



Share-Net  
International

The Knowledge Platform on  
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights



# SHARE-NET INTERNATIONAL

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POSITION PAPER ON MEANINGFUL  
YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH  
EMPOWERMENT



## What is Share-Net International?

Share-Net International (SNI) is the knowledge platform on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). SNI is a membership network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), researchers, policymakers, implementers, young people, advocates, students, the media and companies operating in the SRHR field. We currently have seven Share-Net hubs in the following countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan, and the Netherlands. At SNI, we focus on strengthening the role that knowledge can play in developing evidence-based policies and practices and ensuring that resources are used strategically and to maximum effect.



Due to locally different political environments, some of the hubs have contextualized their own vision and mission,<sup>1</sup> while all adhere in principle to our common vision and mission.

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**1. Vision of Share-Net Jordan:** People have the right to receive and easy access to high-quality health services and be able to make informed decisions on Sexual and Reproductive Health.

**Mission of Share-Net Jordan:** To strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice through sharing, generating, translating and promoting the use of knowledge for the development of better policies and practices in SRH&RR.

**Vision of Share-Net Bangladesh:** Universal access to and utilisation of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

**Mission of Share-Net Bangladesh:** Evidence-informed policies and practices enable everyone to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the freedom to decide how many children they want, when and with whom, and access to good-quality care to ensure their sexual and reproductive wellbeing.

## What is Meaningful Youth Participation?

As right holders, young people can participate on equal terms with adults, or work independently, in organisations as well as in all stages of research, programming, planning and policymaking. In order to make this possible, Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) is a mechanism that allows young people to gain the skills and be empowered to have an active role. MYP also allows young people to have their voices heard and respected. At the same time, MYP can be used as a mechanism for organisations to empower and include young people in research, programmes, policymaking, organisations and society. At SNI, we define young people as people under the age of 30.

## How does Share-Net work on Meaningful Youth Participation?

At SNI, our work is founded on our core values: being evidence-based and participatory, ensuring diversity and building on human rights. Through our core values and objectives, it is clear that MYP should be a priority. It is proven that research and interventions are more effective when they consult and involve the group they seek to target (evidence-based) and because participation is a fundamental human right for young people (participatory, diversity, based on human rights).

Over the past two years, we have analysed how we work on youth empowerment. In 2020, we hired an intern to conduct an analysis of youth empowerment and MYP in Share-Net and develop a mapping of youth organisations worldwide working on SRHR. Based on their findings, a video was created to highlight the importance of MYP in SNI. In addition, throughout 2021, our staff have participated in capacity training on MYP. We developed action plans and started implementing them in the different national contexts. Both activities have informed this position paper. At SNI and in our hubs, we work on Youth Empowerment and MYP in different ways.

We believe that it is crucial that young people do not only participate in our activities but are working on an equal foot with adults. We acknowledge that we can learn a lot from each other. Therefore, when looking for partners to host our new hubs in 2020, we committed to contract at least one youth-led organisation. We are therefore happy to partner with SOS Jeunesse et Défis, a youth-led organisation as the host organisation of our hub in Burkina Faso. They believe that young people can take on the same roles and responsibilities as adults and have therefore promoted a young woman to project coordinator.

Similarly, Share-Net Burundi is hosted by Jimbere magazine which is a collective of young journalists that work towards educating and training young people and especially women in Burundi. All the staff of the secretariat are under 30 years old.

Finally, we stimulate all secretariats to include young people as part of their team and to share responsibilities. This leads to a diversity of skills and ideas which benefits SNI. Most of the secretariats have young people in their team.

## BY ESTABLISHING YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARTNER AND HOST ORGANISATIONS







## BY INVOLVING YOUTH ON A STRATEGIC AND ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

Involving young people in our work can bring new perspectives and a more creative, passionate and flexible way of working and designing programmes. Since the revision of our governance structure, we dedicated (at least) one seat on the SNI Board to a youth representative. The majority of the hubs have reserved one seat in their steering committee for a young person, and we encourage the others to do the same. In Share-Net Ethiopia and Share-Net Netherlands, a youth advisory council or Community of Practice has been set up to advise Share-Net on youth issues and represent youth in the national steering committee.

Similarly, we commit to involving young people in other organisational and decision making bodies for specific SNI activities such as the Co-Creation Conference Coordinating Committee and the Activation Grants Selection Committees. In addition, young people will be encouraged and specifically asked to be part of the (international) Communities of Practice as members, chairs and founders. Finally, we commit to include at least one young person to participate in the reference group of the mid-term review of SNI and the development and implementation of the next SNI Strategic Plan which will be developed in 2022.

We believe that only involving young people in these structures is not enough. We, therefore, commit to working together with young people to identify responsibilities they want to take in these structures. We also commit to providing the same decision-making power to young people as adults.



## BY CONNECTING WITH YOUTH WORLDWIDE

As an international network on SRHR, we connect and link organisations and experts worldwide. Together we work to improve policy and practice on SRHR. Young people are important actors in our network and their expertise helps in achieving this goal. At SNI, we therefore actively approach young people to become members of SNI and be involved in our board and activities. Annually, we commit to actively approach and invite 25 youth organisations worldwide and organise 1 international social media campaign targeted at young people to become a member of SNI or one of the hubs.

Additionally, we showcase the work of young researchers through our annual activities like the Linking Research, Policy and Practice Conference and the SRHR Knowledge Fair. During these activities, young people present and discuss their work and connect to organisations, research institutes, practitioners and policymakers.



At SNI, we organise yearly activities to improve the skills and knowledge of young people. During the preparations of the above-mentioned activities (Linking Research, Policy and Practice Conference and SRHR Knowledge Fair), specific capacity-building sessions for young people are organised in line with participants' expressed learning needs. Past examples include workshops on how to write a good research abstract, public speaking, how to formulate good recommendations for policy and practice, how to prepare a good poster, etc.

Next to specific workshops, we offer paid internships, consultancy and full-time positions to young people at our Share-Net secretariats or in collaboration with CoPs. In these positions, we commit to offering mentors and capacity-building opportunities. We also financially support the efforts of youth-led organisations through grants. When students are seeking for technical advice or support in relation to their (Master) thesis research, we connect them with members working on the respective topics. Some CoPs, for instance the LGBTI health CoP at SN-NL, proactively approach universities and pitch knowledge gaps for potential future research to young people.

In the coming years, we commit to creating more spaces for young people to empower them and let their voices be heard. These include spaces on our digital platform, positions at secretariats, capacity-building workshops and seats in coordinating and steering committees. Additionally, we want to offer financial support for young people to participate in our activities. This financial support includes travel compensation, training opportunities and time compensation. Similarly, we commit to scheduling events specifically targeting young people at times that fit them best (for example outside office/school hours).

## BY CAPACITATING AND EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE



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