

Sexuality in Africa

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Between the "Blindfold" and Reality:

*Impact of Culture on
Sexuality Education of
Young People in
Madagascar's
Betsimisaraka Region*

Mireille Rabenoro

Incorporating Youth and Provider Perspectives in the Design of Youth-Friendly Services in Nigeria

Maria de Bruyn and Ejike Oji

Porno, Peers and Pleasure: Pertinent Sources of Sexuality Education for Adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa

Stella Nyanzi

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BOOK REVIEW

Improving Adolescent Reproductive Health Programmes in Africa: Lessons from Kenya

Review by Arit Oku-Egbas, Africa

Regional Sexuality Resource Centre

The 35-page publication, published by The Centre for the Study of Adolescence, Nairobi, Kenya in 2003 makes interesting and easy reading and is recommended for programme implementers and all those who are working to promote the access of adolescents to youth-friendly and effective sexual and reproductive health programmes. Though the publication largely explores the Kenyan experience it nevertheless provides useful insights and lessons for others working in the different regions of the continent. It clearly and succinctly highlights the main issues.

The publication documents the main lessons learned and experiences from the Kenya Family Health Programme (KFHP) that was implemented by the Government of Kenya in collaboration with NGOs between 1997 and 2002. The programme aimed to "increase utilisation and improve quality of family planning information and services" and was targeted at different age groups. One unique characteristic of the programme was the fact that it drew diverse stakeholders and is an example of the kind of synergy that can exist between government, donor agencies and non-governmental actors in development work.

The introduction draws attention to the almost dismal landscape associated with adolescent sexuality on the African continent within the context of a changing social world order, globalisation, wars, political instability, drastic cuts on education budgets, with the backdrop of increasing and desperate poverty as well as a dearth of information and essential services. The result is that adolescents encounter a tumultuous and dangerous world in which they must grow-up and survive. The HIV/AIDS epidemic seems the last straw within this very unfortunate landscape – adolescents, especially girls, bear the brunt of the disease, which has continued to spread unabated. In the midst of this is the near absence of political commitment on the part of the various African governments.

The situation certainly calls for a focus on adolescents considering their numbers and high level of vulnerability. "According to UNFPA, 50% of all new infections occur among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years" (p.8).

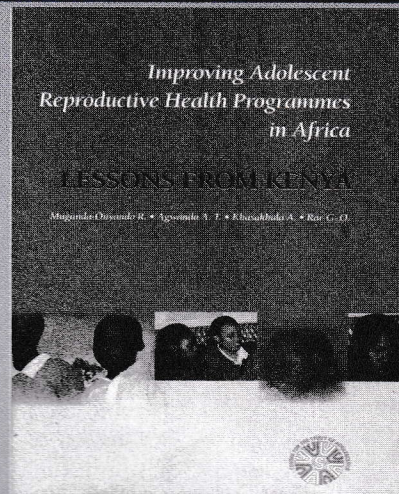
The authors plot the way forward noting that while there are a number programmes to promote the sexual health of adolescents, mostly small-scale, peer education programmes, many of them lack creativity and impact because they hardly take cognisance of the special needs of the target group as well as the communities and the socio-cultural contexts within which they exist.

While the authors appear quite critical of Africa's Adolescent and Reproductive Health (ARH) programmes, - "Africa is full of pilot ARH initiatives. Most rarely go beyond the pilot stage" – the truth remains that for as long as the programmes are donor driven, and many programme implementers are in the business because they have no other source of livelihood – the dream of scaling up programmes to reach increasing numbers and to have impact will remain just that - a dream. While it is pertinent to advocate for donors to be more responsive to the needs of target communities and to expand scope and length of their funding cycles, it is equally important that on the continent we begin to look inward for funding sources.

As pointed out at a recent seminar, if the NGOs do not start to behave like businesses they will soon run out of business. [1] The speaker further noted:

Why is ARH not prioritised by African Governments? Most of the resources for ARH are derived from external funds. Yet, the external funding landscape is not likely to get better. The African continent has an indigenous giving culture: there is a need to learn how churches are generating resources. A lot of organisations have sources of generating surplus. How are they doing this? There is a need to look at endowments and subsidies from both public and private sectors.

Adolescent Reproductive Health in Kenya, as pointed out by the authors is



Authors: Muganda-Onyando R., Agwanda A.T., Khasakhala A., Rae G.O

reflective of the general situation on the continent but they identify a window of opportunity - "currently, 56% of Kenyan adolescents are not yet sexually active" (p.11) noting that this group can be targeted in programmes to delay sexual debut.

In the KFHP which is the focus of the publication, The Kenyan Government collaborated with the European Union (EU) and the Department for International Development (DFID) and fourteen NGOs (including church-based groups) and provided a variety of services including clinic based services.

Some of the key lessons and best practices that evolved from the KFHP programme are highlighted and can serve as a reference for others in the field.

The publication is certainly very informative especially because it is practical and makes reference to actual realities encountered in the field during implementation of a project. It also contributes to the much needed literature on sexual and reproductive health with a specific focus on Africa.

(Footnote)

1. During the ARSRC's Sexuality Institute (October 3-9, 2004) Dr. Babatunde Ahonsi of the Ford Foundation's Office for West Africa chaired a panel titled: Resource Mobilisation for Promoting Access of Adolescents to Sexuality Education and made the cited observations.