

EXERCISE

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Youth Act Alliance (YAA) of Malawi Case Study

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The Youth Act Alliance Is Formed

From July 10-11, 2014, the National Youth Council of Malawi, with financial support from the National AIDS Commission, held a best practices conference on youth family planning and reproductive health. The conference, designed for youth leaders to showcase best practices and attract technical and financial support from government, nongovernmental organizations, and other development partners, brought together around 70 youth leaders from across the country and stakeholders from other sectors. Its key components were to inform youth leaders of global opportunities, such as their ability to influence the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda, and to strengthen coordination and collaboration among youth groups in Malawi. Participating youth-led organizations seized the opportunity and, on their own initiative, formed an alliance called the Youth Act Alliance (YAA).

What Is the Youth Act Alliance?

The YAA has a **vision** to safeguard children and young people in maternal and newborn health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV/AIDS health care programs in Malawi through advocacy.

Its **mission** is to create a platform for youth-led organizations to advocate for improved service delivery and quality and equitable access to youth and child-friendly health services in the areas of maternal health, newborn health, SRHR, and HIV/AIDS at the national, district, and community levels in Malawi.

The YAA's **goal** is to advance youth advocacy efforts on policy-related matters affecting children, mothers, and youth in maternal health, newborn health, SRHR, and HIV/AIDS at local and national levels.

To achieve this goal, the YAA focuses on specific objectives to:

- Build the capacity of the YAA's membership and mobilize resources for members.
- Advocate for quality, equity, and improved service delivery in SRHR for young people at local and national levels.
- Foster networking, collaboration, and information-sharing among its members.
- Advocate for youth social and economic empowerment and inclusion in decision-making positions to help Malawi realize a demographic dividend.

About the Youth Act Alliance's Membership and Structure

The YAA is an umbrella network of 40 youth-led organizations and 10 sectoral partners across Malawi. YAA membership is open to any youth organization in the country. The organization is structured to operate at the national, regional, and district levels.

At the national level, the YAA's secretariat is the Child Rights Information and Documentation Centre (CRIDOC), which is also one of its member organizations. The secretariat is responsible for the YAA's day-to-day operations. CRIDOC's executive director serves as the YAA's national coordinator. The National Advocacy Platform (NAP) is comprised of 10 members representing organizations in the Alliance. NAP is the YAA's highest decision-making structure and is led by a chairperson.

At the regional and district level, the YAA is governed by the Regional Advocacy Platform and District Advocacy Platform, respectively. These two structures were established to coordinate and drive advocacy activities at their respective levels.

The Youth Alliance Act's Main Achievements

Since its founding, the YAA has made some notable achievements, including:

- With support from UNAIDS, the National AIDS Commission, and other partners, the YAA developed a Malawi Youth Charter on 90-90-90. The charter was launched at the State House, where the First Lady of the Republic of Malawi was the guest of honor. In collaboration with the National Youth Council of Malawi, an accompanying workplan was developed to ensure that the charter is operationalized and institutionalized in youth organizations.¹
- The YAA conducted trainings on viral load testing in collaboration with the National Association of Young People Living with HIV. The trainings were complemented by media campaigns.
- The YAA participated in development of an advocacy toolkit for adolescents and then, with financial support from the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, used the toolkit to implement some activities.² For example, the YAA identified gaps in policies, laws, and data on adolescents and youth. Based on its findings, it began an advocacy mission to establish the age of consent for access to sexual and reproductive health services at 13.³

Noted Challenges of the YAA Based on the Author's Assessment

It is the case study author's assessment that the YAA could strengthen its organization and advocacy by taking the following steps:

- Efforts to establish age 13 as the age of consent could cause unintended harm in a setting without current age restrictions for access to sexual and reproductive health services. Instead, it is recommended that Malawi ensure there are no age restrictions for access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.
- The YAA's advocacy mission would be stronger if it diversified partners and consulted more experts in the field.
- The YAA should add a capacity-building component for their members in a mentorship or fellowship format. This component would ensure that the organization's leadership receives ongoing skills training and knowledge development.

¹ National Youth Council of Malawi, "[Launch of Malawi Youth Charter on 90-90-90 targets in HIV](#)," October 4, 2017.

² Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Women Deliver, [Advocating for Change for Adolescents: A Practical Toolkit for Young People to Advocate for Improved Adolescent Health and Well-Being](#), May 2017.

³ Youth Act Alliance, [presentation to the United Nations](#) (2017).