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GUIDELINES

Peer education:  
successfully promoting  
youth sexual and  
reproductive health

# Peer Education Manual

## Introduction

The aim of this Manual is to provide basic guidelines for the implementation of peer education projects for young people in the area of sexual and reproductive health (SRH). It is derived from a study conducted by Anne Calvès on behalf of the IPPF Vision 2000 Funds to document the experience of peer education (PE) projects in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Indonesia and Senegal. The full research document is available from IPPF on request.

The Manual provides guidelines on planning, recruitment and training, peer educator activities, educational materials, project management, community and youth involvement and monitoring and evaluation, based on successful project experiences. We hope it will help youth programme managers in Family Planning Associations and other organisations who want to plan and carry out peer education projects for youth, such as social workers, health educators, and youth organisations.

### Topics covered:

- Using the peer education approach
- Recruiting good peer educators
- Quality through training
- The work of the peer educator
- Educational materials and tools
- Supporting peer educators; management, community and rewards
- Youth participation in peer education programmes
- Monitoring and evaluation.

## Using the peer education approach

Peer education programmes seek to harness the knowledge that the greatest source of information about sexuality for young people is often their peers. By training ‘peer educators’, youth programmes can provide an accessible and accurate source of SRH information, with links to services, in the heart of the community.

- ❖ The peer education approach can be used to target sub-groups of youth including in-school, out-of-school, urban, rural, marginalised groups, and youth at risk, such as street children, drug abusers, commercial sex workers and transvestites. The specific needs of young people should always be identified, preferably through baseline surveys and needs assessment studies in the project sites, in order to define the target group of the project.
- ❖ There is no one model of peer education programmes. Methods of peer education range from centre-based one-to-one counselling to workshops provided in schools or for youth groups. Peer educators may be trained to work with clients from the same social background or with other groups. The strategy chosen must respond to the specific needs of the target group and the objectives of the project.
- ❖ Peer education works well as a strongly integrated component of broader youth projects including other IEC activities, providing services to young people and advocacy on youth issues. The use of a holistic ‘youth for youth’ approach to deliver information and services has proved a successful part of the overall project philosophy.

## Recruiting good peer educators

A successful peer educator will be well trained. Potential candidates must also display specific skills and be acceptable to the community in which they will work.

- ❖ The selection of peer educators should not be the responsibility of programme managers alone. The recruitment process should involve teachers, community leaders, religious leaders and other youth organisations in identifying and recommending potential applicants. This approach has achieved a high degree of success in ensuring that peer educators are accepted and respected within their own communities and schools.
- ❖ Clear selection criteria should be established prior to recruitment, with the opinions of older peer educators and target groups on “what makes a successful peer educator” taken into account. This makes criteria more realistic and encourages young clients to have confidence in the individuals selected.
- ❖ Peer educators should show commitment to the philosophy of the programme, its objectives, goals and organisational systems. They must be willing and available to work as volunteers.
- ❖ Key personality attributes include: the ability to communicate on sensitive issues, be trustworthy, be discreet and tolerant, be dynamic and assertive, act as a model for youth, and able to facilitate a group discussion.
- ❖ The necessary socio-demographic characteristics will depend on the target group. The age limit for peer educators is often set at around 25 years but in some cases age is a less important criterion than the skills and attributes listed above.

## Quality through training

Ongoing training is central to maintaining quality in peer education projects by developing the skills of young people and equipping them with the necessary knowledge, understanding and motivation.

- ❖ Strong initial training, lasting at least 10 days, and focusing both on theoretical and practical issues, is an important element of a successful peer education training programme.
- ❖ Planning frequent additional training and refresher courses, for example 2-3 day seminars, is also crucial to update the knowledge and further develop the skills of peer educators.
- ❖ A comprehensive training curriculum should cover all aspects of sexuality including not only a large range of SRH issues (HIV/AIDS, contraception, pregnancy etc) but also the social and psychological aspects of sexual relationships such as peer pressure, gender issues and sexual abuse.
- ❖ The skills development component will include communication and counselling skills, project management, and organisational values training (familiarisation with project philosophy, the organisation's strategies and programmes, etc.).
- ❖ By combining knowledge and skills training, courses can address the more complicated issues that peer educators face such as the gender roles of men and women within relationships. Discussing the way these often disempower women and encouraging peer educators to think about models of 'alternative' male-female relationships they may have observed will increase their understanding of the social context of sexual behaviour.
- ❖ Attention should also be paid to the format of training and refresher courses. A friendly atmosphere during training and a participatory approach (e.g. utilising role plays, sketches, etc.) are greatly appreciated by peer educators and facilitate the understanding of complex issues.

- ❖ Involving medical personnel, other specialists and experienced peer educators in the training of future peer educators adds to the quality of the training.
- ❖ Practical training through field experience can be integrated into peer educators' initial training or carried out through a system of "peer educator trainees" who work for a short period in the field before or shortly after formal training. This allows the new, and often young, peer educators to improve their communication and educational skills before being fully engaged in community work.
- ❖ A formal evaluation of the training should be carefully planned to assess changes in the knowledge of participants (e.g. through pre and post-test questionnaires) and to gather their feedback (e.g. through qualitative methods). The data collected can be analysed to determine training needs and improve future training practices.



*Peer educators, South Africa. Credit: IPPF/Simon Rowe*

## The work of the peer educator

The nature and content of peer education may vary considerably and must be tailored to the target group.

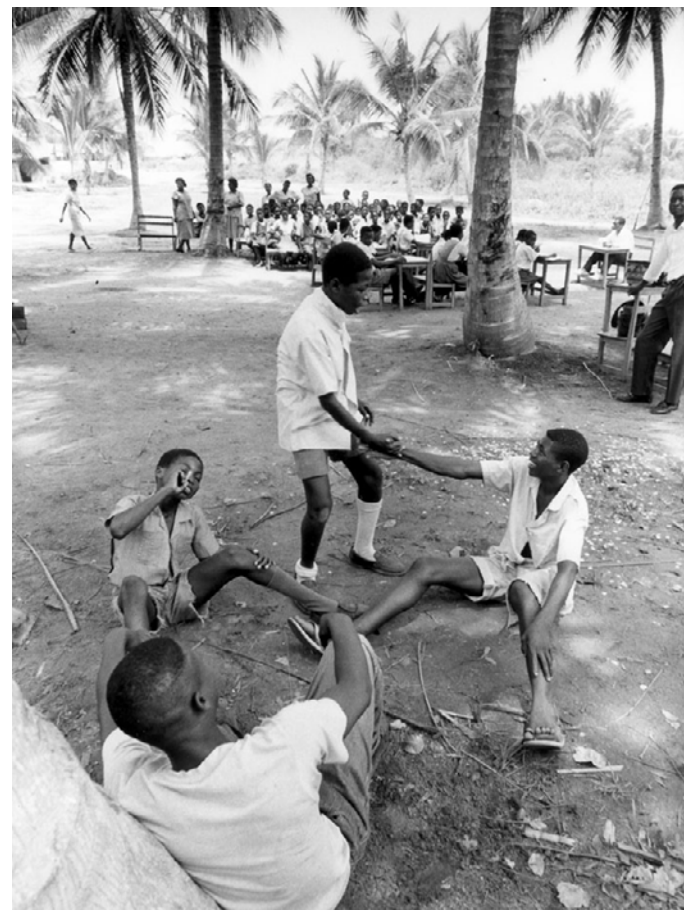
❖ Peer educators can successfully carry out a wide variety of different activities which can be grouped into four different approaches.

1. *Peer information and communication*: providing information, often to large groups, through discussions, video, drama, sports and games etc.
2. *Peer education*: reaching smaller groups of individuals with educational and training activities.
3. *Peer counselling*: carrying out one-on-one or small group counselling including support and help for problem solving.
4. *Community-based distribution* of condoms and other contraceptives as well as providing referrals to services.

❖ Peer education activities can be utilised in a wide variety of settings, often proactively taking SRH information and services to the target group. This includes schools, individual homes, soccer fields, places of work for young apprentices (e.g. workshops, garages and tailors), under trees and other places where young people 'hang out', brothels and 'cruising areas' (to reach 'at-risk' youth such as commercial sex workers).

❖ Young people are not a homogeneous group. Their information needs vary, especially between age groups and as they become sexually active. One way to address this is to offer clients different information, focusing on abstinence with younger groups and safer sex practices with older ones. However, this strategy can be problematic as age does not accurately predict sexual activity, sometimes resulting in the sending of mixed messages or information which is largely irrelevant to some clients in the target group.

❖ Differences in emphasis can be used for different groups of young people but it is important that basic information about contraception and access to contraception should be available to all ages.



*Role play, Ghana. Credit: IPPF/Caroline Penn*

## Educational materials and tools

High quality peer education requires the availability of accessible educational materials.

- ❖ Some material should be developed in the local language in order to reach young people from a variety of backgrounds.
- ❖ Access to a good range of educational and demonstration materials improves peer educators' activities and maintains their motivation. An individual kit for each peer educator should be available. This could include for example, flip charts, demonstration models (pelvis, penis, etc), a sample of contraceptive methods, reference materials, and handouts, etc.
- ❖ An on-going supply of fresh materials, relating both to sexual health and to other topics of interest to young people, will ensure that beneficiaries do not get bored by repetitive peer education content and techniques.
- ❖ Providing standard answers to frequently asked questions is a useful resource for peer educators and also results in greater consistency of the information provided.
- ❖ Peer educators should be given on-going technical and practical support on educational techniques. This is necessary to encourage them not to 'give up' on participatory approaches, which are more difficult to implement than didactic ones.
- ❖ Evaluation of the educational material and tools should be carried out systematically. It is important to design educational tools which are the most accepted and liked by young people.

## Supporting peer educators

Peer education is a challenging, time consuming and largely voluntary position and a high turnover of peer educators is often identified as a constraint for PE projects. Young people are a particularly mobile group but ongoing support from programme managers and communities as well as regular rewards can make peer educators feel valued and help to maintain their motivation.

### *Management of programmes:*

- ❖ A monthly or weekly activity plan, as well as clearly identified targets to be reached, are key elements to ensure that peer educators know what is expected from them. The objectives of peer educators' activities should also be in line with the short and long term project objectives. A high level of awareness of planned activities and achievements can also contribute to the assessment of programme performance and impact.
- ❖ Adopting a democratic, egalitarian, open management style and creating a youth-friendly environment improves communication between peer educators and programme managers, thereby increasing peer educators' motivation and retention rates and significantly contributing to effective monitoring systems.
- ❖ Young staff at the managerial level is an important factor in creating a youth-friendly environment and management style.
- ❖ Using 2-3 day retreats in addition to regular project meetings can provide a useful opportunity for peer educators and managers to discuss monitoring and evaluation findings, potential problems and future work-plans.

### *Community support*

- ❖ For peer educators to work effectively, it is vital to have support from the community in which they work. IEC campaigns and promotional activities for community members, including parents, have proved

successful in dispelling concerns and misconceptions about SRH-related activities. Targeting sensitisation activities towards groups, such as religious leaders, who express specific opposition to the project can also secure a higher level of project acceptability and sustainability.

- ❖ Involving community leaders and teachers, for example through a steering committee, in various aspects of community and school peer educators' work has proved to be an effective element of success in creating awareness and building community ownership of the project.

#### ***Motivations and rewards:***

- ❖ A reasonable travel allowance, and other compensatory rewards are appreciated by peer educators as an important recognition of their work. These rewards can be financial or non-financial including: a fixed payment per activity, a percentage on condoms sales and "presents" such as bicycles, bags, oil lamps and promotional t-shirts.
- ❖ Reward and motivation systems should first be discussed with peer educators to ensure that they encourage good practice. For example, rewards relating only to the quantities of information or contraceptives distributed may undermine the incentive to provide a high quality service.
- ❖ A desire to improve skills and career options is often cited as a reason for becoming a peer educator. Managers can harness this motivation and increase peer educators commitment by providing opportunities to gain progressively responsible experience in education, communication, organisation and managerial skills. Vocational or computer training, involving peer educators in exchange visits and implementing income-generating activities are all further suggestions made by PEs for attractive rewards.

## **Youth participation in peer education programmes**

Peer education is often given as an example of youth participation in sexual and reproductive health programmes but genuine participation implies that young people will be involved in all aspects of project planning, including at the decision making level.

- ❖ Involving peer educators at various stages of the project design, planning, implementation and evaluation, and creating a "feeling of project ownership" among peer educators have proved to be successful strategies for peer education programmes.
- ❖ Involving peer educators in the development of action plans for peer education activities is key for successful programme implementation. The high mobility of the target group and the level of demand for a peer educator's time make it important for them to develop their own weekly or monthly activity plan. This also increases their sense of responsibility and autonomy as well as their management skills.
- ❖ Peer educators' involvement in the decision making process should go beyond the daily implementation of project activities. Their opinions and suggestions should be taken into account systematically (using frequent focus discussion groups, meetings, retreat or qualitative surveys).
- ❖ Peer educators should be involved in the development of educational material. It has been noted that the experience gained by peer educators in the course of the programme implementation enhanced their capacity in terms of IEC material development and identifying appropriate messages and tools.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of peer educators' activities must be carefully planned, using quantitative and qualitative techniques to identify project strengths and weaknesses.

- ❖ Monitoring of peer educator activities can be carried out by project staff, older peer educators and also by community members such as those represented on the project steering committee and teachers.
- ❖ Monitoring procedures can include field supervision visits, activity reports, and regular meetings. Using focus group discussions and qualitative surveys with both beneficiaries and peer educators will provide greater insight into specific areas for project improvement.
- ❖ Project evaluations must include process and impact indicators. Evaluation tools should be well formulated and address specific peer education outputs and outcomes. For example, process data collected may include the number of young people reached through workshops and the number of condoms distributed. Impact may be measured through pre and post-test surveys at workshops and behavioural surveys.
- ❖ Data collected for monitoring and evaluation purposes has little value unless it is compiled, analysed and disseminated systematically. Where this is done effectively, monitoring will make a vital contribution to programme planning and management. Referring to baseline data will also help to track the evolution of programme impact and constraints.

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Peer education is a way of promoting sexual and reproductive health to young people by young people. It is now used by many organisations around the world.

This publication provides practical guidelines for designing and implementing peer education programmes. It is based on a recent study of IPPF's Vision 2000 projects in Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ghana and Indonesia. The full research document is available from IPPF on request.

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