



SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG WOMEN'S HEALTH IN SENEGAL



LEARNING BRIEF

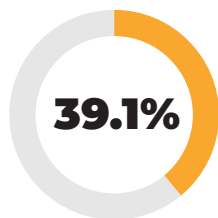
Introduction

This learning brief consolidates insights from the research conducted under the Power to You(th) (PtY) programme, aimed at strengthening social accountability mechanisms related to adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Senegal. The brief emphasizes practices, challenges, and opportunities identified across the PTY project's intervention regions: Dakar, Thiès, Diourbel, Fatick, and Matam.

Context of the Studies

In Senegal, youth under 15 years old constitute 39.1% of the population, presenting significant needs in SRHR. Despite international commitments and local initiatives, cultural and religious norms present obstacles, limiting youth participation in SRHR decision-making.

The PtY programme, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by Amref Health Africa, Rutgers, Sonke Gender Justice, alongside national partners, aims to reduce harmful practices such as FGM, early marriage, and sexual violence, while promoting meaningful youth participation.



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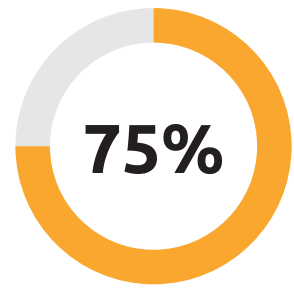


These are the challenges the Power to You(th) programme set out to address:

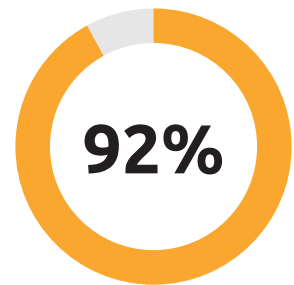
- **Cultural Resistance:** Traditional values and taboos clash with SRHR policies, hindering acceptance and open discussion.
- **Stigma and Shame:** Fear of judgment prevents youth, especially girls, from accessing vital SRHR services.
- **Limited Participation:** Cultural norms restrict young people's, particularly women's, involvement in SRHR decision-making.
- **Socio-political norms:** SRHR policies aren't aligned with local cultural and religious realities, causing resistance.
- **Negative Perceptions:** Societal and authority figures' negative views deter youth engagement in SRHR initiatives.

Key Insights

- Awareness of harmful practices among youth is high (75% awareness; 92% support whistleblowing), indicating strong potential for youth-led advocacy.
- Effective social accountability improves transparency and community involvement (e.g., direct dialogues facilitated through CI LAA BOKK platforms between youth and authorities).
- Local platforms (e.g., CI LAA BOKK) significantly enhance dialogue and accountability (e.g., youth directly question local leaders on policy commitments).
- Citizens' and public hearings facilitate direct accountability (e.g. public forums where authorities respond to community concerns about health budget allocations).
- Adolescents and Young Women (AJF) face significant barriers in utilizing available accountability mechanisms due to societal norms restricting female participation.



Youth awareness on harmful SRHR practices.



Youth support whistleblowing activities.

What Worked Well

- Platforms such as CI LAA BOKK effectively engaged youth in meaningful dialogue, improving understanding between communities and local authorities.
- Public and citizen hearings increased transparency, such as sessions where authorities explained healthcare resource allocation directly to the community.
- Budget orientation sessions and community fairs fostered active youth involvement (e.g., young people participated actively in debates on community resource management).
- Collaboration with deeply rooted local associations (e.g., local CSOs collaborating with religious leaders to address sensitive SRHR topics) increased community buy-in.
- Consistent capacity-building activities significantly empowered youth advocacy, enabling young people to organize and participate effectively in advocacy campaigns.



Opportunities

- Enhance participation by addressing cultural sensitivities and language barriers through tailored training sessions and culturally appropriate communication strategies.
- Expand effective accountability mechanisms by leveraging existing local structures such as Teen Advice Centers (CCAs) and local child protection committees (CDPEs).
- Strengthen youth leadership roles, particularly among AJFs, by providing targeted empowerment and advocacy training.
- Institutionalize and regularly conduct public accountability sessions to maintain community engagement and transparency (e.g., semi-annual CI LAA BOKK forums).
- Encourage youth-led advocacy and policy change initiatives supported by evidence-based research from PTY interventions.

Recommendations

- Institutionalize youth inclusion in decision-making bodies to improve accountability (e.g. formal youth representation on municipal councils).
- Establish robust, sustainable social accountability mechanisms at local authority levels, including regular budget orientation sessions and citizen hearings.
- Ensure continuity and frequency of regional social accountability platforms by holding quarterly meetings.
- Strengthen existing platforms through capacity-building for CSOs and local authorities to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability.
- Prioritize monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of social accountability practices, ensuring best practices are replicated across regions.
- Improve financial support to youth organizations for sustainability of initiatives (e.g. securing consistent funding for regular advocacy training).



Inclusion in decision-making bodies



Ensuring best practices are replicated across regions



Improve financial support to youth organizations

Conclusion

Strengthening social accountability mechanisms in SRHR policies is essential for empowering Senegalese youth and improving health outcomes. The PtY programme's approach demonstrates significant potential, especially when it combines advocacy, capacity-building, and direct community engagement. Ongoing efforts should focus on scaling effective practices, addressing structural and cultural barriers, and ensuring sustainable participation of young people, especially adolescent girls and young women, in SRHR governance.