

Peer education - a programme guidance note

The 2006-2009 Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) calls on UNICEF to prioritise and focus resources on those adolescents who are most at risk (MARA) and especially vulnerable (EVA) to HIV infection and to ensure that they can access and use prevention information, skills and services. Peer education is one strategy by which to reach these adolescents, but it is not an all time easy solution - like all other programmes, initiatives and projects it has to be carefully planned and implemented to be effective.

This document is designed to provide UNICEF staff and their partners an initial understanding of what needs to be considered before and when you plan and implement peer education. It provides a number of questions to be answered and issues to be considered - and link you to some of the abundant materials on peer education that might be useful as you proceed with your planning and implementation.

▶ What is peer education?

A 'peer' is one that is of equal standing with another; one belonging to the same societal group especially based on age, grade, or status. Thus, the term 'peer education' would indicate a process whereby those of the same societal group or social standing are educating each other.

Peer education is used to affect changes in knowledge, attitude, beliefs and behaviours at the individual level. However, peer education may also create change at the group or societal level by modifying norms and stimulating collective action that contributes to changes in policies and programmes. Peer



UNICEF/ROSA/Piers Benatar, Girls, Bangladesh

"I always thought of myself as a human being, who has to live just to eat, do household chores, bare the conflicts between me and my family and has to die in the old age. But now I know what I was thinking is wrong. I have a personality and a place in this huge society. I had never thought of communication, problem solving and decision making as a skill".

(Pakistani girl, north western frontier province)

education can take place on a street corner, in a social club, in a bar, on school grounds, in a home, in a church, at a bus station, in a factory, on a farm or any other place where people feel comfortable. Peer education is not intended to be an isolated intervention; it is intended to be one important part of a comprehensive co-ordinated effort to help lead adolescents towards making their own wise and responsible decisions. Hence, it is rarely used alone, but is one component of a broader strategy.

During the last twenty years, the most common application of peer education has been in relation to reproductive health, HIV and AIDS and prevention of drug use.

▶ Is peer education the right approach?

It is very unlikely that one organisation can provide everything that is needed for a comprehensive response to for example sexual and reproductive health or HIV and AIDS. Hence, an assessment is necessary of what is involved in each programming option, what other organisations are doing and what skills and resources is available. Do not assume that peer education is right just because "it's what everyone does" or "it's what we've always done". Although peer education is widespread and can be useful and powerful consider carefully whether it is in fact appropriate for your programme, organisation or target group. Over the years, different ways

of conducting peer education has been developed to suit different organisations, communities and contexts. The following guides you through issues to consider whilst planning and implementing peer education.

"While peer education form an important part of South Asian adolescent programming, particularly where schooling is weak or inaccessible, "under supervised" adolescent volunteers with limited training are not a substitute for trained adult professionals. Given this, stakeholders should review their use of peer educators from the perspective of programming expectations, training quality, the use of incentives, and the need for trained adult mentors who can provide in-service support and supervision."

(UNICEF ROSA, South Asia Regional Assessment on LSBE, 2005)

ADVANTAGES

- ✓ Enables the active participation of children and young people
- ✓ Suits the sensitive nature of sexual and reproductive health work, as children and young people can discuss issues at their own level
- ✓ Is based on active learning, where children and young people learn for themselves and each other rather than being taught
- ✓ Can be adapted to meet the specific needs of marginalised children and young people
- ✓ Promotes messages that reflect the realities of the lives of children and young people

(Save the Children, 2004)

DISADVANTAGES

- ✗ Tends to focus on awareness-raising rather than helping children and young people to change their behaviour
- ✗ Can involve a lot of resources, including the time, skills and money needed to select, train and manage educators
- ✗ Can be difficult to sustain, for example due to a high turnover of educators
- ✗ Risks being isolated and not having links to other local strategies on sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS
- ✗ Can be difficult to monitor, in terms of assessing the impact on people's attitudes and behaviour
- ✗ Is often selected as an 'easy option' without adequate planning for technical support and follow-up training

► Issues to consider when *planning* peer education initiatives?

Define the situation and assess the needs...

Start with a situation analysis to identify factors that affect the lives of children and young people and increase their vulnerability. To determine how to respond conduct a needs assessment - looking at three levels:

- *community* - what are the needs of children and young people, what makes whom at risk, marginalised and vulnerable.
- *environment* - what services are other organisations providing, are different sectors working well together, are national policies supportive and who are the stakeholders that needs to be consulted.
- *organisation* - the skills, expertise and resources your programme and partners can offer.

Clearly define the target population...

Considering vulnerability and risk, determine the targeted population based upon the assessment. Peer groups can be determined in relation to age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, sexual orientation, socio-economic factors, in- or out-of-school etc.

Include target population and other stakeholders from the beginning of the planning process...

Involve the target population and other stakeholders in all aspects of the project development in order to:

- ensure that the intervention is properly set in the context and reflects the cultural background and educational level of the target group.
- ensure that the 'language of youth' is properly used in all communication efforts and to challenge misconceptions.
- ensure that the peer educators and the community have a vested interest, a sense of ownership, in the overall effort.

Planning processes, such as developing and pre-testing materials, curricula or training manuals, serve as valuable opportunities for

Reasons why peer education fails:

- × **A lack of clear aims and objectives for the project**
 - ▶ *important to ensure that aims and objectives are realistic and SMART*
- × **An inconsistency between the project design and the external environment/ constraints which should dictate the project**
 - ▶ *the goals of the project should dictate its design*
- × **A lack of investment in peer education**
 - ▶ *peer education should never be viewed as a cheap or easy option*
- × **A lack of appreciation that peer education is a complex process to manage and requires highly skilled personnel**
 - ▶ *peer education requires trained and committed staff and may be labour and time intensive*
- × **Inadequate training and support for peer educators**
 - ▶ *training and supervision should be appropriate to the task they are expected to undertake*
- × **A lack of clarity around boundary issues and control**
 - ▶ *empowerment is not an automatic outcome of involvement in peer education, empowerment is a process which occurs over time. Involve peer educators in the decision-making*
- × **A failure to secure multi-agency support**
 - ▶ *a broad range of community involvement will result in shared ownership*

(Walker and Avis)



UNICEF/India 2004

Peer education on condom use among young women

young people to practice facilitation skills and to gain knowledge.

Clearly define realistic goals and objectives...

It is vital that any programme knows what it wants to achieve and why. One programme cannot address all the issues facing teens, and a group of ten teenagers will not be able to reduce the overall rates of STDs in a district or town in six months. While planning:

- Be realistic and make your goals clear and strong and your objectives 'SMART'.
- Consider whether the goals and objectives are behavioural and if so, set realistic behaviour change goals.
- Consider which socio-cultural factors or barriers the programme might be faced with and how these can 'make or break' your strategy.

Plan realistically for monitoring and evaluation in the time-line and budget...

How will you know if your programme has

achieved its goals and objectives and reached its target group? Monitoring and evaluation allow ongoing assessment of programme strength and weaknesses and provides lessons learned that can be used in improving the programme. Creating baseline data and monitoring indicators enables you to keep track of your progress and results throughout the programme. Peer education can for example be monitored and evaluated through:

- process evaluations - e.g. progress reports submitted by the peer educators
- outcome evaluations - e.g. looking at HIV-related knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour

Find the right person to co-ordinate the programme...

Much of the success of a peer education programme will rest on the co-ordinator(s) who must understand youth and enjoy working with them. The co-ordinator should display a non-judgemental perspective while establishing high standards of expectation for programme participants. Evidence shows that a full-time coordinator is often a necessity.

Plan for sustainability...

Peer education is not an easy or cheap programming option - it is high maintenance. To run a sustainable programme, peer educators, community, resources, organisation and partners all need to be in place and 'on board' to maintain quality and impact in the long term. This means that a lot of resources, time and management are needed to keep it going and to eventually pass it on to peers and the community. It is therefore necessary to plan for sustainability from the start of your work.

► Issues to consider when implementing peer education initiatives?

Finding peer educators...

Selecting peer educators who are acceptable to both programme staff and community members is one of the most crucial components for success.

- Draw in the target group - they know who they best relate to.
- Establish clear criteria for the knowledge, skills and attitudes that peer educators should have - e.g. confidence, communication skills, compassion.
- Have clear, manageable, achievable expectations for the peer educators.
- Select through volunteering, nomination,

tests or based on the results of social network analyses. Remember that selection is a two-way process - children and young people have the right to know what they are committing to and to choose not to get involved.

- Ensure that the selected peer educators cover potential heterogeneities within the given peer group and take into account gender balance.
- Determine whether the target audience would like to learn from 'exact peers' or 'near peers'
- Consider incentives - monetary or non-monetary - for peer educators to attract, recognise and maintain their participation.

Provide sufficient training...

Training and supervising peer educators is crucial. When considering training it is important to remember that:

- Skills development and ethical issues is as crucial as knowledge.
- Training should focus on the topic and model the supportive and participatory facilitation techniques that peer educators themselves will be expected to use.
- The needs of male and female educators might differ - e.g. different expectation about how girls should behave and talk about in public.
- Flexibility when scheduling training and feedback sessions will maximise participation.
- Training should be competency and needs based and include initial and ongoing evaluation of competencies.
- Thorough training, regular follow-up workshops and practice sessions is particularly important as turnover of peer educators can be high.
- Training empowers peer educators to recognise when to refer a peer to a professional person.
- Training need to be contextualised to prepare the peer educator for work-ing in a specific environment - hardly any peer education programmes are implemented in hotels or training halls!

Develop a curriculum to maximise interactive and experiential learning

- Peer educators gain ownership of the



UNICEF/India

Peer HIV educators from different schools in Ban-galore during one of their outreach activity

programme when they play a role in deciding which activities to use or in designing new ways to present the information.

- Peer educator's ongoing access to program material, resources and up-dated information needs to be assured.

Provide ongoing encouragement, supervision and support...

Peer education relies heavily on part-time peer educators and coordinators, working in new and demanding roles and often in difficult environments - this demands close supervision:

- Support and supervision help peer educators deal with stress, burnout and other psychological aspects and create a forum for sharing successes and ideas. It also prepares them to deal with resistance and public criticism, should it arise.
- Motivating the peer educators helps build commitment, reduce turnover and improve sustainability.

Link peer educators with other initiatives...

Peer education is most effective when part of a comprehensive initiative. It is not intended to be an isolated intervention but one important part of a comprehensive co-ordinated effort to help lead adolescents towards making their own wise and responsible decisions. Therefore a referral system should be established to

services such as counselling and testing, youth friendly clinics, access to condoms, family planning etc.

Expect attrition - plan for retention...

Do not forget to improve the retention of peer educators by ensuring that they are:

- Appreciated and respected by each other, their peers, project staff and community leaders
- Given systematic training and support and allowed to develop their role
- Aware of what is/is not expected of them and what they can/cannot expect from the project
- Involved in all stages of project development and decision-making
- Visibly part of the project 'family' - e.g. having a T-shirt or a badge
- Feeling physically and emotionally safe in their work
- Linked to networks for support and sharing of ideas
- Given opportunities to have fun and celebrate their achievements

This document builds on the following resources on Peer Education programming

- ✂ International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region: **Peer to Peer: Creating Successful Peer Education Programs**, 2004 (http://www.ippfwhr.org/publications/download/monographs/PeertoPeer_E.pdf) - provides very detailed step-by-step guidance and tools for planning and implementing peer education programmes.
- ✂ The Save the Children Fund: **Effective Peer Education - working with children and young people on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS**, 2004 (<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/resources/details.jsp?id=1990>) - Excellent and very detailed hands-on programming guidance asking you all the questions you need to ask your programme throughout planning and implementation. Provide a quick guide to 18 programming options including peer education.
- ✂ AIDSCAP/ FHI: **How to Create an Effective Peer Education Project - Guidelines for AIDS prevention projects**, 2004 (<http://www.fhi.org/NR/rdonlyres/efec2fjcedftpcqabrs5oluwwvdu5jofqmwg6hwjkwrl7gsgpzjt24ceuyccva4vvsbgdydx3fwgwdol/createeffectpeereducation.pdf>) - Detailed guidance through important steps to consider whilst programming peer education.
- ✂ UNESCO Bangkok: **Peer Approach in Adolescent Reproductive Health Education: Some Lessons Learned**, 2003 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001305/130516e.pdf>) - excellent compilation of lessons learned with abundant case examples.
- ✂ UNAIDS Horizons/ Population Council: **Peer Education and HIV/AIDS: Past Experiences, Future Directions**, 1999 (http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/peer_ed.pdf)
- ✂ Svenson, G R and other collaborators: **European guidelines for youth AIDS peer Education**, European Commission/ Europeer, 1998 (<http://www.europeer.lu.se/files/english72.pdf>)
- ✂ Walker, S A & Avis, M: **Common reasons why peer education fails**, Journal of Adolescence 1999, 22, 573-577



UNICEF Nepal/2003

Peer education session for a group of children attending out of school

Web pages on peer education:

- Europeer:** <http://www.europeer.lu.se/> - excellent bibliography
- Advocates for Youth:** http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/iag/peer_led.htm
- FHI/ YouthNet:** <http://www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/Publications/peeredtoolkit/index.htm> - Peer education toolkits
<http://www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/Publications/Clresources/index.htm> - Docs on community involvement
- UNICEF:** http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html
- UNFPA:** <http://www.unfpa.org/ypeer/index.htm>
- UNODC:** http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/en/youthnet_action_right_message.html

Contact information:

United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia

P. O. Box 5815, Lekhnath Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal
Telephone: 977-1-4417082, Facsimile 977-1-4418466 / 4419479
www.unicef.org