

MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION - "EDUCATING TO PREVENT"

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PROMOTION OF SEXUAL HEALTH

The Mexico City Ministerial Declaration "Educating to Prevent," is a strategic tool to strengthen HIV-prevention efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean by ensuring access to quality, comprehensive sexuality education as well as sexual and reproductive health services. The Declaration's success is contingent upon the engagement of civil society in the efforts to better educate youth to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

... We, the Ministers of Health and Education of Latin America and the Caribbean ... Implement and/or strengthen multi-sectoral strategies of comprehensive sexuality education and promotion of sexual health, including HIV/STI prevention. Our efforts must be complementary, as well as work in collaboration with other sectors.

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Role of Civil Society in Promoting the Sexual Health of Young People and Preventing HIV Transmission

Reaching the goals outlined in the Declaration requires the response of many actors, including civil society. Civil society represents a diverse range of entities such as non-governmental organizations, trade and professional associations, community-based organizations, youth groups, action and advocacy groups, religious and faith-based institutions, and citizen networks. Those with expertise in HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, sexuality education, parent/child communication, and working with marginalized populations have particularly valuable contributions to make, as well as those who can speak to their personal experiences.

Civil society often complements the state's efforts, and in some cases may have greater capacity to reach a broad range of constituencies. These include young people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, parents and families, community members, as well as marginalized populations, such as homeless youth, commercial sex workers, injection drug users, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Civil society can serve as a catalyst for change, mobilizing citizen participation, and ensuring transparency, effectiveness, and accountability from state actors. Civil society may also give voice to critical issues, raising awareness through, for example, public outreach campaigns and educating the media.

Fundamental Concepts: Supporting Sexual Health and HIV Prevention

Comprehensive sexuality education and access to quality sexual health services are the foundation of curbing the HIV epidemic in Latin America and the Caribbean. Sexuality is an essential part of being human that is expressed throughout the lifespan. It is important to share knowledge and build skills among young people before they engage in sexual activity, so that they are equipped to make healthy decisions.

The information should be scientifically accurate and age appropriate and the messages should be culturally sensitive, drawing from cultural knowledge, awareness, and participation of local communities to make change effective and sustainable. Studies demonstrate the sexuality education is effective at delaying sexual debut, increasing condom and contraceptive use, and decreasing the number of partners and frequency of sex.

THE DECLARATION STATES THAT COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION SHOULD:

- Promote and be based on human rights;
- Respect the values of a democratic, pluralistic society where families and communities thrive;
- Include ethical, biological, emotional, social, cultural, and gender aspects as well as topics related to the diversity of sexual orientations and identities, in accordance with the legal framework of each country;
- Promote respect for differences and reject any form of discrimination; and,
- Foster responsible and informed decision-making among youth regarding their sexual debut.

Ministers of Health and Education throughout Latin America and the Caribbean committed to “update the contents and didactic methods of their curricula to include comprehensive sexuality education,” to “review, update and reinforce the training of educational personnel,” to “ensure that health services are youth friendly and delivered with full respect for human dignity... [and] the diversity of sexual orientation and identity.”

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MINISTERIAL DECLARATION, “EDUCATING TO PREVENT”

Support from civil society with expertise in education and health, particularly sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, is needed to realize these and other goals outlined therein.

Civil society may design programs and curricula used to support state capacity building and teacher training efforts. Drawing from their experience, understanding of best practices, and evaluations of which interventions are most effective, they can also offer recommendations and provide technical guidance to state actors. Civil society may also engage in direct service delivery, particularly to hard-to-reach populations, such as out-of-school youth.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY: PROGRAMMING

- Design programmatic guides aimed at combating gender inequality, sexual and intimate-partner violence.
- Develop and/or promote comprehensive sexuality education curricula that is age appropriate, evidence-based and medically accurate
- Create guidelines and indicators for inclusive, youth-friendly healthcare delivery and strategies to combat stigma and discrimination in the health and education sectors.
- Implement peer-education training programs to reach youth in and out of school.
- Develop and implement capacity building workshops for existing educators and collaborate with universities to incorporate sexuality education training into the core curriculum for students training to be teachers.
- Prioritize programs for most-at-risk populations.

Civil Society Supports Sexual Health through Advocacy

Although the Declaration serves as a mandate for action, expressing the high level political will of Ministers of Health and Education throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, it is not legally binding. It is important then to translate the provisions outlined in the Declaration into national, state, and local level policies to secure funding for and implementation of programs. The signatories to this Declaration agreed to “work with the executive and legislative branches of government, in countries where relevant, to guarantee an appropriate legal framework and the necessary budget for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education and promotion of sexual health.”

Civil society can help promote the uptake of the goals outlined in the Declaration through strategic advocacy and outreach to policymakers and other key decision-makers. Advocates provide critical access to relevant research and data, highlight problem areas and suitable solutions, prioritize action steps, as well as facilitate access to technical experts needed to fill any gaps in expertise of government entities.

Experts are not the only ones to conduct advocacy efforts, however. Constituent groups and other stakeholders are well positioned to engage with policymakers and other state actors to express their own needs and experiences of living without the access to quality sexual health services and comprehensive sexuality education and other concerns relating to the HIV epidemic in their communities.

Civil society networks, alliances, and coalitions bring together individuals and groups that are interested and invested in ensuring access to quality sexual health services. Civil society organizations are uniquely positioned to monitor the progress of the Declaration and hold policymakers accountable for meeting the established targets.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY: ADVOCACY

- Develop collaborative partnerships and inter-organizational alliances and build action-oriented coalitions and networks.
- Consolidate and present relevant evidence to policymakers highlighting problem areas regarding availability of and access to quality sexual health services and comprehensive sexuality education for young people.
- Identify and mobilize champions, experts and stakeholders alike, to promote the goals outlined in the Declaration.

Civil Society Supports Sexual Health through Communications and Media

Civil society can also help prevent HIV and support the sexual health of young people through media and communication strategies. These efforts support broader shifts in awareness on the issues and priorities pertaining to the sexual health of young people and the realities of HIV/AIDS at the community, state, and national levels.

Issues relating to sexual health and HIV/AIDS, particularly when it comes to young people, can make some people feel uncomfortable or put them on the defensive. Some may even feel that they are not appropriate topics to be discussed publicly. Crafting strategic messaging and public awareness campaigns which speak to specific audience is critical in tearing down such barriers and engaging all relevant actors as allies in support of young people's well-being. The target audience may be policymakers, parents and families, religious leaders, or even young people themselves.

Promote outreach efforts with the mass media and civil society in order to improve the quality of the information and messages disseminated and to make them more consistent with the Ministries' comprehensive sexuality education and promotion of sexual health.

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"EDUCATING TO PREVENT"*

Building relationships with journalists and outreach to media outlets can serve as an important means to disseminating information and new developments to a broader audience. It can also help ensure that the media are following the implementation of the Declaration and can help push to meet the goals when progress is slow. Engaging opinion leaders to draft editorials also lends credibility and gravitas to the issue. Such connections can also help stem the flow of negative, inaccurate or inflammatory stories that may derail progress in implementation.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS: COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA

- Sponsor a media campaign focused on parent/child communication.
- Foster public dialogue around sexual health of young people as a concern and interest of the entire community.
- Develop messaging emphasizing the rights of young people to access quality sexual health services and information.
- Incorporate pledges of support from religious and faith leaders to preventing HIV and ensuring the sexual health of young people in public statements and sermons.
- Build relationships with journalists to help disseminate accurate, relevant and timely information regarding developments in implementing the Declaration's goals.

What is the Mexico City Ministerial Declaration?

The Mexico City Ministerial Declaration represents a partnership between Ministries of Education and Ministries of Health, marked by the establishment of joint planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow up, as well as facilitating involvement of other key sectors. It represents a synergy between Ministries of Health and Ministers of Education to develop and deliver the information, education and counseling needed to reverse the HIV/AIDS epidemic, promote healthy life styles through comprehensive sexuality education as well as sexual health related services.

GOAL: Reduce by 50% the number of adolescents and young people who are not covered by health services that address their sexual and reproductive health needs appropriately

GOAL: Reduce by 75% the number of schools that have failed to institutionalize comprehensive sex education

ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND WEBSITES

Planning and Support Tool for SRHR/HIV Interventions for Young People

This tool can be used to plan new interventions, but also to analyze existing interventions.

http://www.aidsportal.org/repos/OVC_E-PAT_tool_UK.pdf

What Religious Leaders Can Do About HIV and AIDS: Action for Children and Young People

Supports the response of religious leaders to the HIV epidemic.

http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/Religious_leaders_Aids.pdf

Measuring up: HIV-related advocacy evaluation training for civil society organisations (draft): A guide for Facilitators

Guides designed for advocacy, monitoring and evaluation staff of civil society organizations.

<http://www.aidsportal.org/repos/Measuring-Up-Facilitators-guide-draft.pdf>

THE TEXT OF THE MEXICO CITY MINISTERIAL DECLARATION CAN BE FOUND:

In Spanish at:

<http://www.censida.salud.gob.mx/descargas/pdfs/declaracion.pdf>

In English at:

http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080801_minsterdecl aration_en.pdf

We count on you... the social and health workers with an increasingly sophisticated understanding of how to support people and families to take control of their lives. You, faith based leaders supporting communities around the world... You, the next generation, the protagonists and activists who must play a central role in generating demand for prevention, treatment, care and support. You, members of civil society who will hold us all to account... We know what it takes—now we need your inspiration and action.

- MICHEL SIDIBÉ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNAIDS