

Congo Brazzaville

FACTFILE

Title Youth Centre of Brazzaville

IPPF Member Association Association Congolaise pour le Bien-être Familial (ACBEF)

Set up in 1987, ACBEF is the country's leading non-governmental organization promoting and providing sexual and reproductive health services.

Aim To improve accessibility and use of quality sexual and reproductive health services among young people by setting up a youth centre and outreach services in Brazzaville.

Duration Five years: 2003–2007

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

▶ The youth centre is now regarded as a model of good practice for other organizations involved in youth services, including several government ministries and United Nations agencies.

▶ 84 per cent of young people interviewed at the end of the project were willing to be tested for HIV. This compared to only 50 per cent when the project began.

▶ Lasting collaborative partnerships were formed between ACBEF and a number of youth civil society organizations, including organizations for young people who are HIV positive.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Addressing stigma through partnering with young people living with HIV

Attitudes towards HIV positive people were very negative to begin with and opportunities to learn from young people living with HIV were non-existent. The project provided young people with opportunities to learn about HIV and interact with young people living with HIV. This opened up a dialogue among young people about HIV prevention and reduced stigma.

“When a positive person speaks, you know it’s serious.”

Young person attending centre

Young people become agents for change within their families and the community

Although some parents had doubts about the value and role of being a peer educator, their anxieties disappeared when they saw a gradual change in the attitudes and behaviour of their children. This gave peer educators the opportunity to serve as a valuable resource within families and communities and helped to change attitudes and behaviour at an individual level.

Increasing awareness led to breaking the silence

The Member Association's youth centre was particularly successful in increasing awareness about the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people through a series of education campaigns in the community, theatre performances, film shows, conferences and talks.

In 2004, a popular weekly television programme called *Break the Silence* was produced by the project. It was aimed at young people and initiated a community-wide debate about young people's sexuality.

Community support for the project was very strong, particularly from community and religious

KEY PROJECT STATISTICS

The project reached **75,362 young people** through information, education and communication sessions in the clinic and campaigns around Brazzaville.

Number of young people who visited the centre for recreational services, such as the library and extra-curricular activities: 13,055.

122 young women took part in a vocational internship programme.

The project ran **111 information and sensitization sessions** by HIV positive young people.

Number of condoms distributed: 57,528; this included 4,831 female condoms.

leaders, schools and parents, as well as from young people themselves.

The youth centre is now regarded as a key resource for sexuality education by other community organizations, including religious organizations.

“It wasn't easy, they really knew nothing, but they are not scared any more... now we even eat together.”

Young person living with HIV

Opening a dialogue on modern contraceptive methods

Previously a taboo subject, the project addressed the topic of modern contraceptive methods openly in the community, allowing people to talk about, understand and change their attitudes towards modern contraception. These changes in attitudes seen from the initial evaluation to the final evaluation were quite dramatic.

Tying in with government strategies

ACBEF was founded in a partnership with the government. One of the six health priorities of the government's strategy on reproductive health for 2000 to 2007 targeted the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. This strategy allowed ACBEF to continue to contribute towards the wider sexual and reproductive health services provided by the government.

The government provided staff to help with both the mid-term and final evaluations of the project.

"Before the project started my girlfriend had had six or seven abortions."

Young person interviewed for initial project survey

IPPF and UNFPA working together in-country

The project is in line with UNFPA's strategy in-country and UNFPA chose ACBEF as a privileged partner in family planning issues.

LESSONS LEARNED

The success of partnering with other organizations depends on their willingness to adapt their views and respond flexibly to young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Efforts should focus on how to deliver messages as well as what messages to deliver. Translating information, education and communication materials into easy to understand language resulted in higher uptake.

Training a wide variety of young people to become peer educators, including out-of-school young people and young people living with HIV, ensured a wider reach into the community.

UNFPA undertook an evaluation of its distribution of condoms which resulted in teaming up with the project, not only to provide it with condoms but also to offer television spots to highlight the project throughout Brazzaville.

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In addition, after a mid-term evaluation of the project jointly conducted by IPPF and UNFPA, the team recommended that the project added two more objectives to keep in line with UNFPA's work in-country. These were mainstreaming gender throughout the project and ensuring that capacity building became a priority for the project.

"My family were surprised to see how I have changed; my brothers call me at one in the morning now to ask for condoms."

Peer educator

Project continuation

A substantially reduced budget for the youth centre is being provided by ACBEF enabling the project to continue to run. However, despite the excellent capacity building that took place during the project, much of the work is reduced as the target population is not able to pay fees for services to supplement income.



COUNTRY STATS

Population is 3.8 million, with 41.9 per cent under the age of 15. (2008, Population Reference Bureau)

34 per cent of population is aged between 10 and 24. (2006, Population Reference Bureau 2008)

Human Development Index ranking: 139 out of 177 countries. (2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

Average life expectancy at birth is 54 years. (2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

The infant mortality rate is 75 per thousand live births. (2008, Population Reference Bureau)

The total fertility rate is 4.8 (2000–2005) with only 44 per cent of married women aged 15–49 practising family planning. (1997–2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

Population living with HIV/AIDS (aged 15–49) is 5.3 per cent. (2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

86 per cent of births are attended by trained personnel. (1997–2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

