

## Advocacy

### Objective:

- Understand what advocacy means
- Build awareness of different opportunities for sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) advocacy in their lives

### Behaviour:

- Share SRHR knowledge with peers
- Speak to family about what they have learnt and how they feel about SRHR in Madagascar
- Advocate for [empowerment of women and girls, access to sexual and reproductive health services including contraception and STI testing services, freedom of choice in marriage: timing and partner, punishment of sexual abusers]

### Information:

#### **Defining Advocacy**

Advocacy can be defined as identifying a problem within a family, community or region and calling for change. This could include the alteration of laws, policies or practices which would positively impact someone or community life. The aim is to find the root cause of the problem and encourage sustainable behaviour change in the long-term.

#### **Who can advocate:**

Anyone! Advocates need to be passionate, dedicated and persistent with good communication skills and the ability to collaborate with others to ensure change happens. Young people are the best advocates for issues affecting them because they understand their own needs and the problems they face every day. There are simple steps to making a positive change and this usually happens in three phases; **head, heart, hands**.

- **Head** (knowledge): advocates need to provide the correct information and facts to friends, family and the community. This will inform individuals and communities about what needs to change and why it is so important.
- **Heart** (attitude): even if friends and the community have all the information they still need to see how passionate an advocate is about this positive change and how it will benefit everyone.
- **Hands** (implementation): it is important to support the change by helping friends advocate for themselves or working with other communities to change legislation or laws surrounding SRHR. This will ensure change happens effectively and quickly.

#### **Formal Advocacy:**

Formal advocacy involves meetings with community members and elders, writing letters to the head of the region or ministry, or public speaking during ceremonies which gather authorities to create a solution to SRHR issues. An example of formal advocacy would be the “kabary” in

the middle area of the Island. "Kabary" is a formal speech which often aims to advocate for something in a formal manner. When a speaker wants to make a hard and strong advocacy point, he/she states; "don-tany sy kapo-tandroka", which is one of many points of "kabary". Most of the time "don-tany sy kapo-tandroka" is a debate between two very good speakers, and, in some ways, "kabary" is kind of spectacle when speakers are very effective.

- **Advocate with Community Leaders**

Advocating to community leaders can have a huge impact on local and national policy and legislation. For instance, if the community doesn't have access to sexual health services, or women and girls' could be included more in community matters, or sexual abuse is not being adequately punished, advocates have the power to identify an issue and call for change.

### **Informal Advocacy:**

Advocacy can take place informally in the form of conversations and discussions with friends and family members to share knowledge, challenge stereotypes and discrimination, and highlight the importance of SRHR. Informal advocacy is incorporated into everyday life in school, at the weekends and while chatting with neighbours. For example, if a friend is having sex without using a condom and the village has high rates of HIV/AIDS, advocates could talk to them about the risks and the consequences of unprotected sex. To support the friend offer to go with them to get an STI test and encourage them, and other friends, to use condoms in the future.

- **Advocate with Peers and Family**

Advocacy can feel scary, so it may be easier to start with friends and family, by challenging social norms and stereotypes by including female friends and siblings in open discussions; talk to parents about unprotected sex and the importance of contraception; or encourage friends to go for STI testing. There are many ways informal advocacy can be incorporated into everyday life.

### **Simple steps for advocacy:**

Step 1 – Identify what needs changing, what are the main concerns and what the goal is. Collect as much information about the issue as possible to inform the community, friends and peers and try to offer a solution.

Step 2 – Who can make that change happen and what are the barriers to change? The goal of advocacy is to make a positive change, therefore, think about who is most able to implement change (elders, friends, regional or national government).

Step 3 – Once the problem has been identified the advocate will need to decide the right approach to implement change; formal or informal advocacy. This may include writing formal letters to the Chef Fokontany or have informal discussions with friends and family. SRHR issues

are sensitive subjects so be prepared to argue the main points and have all the key facts and information ready.

Step 4 – Ensure meaningful participation with peers by reaching out to them in an approachable and inviting way. Don't be judgemental as SRHR affects everyone and they deserve to have their voices heard too, as they may have different concerns and problems. Include peers by designing a strategy for change together and encouraging them to become advocates.

Step 5 – Advocacy is more successful when working in collaboration with elders, groups and organisations. This is because voices will be louder and ideas for change will spread wider when joined by others advocating for SRHR. Working in collaboration also provides better access to influential people within the government or community.

Step 6 – Think about the potential obstacles that could arise when advocating for SRHR. These might include not having enough information relating to the topic, strong opposition from policy makers, or working against traditional values of the community. Try to create solutions to these issues by working with peers and elders, finding people with the same goals and being prepared to answer questions about why SRHR is so important.

Step 7 – Most importantly, continue to advocate for the community and peers as this is vital to improve access to contraception, counteract HIV transmission myths and end gender discrimination. Don't be afraid to advocate for others, ask questions and don't compromise on what is right.

#### Summary and Key Messages:

- Advocacy means identifying a problem and calling for change
- This can be achieved formally by writing letters and holding meetings with community elders, local or national government or Chef Fokontany
- Advocacy can be informal through everyday conversations and knowledge sharing with friends, family and peers
- Use the three stages of change; **head, hands** and **heart**, when advocating and follow the 7 steps for bringing about change in the community for better SRHR for everyone

#### Sources:

<https://www.ippfwhr.org/sites/default/files/Advocacy%2520Planning%2520web%2520version.pdf>

<https://www.ippf.org/resource/want-change-world-heres-how-young-people-advocates>