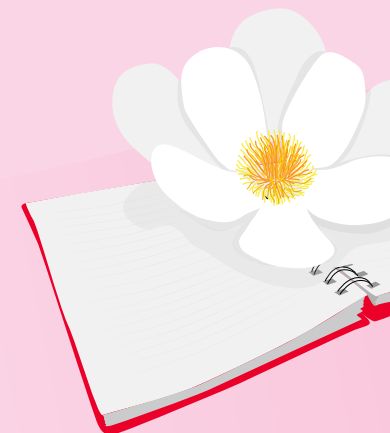
## Get Up Speak Out – for Youth Rights

The Get Up Speak Out program (GUSO) was developed by young people for young people and came into being as a collaboration between six Dutch/UK organizations; Rutgers (lead organization), Aidsfonds, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, dance4life, IPPF and Simavi, and was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The GUSO program aimed for a society where all young people, especially girls and young women, are empowered to realize their SRHR in societies that are positive towards young people's sexuality. The program was implemented in two countries in Asia (Indonesia and Pakistan) and in five countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda), by in-country alliances. As CHOICE we supported four GUSO countries: TaYA in Ethiopia, ARI in Indonesia, NAYA in Kenya and CYECE in Malawi.



## Yes I Do

Yes I Do (YID) was an alliance consisting of Plan Netherlands (lead organization), AMREF Netherlands, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and Rutgers, together with our partner organizations in Africa and Asia. The program worked on preventing harmful practices such as child marriages, teenage pregnancies and female genital mutilation/cutting. It aimed to create a future in which adolescent girls can decide if, when and who to marry, if, when and with who to have children, and are protected from female genital mutilation/cutting. Under YID, CHOICE had partners in six countries: TaYA in Ethiopia, ARI in Indonesia, NAYA in Kenya, CYECE in Malawi, COALIZAO in Mozambique and Generation Alive! in Zambia.



# Key activities

## STRENGTHENING MYP: MATERIALS, TRAININGS OF TRAINERS AND MYP SUMMER SCHOOL



CHOICE's commitment to making meaningful youth participation (MYP) more than just a buzzword is anchored in the organization's activities and initiatives to build young peoples' knowledge and capacities.

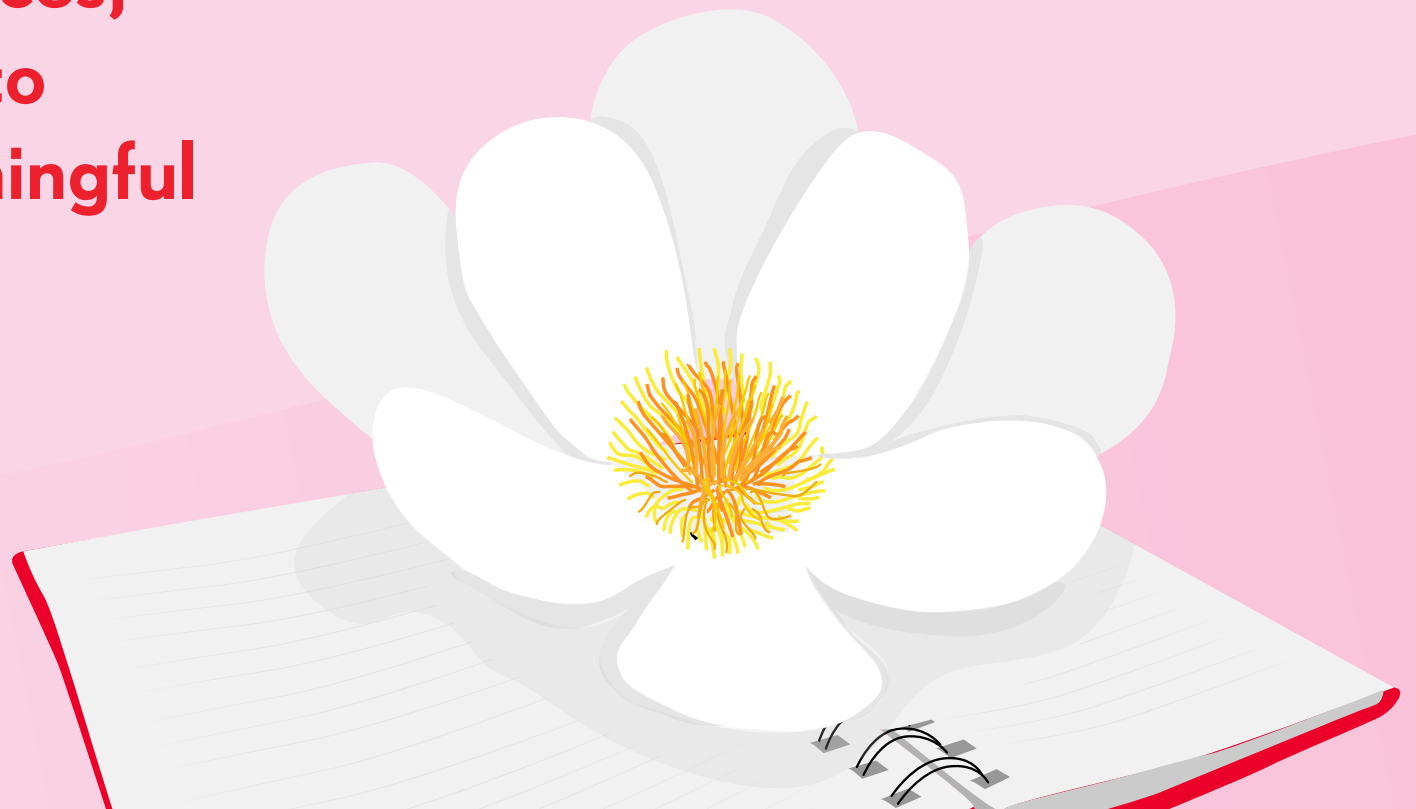
For CHOICE, the GUSO and YID programs created a key opportunity to take our work on MYP to the next level. In 2017, CHOICE launched the Flower of Participation 2.0. Coming from the need to have one comprehensive model on MYP, the existing Flower of Participation was redesigned based on experiences by CHOICE and partners, as well as scientific research. Building on the Flower of Participation, in the same year CHOICE also launched the training manual that forms the core of all of our MYP activities: The A-Z of MYP – How To Integrate Meaningful Youth Participation Into Your Organization & Program. This training manual is designed to be a tool that organizations and programs can use to anchor meaningful youth participation into their work. In the same year as it was launched, the A - Z MYP manual was piloted and implemented through MYP trainings in six partner countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Indonesia. In total, 61 trainers were trained who consequently trained the in-country alliances and partners on meaningful youth participation. In addition to the trainings for her partners, CHOICE worked with dance4life on a capacity strengthening trajectory on MYP and youth empowerment

**Meaningful youth participation is at the heart of CHOICE's mission to work towards a better future for young people and their SRHR.**

as part of a bigger GUSO-wide trajectory on capacity strengthening. In August 2018, CHOICE organized an interactive Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) Summer School. The MYP Summer School followed an initial Training of Trainers (ToT) which took place in 2017 and built on the Meaningful Youth Participation and Youth Empowerment session provided then by CHOICE and dance4life.

Meaningful youth participation is at the heart of CHOICE's mission to work towards a better future for young people and their SRHR. Working with our partners has helped us to learn, innovative and fine-tune our methods so that we are providing our partners, and young people at large, with the best resources, trainings and tools to push for more meaningful youth participation. •

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## CONNECTING YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS: CONNECTOR WEEK



CHOICE's work building capacity and advocating for meaningful youth participation and SRHR has made us a champion in connecting young people and youth-led organizations. 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. CHOICE's drive to connect young people dates back to 2014, when we organized our first connector meeting as the Youth Leadership FYI week (Fostering Youth-Led Initiatives) with five of our partners in Nairobi. The key objectives of this week were to encourage cross-regional learning, capacity strengthening, strategizing and linking and learning between CHOICE and our partners. The following year, CHOICE convened with four of our partners in New York during a second connector meeting.

In October 2017, CHOICE launched the Connector Week, bringing the organization's commitment to connecting young people to the next level. The 2017 Connector Week brought nine of CHOICE's partners from the GUSO, YID and Rights, Evidence, Action (REA) program together in Amsterdam. During various sessions, partners shared their challenges (including high turnovers in organizations, the diversification of funding, and meaningful youth participation) and best practices relating to SRHR, gender diversity and other fields of engagement. Amongst other things, partners discussed working with a Theory of

Change, advocacy communication and youth movement building. An 'advocacy marketplace' was also held, where information was shared about different advocacy processes.

Two years later in 2019, the Connector Week was held in Entebbe, Uganda. 23 representatives of partner organizations and five CHOICEs participated in the Connector week. For the first time, the movement became bigger than CHOICE's own partners: representatives from other youth-led organizations implementing in GUSO were present as well. Like the previous edition, the Connector Week focused on sharing best practices and challenges, whilst also building capacity. The program of the Connector Week was co-designed and co-facilitated with participants, which resulted in a dynamic agenda covering a wide range of topics including organizational development, national and international advocacy, fundraising, design thinking and M&E. Last but not least, participants also had time to network and have fun.

In 2020, the Connector Week took place online from 9–13th of November. Contrary to previous years, the Connector Week was held digitally due to the travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and CHOICE deployed virtual methodologies to engage participants and make the most of the online platforms and tools that were used. Going digital also presented the opportunity to go bigger than ever before, with a total of 91 participants attending 19 different sessions. Besides representatives from youth-led organizations from GUSO, YID and REA, the Connector Week now also included young people from the Right Here, Right Now program, bringing together young people from all CHOICE's major programs. The Connector Week virtual space hosted various sessions on MYP, advocacy, organizational capacity strengthening and more. Participants were also able to engage with others on the online discussion forum on the platform.

Over the years, the Connector Week has provided a platform for genuine connections and important dialogue between young people coming from different programs, working in different contexts and living across the globe. It is one of CHOICE's many successful engagements to grow connections among youth and build a stronger movement for young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights. ●



The CHOICE Connector Week became an opportunity for young people to not only learn from each other, but also to get to know each other and connect.

## STRENGTHENING YOUNG PEOPLE'S SKILLS: YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAININGS OF TRAINERS



CHOICE remains committed to empowering young people and youth-led organizations by helping them develop youth leadership skills that can bolster their advocacy and implementing efforts.

In 2018, we drafted a Youth Leadership Skills Manual with support from advocates and partners worldwide. In April 2018, the first pilot of the manual for a Training of Trainers (ToT) on youth leadership was facilitated by CHOICE. The pilot was conducted in Malawi with our GUSO and YIDA partner, the Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (CYECE). The Training of Trainers consisted of four key components: experiential learning, personal development, youth leadership skills and an advocacy simulation called Juncture. During and following the ToT, participants provided CHOICE with feedback on the facilitation and design of the training. Their insights and suggestions were later used to fine-tune and enrich the manual and its implementation. In total, the Youth Leadership Skills Manual was piloted in five GUSO and YIDA countries in 2018 and the final Manual was launched online in 2019.

CHOICE believes that young people are leaders. Which is why we are excited that the Youth Leadership manual and ToTs offer young people an engaging and fun way to deepen and gain new leadership skills and knowledge. We are eager to keep supporting young leaders to grow and develop, in order for them to continue championing SRHR. •

**For me as a young person, this experience (of conducting ToTs) was incredibly fulfilling. Not only did I learn about youth leadership, but I was also empowered to take the responsibility of a youth leader.”**

**-Anna Devereux**

**Former CHOICE Youth Advocate**

## INNOVATION FOR MYP: SEED GRANTS FOR NEW IDEAS



After years of working on meaningful youth participation, CHOICE is always on the lookout for ways to support new and innovative youth-led initiatives to catalyze action for meaningful youth participation.

In 2018, CHOICE managed its first seed grant for innovative ideas on Youth-Adult Partnerships. The seed grant was opened as a way to inspire inventive, meaningful youth participation strategies. With the grant, youth-led organizations could fund their ideas to develop innovative approaches to youth-adult partnerships. One of the 2018 seed grants was the PPAG's Youth Action Movement. They used the grant to organize drama sessions followed by guided discussions. Thus, bringing together young people and adults within the GUSO program and sensitizing them to the importance of youth-adult partnerships.

"The drama gave the opportunity for the young people to strengthen yet another set of their skills and they played their roles quite confidently and boldly. Even the few who were a bit hesitant on the rehearsal day were quite vocal and expressive by the last day of the drama." – Seed Grant report, PPAG's Youth Action Movement

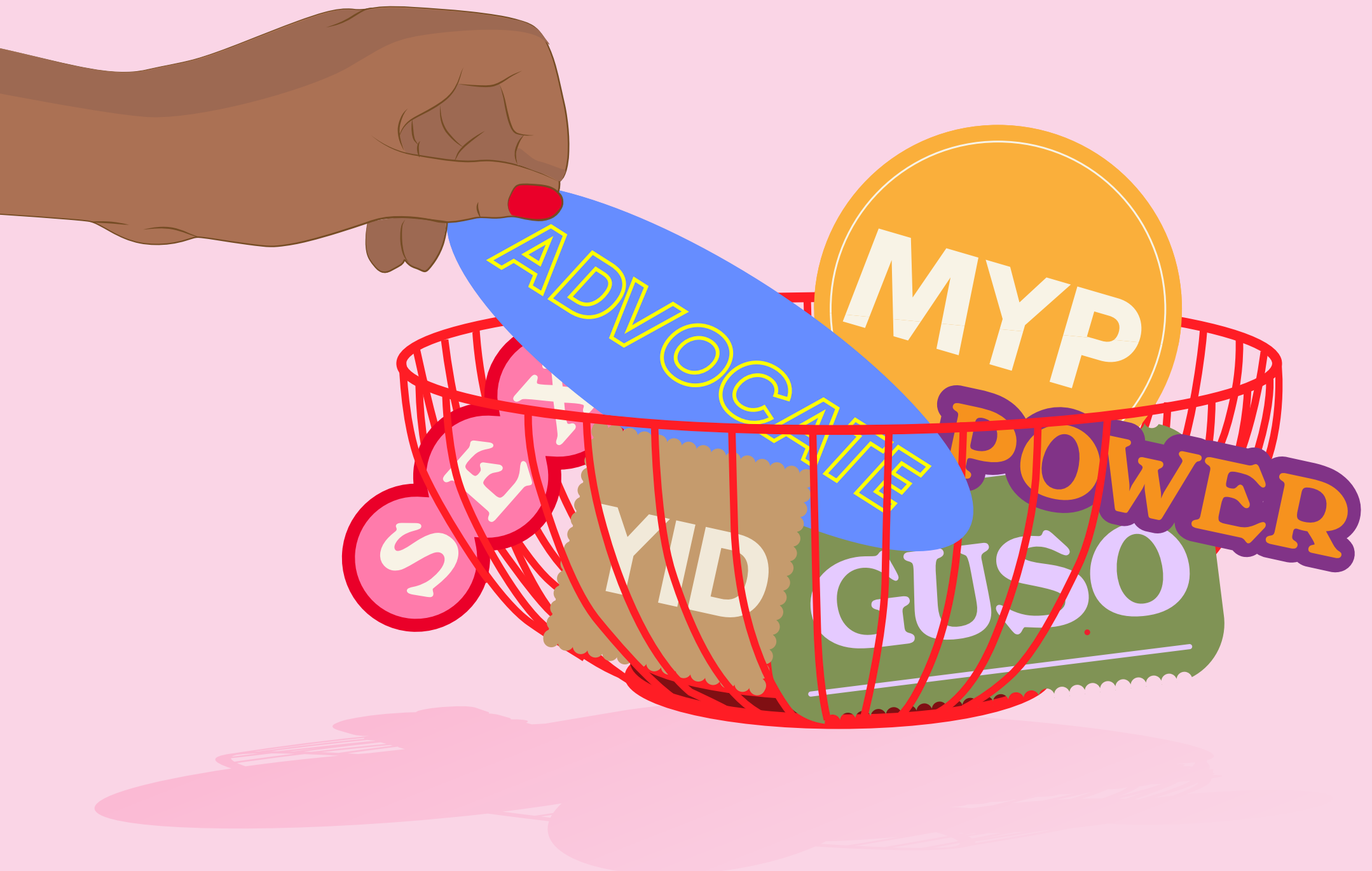
The second cycle of the seed grant was opened in 2019. All GUSO organizations could apply by sending in their ideas on ways to improve meaningful youth participation within the program using the online TrainersLab platform. The winner of the grant was GUSO's Ugan-

**The drama gave the opportunity for the young people to strengthen yet another set of their skills and they played their roles quite confidently and boldly."**

**- PPAG's Youth Action Movement**

dan partner RAHU, who enhanced the planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning skills of 20 young people using the TrainersLab platform. Thus, contributing to GUSO's sustainability.

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





Following a drama performed by young people, this group is discussing how to improve youth-adult partnerships in their community in Ghana.

## ONLINE SKILL BUILDING: YOU(TH) DO IT! PLATFORM



CHOICE has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and experience which we happily share with our partners, but also with young people more broadly. We believe that having the appropriate resources and support can help young people bloom into strong advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights, which is why we use our platforms to share our resources and advice.

In 2017, CHOICE re-launched the YOU(TH) Do IT! platform. YOU(TH) Do IT! was created by the SRHR alliance that implemented the ASK program, and was fully taken over by CHOICE in 2017 and serves as a resource hub curated by CHOICE for young people. It shares information and materials on six key themes: meaningful youth participation, sexual and reproductive health and rights, youth-led advocacy, youth-friendly services, awareness-raising, and youth leadership.

Young people visiting the platform will find a wealth of resources and exercises on these thematic issues. What's more, the platform also hosts an SRHR dictionary which translates the jargon and technical concepts used within the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights into easily understandable youth-friendly language. It truly is a go-to platform for young people wanting to know more and raise their voice! •

**Make sure to visit YOU(TH) Do IT! at [www.youthdoit.org](http://www.youthdoit.org).**

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## STRENGTHENING YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS: ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADVOCACY CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS



CHOICE has been a pioneer in supporting youth-led organizations and movements to flourish and grow. Through our work, CHOICE provides tailored advice, develops practical resources, and shares an array of information on sexual and reproductive health and rights and meaningful youth participation.

Through conversations with our partners, CHOICE discovered there was a need for a tailored Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) for youth-led organizations. Existing OCAs were deemed too technical, not inclusive enough, and not responding to the actual needs of the youth-led organizations. Therefore, in 2018 CHOICE developed its own OCA which was put into practice in 2019 during the review with five of CHOICE's partners: ARI in Indonesia, COALIZAO in Mozambique, GAL in Zambia, NAYA in Kenya and CYECE in Malawi. The CHOICE OCA is unique in that it is co-created with our partners, and partners have appreciated the participative and empowering process from the start. Based on the OCA outcomes, CHOICE and partners jointly tailored recommendations for our partner organizations, and CHOICE provided support in integrating and implementing the resulting action plans. The OCA process for COALIZAO and NAYA led to the development of a MAS, thus helping them align their activities

**Based on the OCA outcomes, CHOICE and partners jointly tailored recommendations for our partner organizations, and CHOICE provided support in integrating and implementing the resulting action plans.**

for the next years with their overall vision. For CYECE, the process led to integration of more youth-friendly policies as well as a fundraising strategy.

CHOICE also supported our partners in strengthening their capacity on advocacy by developing and performing an Advocacy Capacity Assessment (ACAT). The ACAT is conducted using a similar process to the OCA, but with a tailored focus on advocacy. For TAYA, the ACAT led to the development of an advocacy strategy which was relevant to Ethiopia's newly changed political context and couldn't have come at a better time.

CHOICE is proud to have worked with wonderful organizations to jointly grow and improve their organizational structures and processes, and advocacy efforts. We are excited to keep using our assessments to help more youth-led and youth-focused organizations flourish, and thereby contribute to a sustainable movement for sexual and reproductive health and rights. •

# Trainings & Countries

## All Countries

Since the start of the YID and GUSO programs, CHOICE has successfully conducted a total of **16 trainings** attracting **202 participants**. Through these trainings, CHOICE has helped build the capacity of a total of **181 young people** and **21 adults**. CHOICE provided five types of trainings: Meaningful Youth Participation, Meaningful Youth Participation Training of Trainers (ToT), Youth-Led Advocacy, Youth-Led Advocacy TOTs and organizational trainings.

In terms of the Meaningful Youth Participation trainings, one training was held which attracted the participation of **14 young people**. Likewise, eight Meaningful Youth ToTs were held with **86 participants**, consisting of **75 young people** and **11 adults** that trained other people in their community on meaningful youth participation.

Regarding youth-led advocacy activities: one Youth-Led Advocacy training was held with **21 young people**, and **5 Youth-Led Advocacy ToTs** were held with **63 young people** and **6 adults** who used these skills to train other young people in the communities they worked in.



### Ethiopia

Between 2016 – 2018, CHOICE designed and hosted **4 trainings in Ethiopia**. In 2016, as part of GUSO, CHOICE hosted a Youth Leadership and Youth-led Advocacy training with TaYA, DEC, FGAE, YNSD with **21 young people**. In 2017, CHOICE hosted **2 trainings** in Ethiopia: a Meaningful Youth Participation ToT with **9 young people** and **2 adults** from TaYA, NPC and YCC as part of GUSO and YID, and a PMEL Organizational Development training with the GUSO alliance that brought together **8 young people** and **4 adults**. Finally, in 2018 CHOICE facilitated a Youth Leadership ToT with Taya as part of both the GUSO and YID programs – **15 young people** took part in the training.



### Indonesia

CHOICE facilitated **3 trainings** in Indonesia between **2016 and 2018**. In 2016, CHOICE facilitated a Youth-Led Advocacy ToT for ARI as part of GUSO. The training focused on meaningful youth participation, engagement in Model United Nations and local advocacy. The training brought together **16 young people**. In 2017, as part of both GUSO and YID, CHOICE conducted a second Meaningful Youth Participation ToT with **6 young people from ARI**. Finally, in 2018 CHOICE conducted a final ToT with ARI on Youth Leadership where **14 young people** joined the training as part of GUSO and YID.



### Kenya

In 2017, CHOICE facilitated a Training of Trainers on Meaningful Youth Participation with NAYA, NPC and YCC as part of GUSO and YID. In total **10 people** attended: **9 young people** and **1 adult**.



### Malawi

In 2017 and 2018, CHOICE conducted **2 Training of Trainers** with CYECE as part of GUSO and YID: 1 on meaningful youth participation and the other on youth leadership. The MYP training engaged **5 young people** and **9 young people** took part in the Youth Leadership training.



Envisioning a future full of MYP in Ethiopia.



Discussing teenage pregnancies during a youth-parent dialogue in Malawi.



Training on MYP in Kenya.



Happy faces after completing a youth leadership training in Mozambique.

## The young trainers themselves trained numerous other people in their communities on youth leadership and MYP.



### Mozambique

In 2017, CHOICE facilitated a training and a ToT on meaningful youth participation with Coalizão, as part of YID. The training on meaningful youth participation engaged 14 young people and the Training of Trainers built the capacity of 9 young people. In addition, in 2018 a Youth Leadership ToT was held with 9 young people and 6 adults.



### Zambia

In 2017, CHOICE facilitated a Training of Trainers on meaningful youth participation with GAL as part of YID – of the 4 participants that joined the ToT 3 were under 30 years of age and 1 was an adult.



Participants sharing a joyful moment during the training in Zambia.



Visiting the Yes I Do project team at Lombok, Indonesia

# Stories of Change

## Stories of Change



## BETTIE NAMALE AND MPHATSO CHIKONDI MTEMBENUZENI

Program Officer CYECE and Project Officer CYECE

Becoming role models for girls in the communities they worked in was certainly not what Bettie and Mphatso expected when they started working within the *Yes I Do* alliance. At the time, neither felt comfortable speaking up and advocating for themselves, let alone for other young people. However, things changed after they both received training on meaningful youth participation from CHOICE. "CHOICE is the meaningful youth participation champion", Bettie explains. "It has been great working with CHOICEers because they are also young people. This made it extremely easy for us to interact with them, and they taught us a lot. As a result, we are now master trainers and their trainings have shaped how we facilitate ours. CHOICE's ice-breakers are fun, and during the reflective sessions they really try to understand how you are feeling and hear what you've learnt from the training. The practical exercises make it easier to imagine situations, which is much better than learning from textbooks". Mphatso agrees, "I felt like the trainings were more experiential, you start from what you know, and you work from there".

Starting their work with young people and CYECE's youth clubs, Bettie and Mphatso soon realized how impactful their training had been. Bettie: "What I wanted to gain was being able to empower young girls

to be independent and speak their minds. Whilst we were sharing information with young people, we realized we had also enhanced our skills on how to network, how to engage other stakeholders and how to make our needs heard and acted upon". Mphatso continues, "I feel like the capacity building we received on different skills was not only useful on advocacy platforms, but also in our daily lives. What's more, it has definitely helped the

**"CHOICE is the  
meaningful youth  
participation  
champion"**

BETTIE NAMALE

young people in the communities we work in." Mphatso saw the change she had contributed to by meaningfully engaging young people and training them to lead on transformative dialogue sessions: "Young people were able to question the harmful practices at community level and engage community leaders about their take on these issues, in order to come up with solutions together. It was good that young people and their communities were able

**“Young people were able to question the harmful practices at community level and engage community leaders about their take on these issues, in order to come up with solutions together.”**

MPHATSO CHIKONDI MTEMBENUZENI

to identify their own issues and find solutions”.

Mphatso also saw the power of dialogue during awareness sessions hosted by young people. These meetings brought together community members to discuss specific themes: “During these sessions, young people and community members jointly identified solutions for challenges related to these themes. For example, sessions included discussing access to youth-friendly services, engaging parents to allow adolescent girls and boys to access these services, and developing joint action to end teenage pregnancies and child marriages”.

According to Bettie, a best-practice in the program was the Youth Week of Action, a week-long event where young people gathered and showcased their efforts to end child marriages and teenage pregnancies: “With the Youth Week of Action we created a movement where young people and community members, tired of the different challenges and abuses girls and boys in the community are facing, came together to fight or end them. Young people are sharing information on SRHR, youth-friendly health services, meaningful youth participation and youth-adult partnerships, and ways of ending child marriages and preventing teen pregnancies. They are presenting petitions to

authorities and keeping those in power in check, to protect children. For example, they are following up on cases at policy level and making sure that all those guilty of not adhering to by-laws and national laws are prosecuted.

Young people are encouraging all community structures (such as mother groups) to continue providing counselling to girls to encourage them to go to school. They are also carrying out voluntary work in health facilities, setting up signposts with messages and reconstructing damaged roads that lead to health facilities. All these actions have been commended by the senior chief of Lilongwe, recognition that young people are taking a greater role than ever before in making sure their communities are more liberal and well-informed regarding child rights”.

Bettie feels that engaging young girls and being a role model during the CYECE’s

Girls Conference (a conference that gave girls a platform to express their issues and experiences), transformed how girls in the community saw themselves: “These conferences inspired girls to think about what they want to be when they grow up. It’s one of the best practices we initiated, and it has encouraged girls to stay in school.”

Under YIDA, the number of youth clubs CYECE has set up has drastically increased from 15 to 35. Bettie and Mphatso both agree that their work has brought change that is sustainable and extends far beyond the boundaries of the YID program. In Bettie’s words, “We worked to change the mindset of adults and young people to embrace meaningful youth participation. Young people now know: we have the potential to make a difference, we have the space to think outside the box, and we can envision what we want our communities to be like”. •

## Stories of Change

CHILESHE

MWANSA

Former Program Officer, Generation Alive

**“Another thing I learnt from CHOICE is how to design a training on meaningful youth participation to accommodate both young people and adults.”**

CHILESHE MWANSA

Growing up in Zambia where young people’s participation in decision making is more the exception than the standard, Chi Chi was bothered by the lack of space for young people to voice their needs. She wanted to change this and joined Generation Alive (GAL) as a way to be part of a youth-led movement where she could support young people to advocate for their rights. Chi Chi knew that she would face challenges on her journey to achieve this mission, particularly given that her role meant working in the rural com-

munities: “I knew that going into a rural community would mean working in settings where traditional cultural norms are persistent. I anticipated that traditional leaders and parents would not directly accept meaningful youth participation or consider their children accessing contraceptives. But I like challenges”.

Part of what bolstered her confidence to go into the community and provide trainings to both youth and adults was CHOICE’s training on meaningful youth participation. The training informed her how to meaningfully engage as a young person: “Another thing I learnt from CHOICE is how to design a training on meaningful youth participation to accommodate both young people and adults. Because when it is very technical, young people will not understand – you will lose their attention. But, if it is too youth-oriented, then adults will engage and participate less. That was my number one lesson: knowing how to develop your training with a mixed audience”. Chi Chi also points out that these trainings struck the right balance. They offered young people the space to show adult counterparts they were able put forward impactful solutions to key SRHR challenges and convince adults that young people should be taken seriously and meaningfully engaged.

Receiving the training from a youth-led organization provided an encouraging environment where she could rely on support from the other young people she worked with. This built her confidence and over time she noticed the strength in being part of and working with youth-led organizations. Chi Chi saw how being a young person and working alongside other young people helped her to empathize with young people's challenges, therefore connecting with them as peers. Because of this, co-developing entry points for these young people to engage in their communities and advocate for more meaningful engagement in health facilities was a rewarding process. Chi Chi is grateful that she has been able to contribute to the beginning of a new era of meaningful youth participation in rural communities. She sees that her trainings have led to more communities opening up to create room for young people to engage, and that young people are confidently reclaiming these spaces: "We can now see that young people know the importance of advocating for things they feel are important. Although the communities we work with were apprehensive about embracing meaningful youth participation, you are increasingly able to see that young people are raising their voices and speaking with community leaders to demand recreational and health services. We're taking steps in the right direction". •

**"Although the communities we work with were apprehensive about embracing meaningful youth participation, you are increasingly able to see that young people are raising their voices and speaking with community leaders to demand recreational and health services. We're taking steps in the right direction"**

**DAGEM DEMEREW**

## Stories of Change



Youth Country Coordinator GUSO Ethiopia

Informative, interactive and engaging. These are the three words that spring to mind for Dagem, GUSO Ethiopia's youth country coordinator, when reflecting about taking part in a meaningful youth participation training-of-trainers workshop led by CHOICE in 2017. "Before I took the training, I did not expect it to be colorful and so useful to me and other young people. I gained a lot more than I expected because the training was so broad: it had a technical component, an interactive component and an informative component."

CHOICE's support during and after the training provided Dagem and his peers

with a comprehensive package of new skillsets and knowledge on meaningful youth participation: "before, when I used to think of meaningful youth participation, I didn't consider some of the core elements, the preconditions and forms of participation: these were big eye-openers for me and I believe they are so essential". Now, Dagem still uses many of the skills

he gained from his training as he trains young people in different regions, urban cities and rural settings: "Being a Master Trainer and providing these trainings has improved my facilitation, speaking and personal interactive skills. This impacts my professional life as most of my roles require such skills on facilitation and coordination. It has really helped me grow both professionally and personally".

The impact of the trainings on meaningful youth participation led to significant internal changes within GUSO Ethiopia. Equipped with the knowledge and skills they gained from the trainings, Dagem and other youth advocates took action to open

up space for youth participation in the GUSO Ethiopia's steering committee: "Before our efforts, the steering committee consisted of five adults and one young person, myself. We realized that if we advocate for meaningful youth participation in our work then young people also needed to be part of the committee. That is why we launched our lobbying

**"Now, you can see that young people and adults equally share the decision-making power in the steering committee – this was all a result of the trainings".**

DAGEM DEMEREW

**Dagem sees that there is good progress led by young people, who thanks to the trainings, “now know that meaningful youth participation is not a privilege. Instead, it is their right to ask for meaningful youth participation and they can claim this right”.**

efforts towards the national board. We successfully convinced them, and four new positions on the steering committee were opened specifically for young people. Now, you can see that young people and adults equally share the decision-making power in the steering committee – this was all a result of the trainings”.

The trainings that Dagem has passed on to others has bolstered young people to act, also far beyond the GUSO program. For example, GUSO successfully collaborated with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health to ensure that meaningful youth participation is engrained in all health policies that affect young people. This achievement helped GUSO build ongoing relationships with other Ethiopian ministries and governing bodies, to ensure that meaningful youth participation is interwoven into key policy documents that will impact different facets of young Ethiopians’ lives. While challenges remain in fully integrating meaningful youth engagement in organizational structures and activities, Dagem sees that there is good progress led by young people, who thanks to the trainings, “now know that meaningful youth participation is not a privilege. Instead, it is their right to ask for meaningful youth participation and they can claim this right”. •

## Stories of Change

NADINE



RODRIGUES

Program Officer Coalizão

**“It has made me feel like I can contribute to changing my community, doing and sharing the small things I have as experience”.**

NADINE RODRIGUES

As a Program Officer at Coalizão, Nadine has her work cut out for her. Because Nadine works in three districts in Mozambique, equipping a total of 60 peer educators to go out into their communities. Here, they support local youth-friendly health facilities and share knowledge on SRHR with young people, parents, matrons and traditional and religious leaders. Nadine also provides these peer educators with training about SRHR, youth leadership and meaningful youth participation. The YIDA program, and her background on youth leadership, have taught her a lot about the power of communication and management: “It has made me feel like I can contribute to changing my community, doing and sharing the small things I have as experience”.

Since starting her position, Nadine has shared a wealth of knowledge with young peer educators in Mozambique through the various trainings she provides. Over time, she has seen these young educators blossom into champions of change. For example, it was these young people who - using the negotiation skills they had received from her training - successfully pushed for their inclusion in co-managing the youth-friendly space at a local health facility. During her weekly meetings with the peer educators, she is happy to see them actively co-develop ways to improve activities and align them with young people's needs across the country.

**“I always have meaningful youth participation on my mind;**

Nadine reflects on when she started working as part of the YIDA program: “It was a really big step, but it helped me grow as a person and as an activist.” She has gained the necessary confidence to work with older counterparts and has become more perceptive and empathetic to the needs of young people. The COVID-19 pandemic has also taught her

a lot about being proactive in looking for solutions to changing situations. Her work on youth leadership and participation has shaped not only her community, but also fired her passion to push for more meaningful youth participation: “I always have meaningful youth participation on my mind; it’s part of me now and I don’t look at it as work anymore!” •

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NADINE RODRIGUES

## Stories of Change



# PRAGYA SINGH

Program Officer CHOICE

Pragya's motivation to join CHOICE as a youth advocate was grounded in her upbringing and work in India, where gender, sex and sexuality are taboo topics: "As a young woman who grew up in that society, it is not something that you can unsee. This experience made me take my SRHR seriously, and I saw a very important role for young people like myself in advancing it. When we talk about meaningful youth participation, I genuinely believe young people should be able to make their own choices. Not only is participation a fundamental right, but there's also a lot of value in engaging young people in organizations, programs and policies related to SRHR so that we can set the agenda ourselves. When participation of young people is truly meaningful, it not only benefits young people, but also society as a whole!"

**"The biggest added value of conducting trainings on behalf of CHOICE, a youth-led organization with staff below 30 years of age, is the youth-oriented support".**

PRAGYA SINGH

Pragya's interest in using capacity strengthening as a tool to increase meaningful youth participation flourished during her time as a youth advocate. In this role, she supported the design and facilitation of MYP trainings for CHOICE's youth-led and youth-focused partners: "The biggest added value of conducting trainings on behalf of CHOICE, a youth-led organization with staff below 30 years of age, is the youth-oriented support. This kind of support and inclusive environment is not always guaranteed in other

organizations. In other places, your voice may not always be heard, but at CHOICE everyone treats you as an equal: no matter your age. This is really at the core of what CHOICE advocates for: meaningful youth participation, where young people can participate on equal terms with adults in all stages of SRHR programming and policy-making."

In Pragya's eyes, CHOICE's ability to create inclusive trainings which are adaptable to a diverse audience, reflect the

organization's broader way of working and ambition to do better: "Although we are youth-led and a young organization I do think we are pushing ourselves and learning from our experiences. Sometimes we are still figuring things out that older organizations figured out decades ago.

We are experimenting, learning, finding answers and improving". At the core of this, Pragya sees CHOICE's ability to critically reflect and offer room for introspection as one of its merits: "That's also what motivates us, because we want to do good by ourselves but also

the communities we work with. The fact that we're constantly reflecting on ourselves makes us better: our organizations, our work and our impact".

Personally, these trainings have further helped build

Pragya's confidence and her skillset. She now feels more confident in facilitating trainings – even those in different contexts. She sees the adaptability of the trainings as a key feature in their design: "We've built these trainings as trainings for everybody, but what's

**"We are experimenting, learning, finding answers and improving"**

PRAGYA SINGH

more important is that people really contextualize it to their context and personal experiences". In a sense, she feels the skills she has gained as a youth advocate have also supported her professional growth within CHOICE. Pragya

now works as a staff member at CHOICE, and she's pleased she can help retain the knowledge she gathered as an advocate within the organization: "As a Program Officer for CHOICE, I realize I gained a lot of experience and knowledge during my time as a youth advocate. Now I'm happy that I can use my experiences to work with other young people like myself and support them in advocating for MYP in their organizations and/or communities." Pragya strongly believes that her time as a youth advocate has fueled her passion to work with young people on SRHR and meaning-

ful youth participation and anchored meaningful youth participation as a value she holds dearly in her personal life. She is proud to be a changemaker on the issues that initially motivated her to join CHOICE. •

**"As a Program Officer for CHOICE, I realize I gained a lot of experience and knowledge during my time as a youth advocate. Now I'm happy that I can use my experiences to work with other young people like myself and support them in advocating for MYP in their organizations and/or communities."**

PRAGYA SINGH

## Stories of Change

# VICTOR RASUGU

Executive Director – NAYA

Victor's work as a changemaker dates back to the start of NAYA in 2001. At that time, NAYA only had one staff member. Now, it has grown into one of Kenya's leading SRHR organizations – with 15 staff members and over 65 volunteers in different districts across the country. CHOICE and NAYA's partnership dates back to 2012, and over the years Victor has seen NAYA and CHOICE's relationship bloom. Their collaborative efforts under GUSO and YID have strengthened the partnership, thanks to the joint efforts to push forward the cornerstone themes of both programs: "There are very conspicuous elements in GUSO and YID: the gender transformative approach, diversity and inclusion and meaningful youth participation. These three key principles stand out in both programs".

"There has always been open communication" Victor notes, reflecting on NAYA's collaboration with CHOICE. "When CHOICE received an opportunity to provide a training on meaningful youth participation in Ghana, they said that NAYA would be better suited to provide the training because we would be able to give the continental context. The same happened when CHOICE was invited to give a training in Ethiopia on youth-led advocacy, they passed it on to us". This provided NAYA with the opportunity to be able to transfer knowledge

**"There are very conspicuous elements in GUSO and YID: the gender transformative approach, diversity and inclusion and meaningful youth participation. These three key principles stand out in both programs".**

VICTOR RASUGU

**“It is a manifestation of growth in terms of capacity, but also a manifestation of trust in the partnership”**

VICTOR RASUGU

our youth advocates and develop a hierarchy matrix (highlighting the various roles and responsibilities within NAYA) that is responsible and accountable, consulted and informed. This placed us in a position where our youth advocates could identify what their roles were and where they could engage in internal processes and external opportunities, thereby making their participation more meaningful and transforming NAYA's organizational capacity. The transfer of knowledge and experiences from CHOICE to NAYA has also catalyzed the sharing of information and lessons learnt from NAYA and skills gained over the years through the capacity building trajectory from CHOICE.

Victor also highlights the central role that CHOICE has played in passing on knowledge and strengthening the internal capacity within NAYA on advocacy for SRHR, leadership skills and meaningful youth participation. Being able to learn from CHOICE's best practices in engaging youth advocates was a moment that Victor thinks back to fondly, “CHOICE provided us with a lot of materials and tools that helped us handle different processes, develop a clear collaboration with to other partners within both programs. According to Victor, this exchange has strengthened bonds between the different partners and the communities they work with, “It is a manifestation of growth in terms of capacity, but also a manifestation of trust in the partnership”. Looking back at both partnerships, Victor notes, “My greatest accomplishment is seeing young people from our organizations being able to take charge in GUSO and YID. After seeing them being assigned responsibilities and leading processes, even in settings facing many adults, I can say they've stood out and delivered”. •

**“from strengthening youth-led organizations to connecting young people all over the world - we’ve built a strong global youth movement on which everyone can rely on, now and in the future”**

LINDSAY VOGELZANG,  
Executive Director CHOICE

**Learn more about our organization at  
[www.choiceforyouth.org](http://www.choiceforyouth.org).**

If you have any questions,  
feel free to reach out!



**CHOICE** FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY

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