

Response to Evaluation Report (overarching narrative)

This evaluation represents the final evaluation of the 5-year Sierra Leone Youth Reproductive Health (YRH) Programme, implemented by Restless Development Sierra Leone, with UK support. The SRH Programme was a nationwide scale-up of a successful pilot project carried out between 2005 to 2007, from 6 to all 13 districts of Sierra Leone.

The expected impact of the YRH Programme was to *ensure young people have access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services promoting positive sexual health seeking behaviours with regards to safer sex practices and increase participation and leadership of youth in development.*

The final evaluation of the project, commissioned by Restless Development with DFID funds, was conducted in July 2012 to assess the impact and lessons learned from the five year project and enable DFID and Restless Development account to the MOHS and beneficiary communities regarding project achievements.

Summary of the Evaluation Results

We note the evaluation conclusion that the YRH project made a significant contribution in participating communities to achieving the project goal of stabilising the level of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and by inference HIV/AIDS prevalence among young people. This is evidenced by the decrease in STI cases in operational communities and surrounding communities by 51.2% and 13.2%.

At the outcome level, the evaluation details improved sexual and reproductive behaviour in participating schools and communities. Moderate success was recorded in increasing young people's access to SRH services, promoting positive sexual health seeking behaviours and increasing participation and leadership of youth in development. Significantly higher levels of positive youth behaviour in the three core outcome indicators (abstinence, being faithful and condom use at last sex) were reported in target communities compared to control communities and exceptionally high rates of access to SRH services in local facilities, with 91% of young people accessing services, compared to a target of 55% and a baseline of 35%. In addition, progress was made in engagement of young people in local and national government planning, implementation and monitoring of services.

We concur that the community based peer to peer volunteer strategy is unique and innovative in the Sierra Leone context and was especially successful in achieving the project objectives of empowering youths for greater civil engagement and ability to negotiate and practice safer safe practices. These finding are supported by DFID's annual reviews of the project. The project demonstrated some flexibility in adapting delivery strategies to address challenges as they arose, most notably a revision of the community engagement framework to encourage greater community ownership of programmes. However addressing HIV/AIDS misconceptions, the inclusion of sexual reproductive health in school curriculums, the sustainability of community based interventions and support to ministries to ensure youth oriented policies are among areas that require continued attention.

Although specific value for money indicators were not incorporated in the project design, we note the evaluation attempted to assess this and to the extent where this could be assessed, the programme represented value for money, particularly with regards to efficiency and effectiveness. Restless Development was moderately successful in achieving the project's intended outcome as previously outlined within the allocated budget. Programme efficiency was achieved with respect to utilization of project funds with 72% of project expenditures directly related to project activities.

Evaluation Methodology

The methodology adopted for the final evaluation was a quasi-experimental study design with some qualitative and desk based research. There were some differences in survey instruments employed for the baseline and the final evaluation survey that would have affected the direct comparison of the results from the surveys. However attempts were made in the final evaluation survey design to adjust for these. Overall, subject to the qualifications to the final evaluation results described above, we agree that the outcome data demonstrate significant improvement in intervention communities when compared to control communities where there had been no project intervention.

Conclusion

Overall, the YRH project was a success, represented good value for money and demonstrated fully its relevance in addressing adolescent reproductive health issues in Sierra Leone. This conclusion is supported by annual reviews of the YRH programme. Restless Development continues to implement an YRH programme, as a sub-contractor to UNFPA, under the DFID 'Improving reproductive, maternal and newborn health' (IRMNH) programme that commenced in March 2013. The IRMNH programme supports the development and use of a nationwide, comprehensive package of reproductive, maternal and newborn health care services across Sierra Leone. It focuses on young women and newborns that are particularly at risk and currently underserved in terms of geographical coverage and appropriate quality care. Recommendations arising from the YRH project have informed the design of components of the IRMNH programme.

Evaluation Report Title: External Evaluation Report of Sierra Leone's Youth Reproductive Health Programme (2007 – 2012)

Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If “Accepted”, Action plan for Implementation or if “Rejected”, Reason for Rejection
<p><i>Youth Empowerment programme</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project to work on all components associated with reducing HIV incidence among young people including abstinence, reducing sexual partners, consistent condom use and knowing one's HIV status. • Messaging should continue to target better information around HIV transmission as the study demonstrates that misconceptions regarding the transmission of HIV. • Restless Development's sustainability strategy should be reviewed and revised to ensure the continuation of interventions after such programmes exits communities. • Restless Development should continue to advocate for the inclusion of SRH and FP activities in the school curriculum. 	Accepted	<p>Restless Development is a subcontractor to UNFPA under DFID's 'Improving reproductive, maternal and newborn health programme. Under the increased awareness of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and malaria services component of the programme, Restless Development is implementing a Youth Empowerment component.</p> <p>The YRH project evaluation and project completion reports will be shared with UNFPA. An action plan to address the key recommendations will be developed by Restless Development and UNFPA. The action plan will be reviewed at the 2014 annual review of the IRMNH programme.</p>
<p><i>Strengthen the paradigm shift from family planning to integrated reproductive health services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to implement more effectively the paradigm shift from family planning to integrated reproductive health with young people as the primary client group, Restless Development should institute mechanisms for young people's full participation in policy and decision-making in line with the constitution, and ensure that these mechanisms are operational at all levels of decision-making structure. 	Accepted	<p>The IRMNH programme provides the opportunity to support the paradigm shift to integrated reproductive health centred on young people. In addition to implementing a youth empowerment component, the IRMNH programme plans to incorporate youths, through the Restless Development component in teenage pregnancy policy formulation at the national level, curriculum development for health facility delivery of reproductive health services that centre on youths at the district level and in increasing access to youth friendly reproductive health services in communities.</p>

Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If “Accepted”, Action plan for Implementation or if “Rejected”, Reason for Rejection
<p><i>Strengthen the paradigm shift from family planning to integrated reproductive health services (cont.)</i></p> <p>Strengthen the internal capacity of Restless Development staff to implement the paradigm shift and to provide youth-friendly services. In particular, focus on training of existing service providers on youth-friendly services in community clinics. Strengthen the YRH project through appointing a Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) Advocacy Manager, and provide central coordination for BCC and advocacy activities carried out at project level.</p>	Accepted	The IRMNH programme through UNFPA and UNICEF supports the provision of youth-friendly services. DFID will request assurances from UNFPA that Restless Development has internal capacity to support the paradigm sheet in the aforementioned action plan.
<p><i>Strengthen Relationship with local leaders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restless Development should strengthen the coordination, cooperation and relationship with local authority leaders at the district level, and enter into regular feedback meetings with the relevant staff. This will create a strong working relationship as they will understand the project and build a basis for sustainability. 	Accepted	UNFPA as the contractor for Restless Development’s youth empowerment component will facilitate and monitor the youth empowerment component’s engagement with local authority leaders. Progress will be monitored through the annual IRMNH programme review process.
<p><i>Service Utilization by Young People</i></p> <p>Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation systems to allow for analysis of trends in service utilization by young people and to enable Restless Development to assess programme effectiveness in bringing about sustained behaviour change among young people.</p>	Accepted	Through the IRMNH programme, trends in SRH service utilization by young people will be monitored, coordinated by the Programme Management Evaluation and Learning service provider. Restless development will participate in the monitoring process

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<p><i>Expansion of Restless Development Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion of Restless Development activities to other communities of interest. Increase dialogue with partners and donors on the design and implementation of project, like partner assessment meeting, donor conditions meeting to avoid duplication of donor efforts. 	Not applicable	Recommendations addressed to Restless Development. The Restless Development component of the IRMNH program drew extensively on the YRH programme, is nationwide in scope and was designed in conjunction with Restless development and UNFPA.
<p><i>Mainstreaming SRH into school curriculum</i></p> <p>Restless Development should strengthen their advocacy drive with Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) towards mainstreaming SRH into the school curriculum.</p>	Accepted	DFID MDG team health and education advisers will address mainstreaming SRH into school curriculum as a cross cutting intervention. The Health and Education advisers will identify opportunities through their programmes to influence the inclusion of SRH into school curriculum particularly for primary schools. The Ministry of Education and Science have plans to revise the primary school curriculum, providing an opportunity for inclusion of SRH.
<p><i>Youth Leadership and Advocacy Programme</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the length of time for the internship programmes and provide job facilities after the end of the internship. Better equip youth information centres with computers, furniture, internet facilities and reference materials. Award certificates for the computer trainings delivered at the YIC to the Student Action Group (SAG). Increase the number of time for the radio talk to at least twice a month. Expand Youth Information Centres to other institutions and campuses and Youth Action Clubs in schools 	Not Applicable	Recommendations made with regards the Youth Leadership and advocacy programme are appropriate but outside the scope of DFID’s current health programming. Restless Development continues to implement this component of the YRH project with other donor support. They have incorporated the recommendations concerning the Youth Leadership and Advocacy component in various donor proposals and will use the evaluation report to advocate for additional funds for this component of the programme.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to engage MEST and Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare to 	Not Applicable	The recommendation is valid however this activity is outside the purview of DFID’s current health programme.

strengthen their Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting systems.		
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