



Delivering Comprehensive Sexuality
Education for Out-of-school Young People

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES ON UNFPA'S GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CSE

Ghana

The Country Case studies series is developed by UNFPA based on outcomes of the Global Programme on Out-of-School Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

UNFPA has since 2019 led the programme “Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Out-of-school Young People: Reaching Those Most Left Behind”, with the aim of empowering adolescents and youth from specific groups left behind with the information and skills they need to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The programme is funded by the governments of Norway and Spain, and started its second phase in 2022. The programme implementation takes place in a total of 12 countries – Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Malawi, Moldova, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines and Tunisia.

Out-of-school CSE holds the promise of reaching those left behind. In each of the countries, locally adapted interventions consider the needs, life experiences and vulnerabilities of left-behind groups of young people. This includes young people who are vulnerable either because they cannot attend school, or because the sexuality education curriculum offered in school does not adequately address their unique needs, whether that be young key populations or a young person with a disability, a young person living with HIV, or a migrant or young person displaced by conflict or humanitarian crisis. The initiative reaches out to young people from left-behind populations using the specially developed UN *International Technical and Programmatic Guidance on Out-of-school Sexuality Education*. Youth engagement is an integral part of the programme, and young people are themselves meaningfully included and engaged in the design and implementation of the activities.

In this Country Case studies series we present the experiences and lessons learned from UNFPA's work at the country level implementing CSE to meet the needs of young people most left behind.



Ghana

WORKING WITH PARENTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV TO REDUCE STIGMA



TARGET GROUP:

Young people living with HIV and their parents, service providers, community members



IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

Hope for Future Generations (HFFG)



Ghana has a high rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, at 20 per cent. Many parents feel unable to disclose their own or their child’s HIV status to them until the child is older, and since children under 18 cannot access HIV tests themselves without the consent of a parent or legal guardian, the child is often devastated when the unexpected news is eventually revealed. For this reason, parents cannot be left out of the equation in the implementation of programmes on sexual and reproductive health – especially HIV and AIDS programmes. Parental care and support for children living with HIV is critical to successful health outcomes and to the reduction of stigma and discrimination.

Whether in personal, community, societal, cultural, religious or other settings, HIV stigma affects young people’s well-being, positive living, education, livelihoods and ability to meaningfully contribute to the development of their communities. Hence the out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education project implemented by HFFG with support from UNFPA emphasizes parental engagement as a tool to reduce stigma and sustain the gains made in improving the health and well-being of young people living with HIV.

The programme’s first point of engagement with parents is at antiretroviral therapy (ART) and antenatal care (ANC) centres. Staff solicit the interest and support of parents to enable their children living with HIV to participate in the out-of-school Reproductive Health Education (RHE) programme. Programme officers explain the programme activities to the parents, emphasizing the benefits their children stand to gain by participating. Next, orientation sessions are held for the parents to offer guidance and support on disclosing their child’s HIV status to them, and underscoring the importance of encouraging their child to start ART.

HFFG has mobilized teams of “Positive Mothers” as mentors who use their stories to educate and encourage other parents facing the challenge of having a young person living with HIV in their family. The Positive Mothers can speak openly to other parents living with HIV, using their own experience to build a sense of community and address the fear of stigma and other related issues. This helps ensure that young people living with HIV are supported and encouraged to fully participate in the RHE programme.



Successes

The programme's successes have only been possible because of the engagement and level of support of parents. By building trust between the parents and the programme, HFFG has broken the practice of uninformed parents keeping their HIV-positive children indoors all the time and not allowing them to be involved in any social activities. Through the intervention and engagement sessions, parents have developed the confidence to allow their children to have a social life and interact with others. This helps address self-stigma and enables the young people to develop their social skills. They also benefit from their support groups by meeting other young people living with HIV, sharing experiences, motivating one another and building positive living habits.

Another important success of the programme has been the strengthening of Youth Health Advocates Ghana (YHAG), a youth-led support group for children and young people living with HIV. YHAG is now registered as a Ghanaian NGO. It organizes outdoor activities for members, supports their adherence to ART, and boosts their confidence in dealing with stigma. Many of its members serve as peer facilitators in the out-of-school programme. With parental support and the education that they have received from the programme, many of the young people living with HIV have become youth education volunteers with the national Global Fund programme, playing various roles to support the programme, including at ART units.

Challenges

The programme faces several challenges. Some parents still battle with self-stigma and fears of stigmatization from society. This impacts their engagement and support for their children, and may also lead their children to mirror their actions and behaviours. On a practical level, scheduling conflicts can make it difficult for parents – and therefore for their children living with HIV – to attend RHE sessions and other programme activities. Resources are limited, and while some parents are happy to attend the sessions with

their children on a voluntary basis, others expect support for transport and other related costs. Finally, parents are sometimes challenged by the content of RHE sessions, especially the message that it is OK for young people living with HIV to fall in love and have healthy and safe sexual relationships. Some parents disagree, which can lead them to further constrain their children's socialization and intensify stigma.



Context

Ghana continues to work towards ensuring universal access to Reproductive Health Education (RHE) for young people in-and-out of school. However, in 2019 there was a national controversy fed by misinformation about the newly developed national guidelines for CSE. Following a national stakeholder consultation, the Ministry of Education revised the guidelines, but the updated document – currently referred to as Reproductive Health Education (RHE) guidelines – is yet to be finalized and operationalized. CSE (now referred to as RHE) continues to be taught in the school system, integrated into some subjects but without a standardized structure. Extracurricular activities in schools also continue to provide education on selected RHE topics. Despite the *challenges*, civil-society organizations continue to develop and deliver

RHE to young people outside the school setting, with support from UNFPA and other partners, in view of the country's high rates of teenage pregnancy and other poor SRHR outcomes.

Ghana's population is youthful, with almost three-quarters aged 35 or under. The growing population of people living with HIV makes it imperative to urgently introduce national guidelines, and to ensure delivery of a comprehensive curriculum that addresses issues of SRH including HIV within the broader education programme on sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. The National Population Council is currently working to ensure national support, commitment, and action towards this goal.





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