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- Protecting freedom of expression: an essential condition for democracy, development and human dignity.

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INTRODUCTION

In Ethiopia, many young people transition into adulthood with conflicting and confusing messages about sexuality and gender. They lack the adequate information and preparation on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), which leaves them vulnerable to coercion, abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV. Currently, there are over 25 million learners in the Ethiopian education system (ESDP V, 2015). In 2014 there were an estimated 730,000 (600,000 - 970,000) people living with HIV in Ethiopia (UNAIDS, 2014), with one of the highest prevalence rates among the 15-24 year olds. In this regard, effective Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) plays a role in providing young people with age appropriate, culturally relevant and scientifically accurate knowledge and skills.

In order to produce healthy, responsible and productive young citizens, there must be a coordinated and shared responsibility among all stakeholders at all levels.
BACKGROUND

THE ETHIOPIA CONTEXT

More than 45% of the total population of Ethiopia is below the age of 24 (Ministry of Health, 2012; UNFPA, 2012). The 10-24 year olds who make up 35% of the population (CSA, 2007), have increased opportunities to access basic education, and are simultaneously facing serious challenges related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

Despite the sound achievements of the education system, ever increasing unsafe sexual experiences in the upper primary grades and above, high levels of teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, STIs, and HIV/AIDS are among the SRH problems faced by many young Ethiopians (HAPCO, 2013). These are further complicated by limited the access to SRH information, and the poor quality of adolescent and youth friendly SRH information and services in and outside schools.

WHY COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

As Ethiopia is largely a nation of young people, the issues of adolescents and young people have significant influence on the overall social, economic productivity and political arena of the country. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) emphasizes a holistic approach to human development and sexuality. UNESCO identifies the primary goal of sexuality education as follows “children and young people become equipped with the knowledge, skills and values to make responsible choices about their sexual and social relationships in a world affected by HIV” (UNESCO, 2011).
International Planned Parenthood (IPPF) defines a rights-based approach to CSE by emphasizing the need “to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships”.

Both definitions view ‘sexuality’ as “preparing children and young people for the transition to adulthood...” and also recognize the challenges of the processes.

CSE is an approach that recognizes and promotes: human rights, knowledge, values and skills necessary for safe sex, HIV prevention and, gender equality. Evidence has shown that CSE that is scientifically accurate, age and culturally-appropriate, gender-sensitive and life skills-based can provide young people with the knowledge, skills and efficacy to make informed decisions about their sexuality and lifestyle.

Research points to the fact that CSE can effectively delay sex among young people, and increases contraceptive use among sexually active youth. Scholarly research during the last two decades has also shown that sexuality education does not increase rates of sexual activity among teenagers and does increase knowledge about sexual behavior and its consequences. It also reduces risk taking behaviors among those who are sexually active. When young people are equipped with accurate and relevant information, when they have developed skills in decision-making, negotiation, communication and critical thinking, and have access to counseling and SRH/HIV services that are non-judgmental and affordable, they are better able to be responsible and productive members of society.

While it is not realistic to expect that an education program alone can eliminate the risk of HIV and other STIs, unintended pregnancy, coercive or abusive sexual activity and exploitation, a properly designed and implemented program can reduce some of these risks and underlying vulnerabilities.
EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (ESA) MINISTERIAL COMMITMENT

In December 2013, ministers of education and health from twenty Eastern and Southern African (ESA) countries affirmed and endorsed their joint commitment to deliver CSE and SRH services for young people.

### ESA Commitment Countries:

- Angola
- Botswana
- Burundi
- DR Congo
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Lesotho
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Mauritius
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Seychelles
- South Sudan
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

As a result of Ethiopia’s engagement in the ESA commitment, the UNESCO Addis Ababa Education sector in partnership with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, are providing support to the government through a pilot project to help achieve the binding ESA targets.¹

### OUR WORK

**COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT**

From August to September 2014, UNESCO conducted an assessment in the Oromia region. The study mapped stakeholders and existing programs working on CSE and SRH issues, and analyzed the status of the national and regional strategies on curriculum development, teacher training, education planning and management.

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¹ For more information please visit http://youngpeopletoday.net/
Following the study, four thematic areas of intervention have been identified: coordination, capacity, curriculum development, and policy environment. In November 2014, in partnership with the Oromia Education Bureau, three pilot Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs), namely Assela, Jimma and Sebeta were selected and began implementing the pilot project. The project aims to embed quality CSE in higher education, which will eventually be scaled up to all the relevant education levels.

**ONGOING ACTIVITIES:**

- Capacity development trainings concerning CSE organized for CTEs. As a result lecturers are embedding CSE issues into courses.
- The CTEs are conducting applied research on three CSE thematic areas. The findings will be presented to regional officials to serve as evidence based information for policy development on appropriate CSE in Oromia.
- College health services and student councils are actively engaged in the promotion of CSE.
- The development of a draft CSE guideline for Ethiopia was submitted to the Ministry of Education in March 2015.
- UNESCO together with other agencies, supported the preparation of the national CSE plan.

The CTE together with key stakeholders will play significant roles in planning, designing and implementing country specific and culturally relevant interventions on sexuality education.
WHO WE ARE

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