YouthNet Briefs on Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS

Internet Tool Supports Youth Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS Policy Development and Implementation

A Web site – www.youth-policy.com – provides a unique resource for policy-makers and others.

To help develop a database of health policies for Botswana, the director of the Health Research Unit of the Ministry of Health drew on the content and design of a new Web site: *www.youth-policy.com*.

In Haiti, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) developed policy language on voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) for youth using *www.youth-policy.com* — the database of more than 115 youth-related policies and a VCT fact sheet available on the site. The new language helped improve the national VCT policy regarding the needs of youth.

To help create awareness of youth reproductive health (YRH) rights, policy, and programs, and to monitor the implementation of YRH policy in Africa, the Africa Regional Youth Initiative's policy group went to the Web site's database and reviewed YRH policies from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

Launched in June 2004, *www.youth-policy.com* reached more than 17,000 users in its first year and now has more than 2,000 visitors each month. What they have found is a unique online resource for youth, policy-makers, NGOs, donors, and technical experts worldwide for improving YRH and HIV/AIDS policy. The site can help users find out what policies exist, develop new YRH policies, identify gaps in existing policies, advocate for the development of a policy, and connect with others working in YRH.

The major resources on the site are organized under three key sections: policy database, making policy, and tools and links (see graphic). Other sections provide visitors with a way to contribute policies, join a network of those interested in policies, and stay abreast of recent news and ideas about policy and youth through the youth-policy.com newsletter.

Family Health International (FHI)/YouthNet and the POLICY Project developed the Web site with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

What this Web Site Offers

Comprehensive YRH policies can provide a solid basis for effective action to address the many reproductive health needs of young people. However, at the country level, policy-makers lack a comprehensive framework for thinking about YRH policy and easy access to examples of such policies from other countries. The project grew out of the desire to find cost-effective ways to address these gaps and to extend USAID's support for YRH policy development.

The site offers a way for policy-makers and others to analyze or develop policies. The "making policy" section summarizes six key elements that provide a framework for YRH policy. These include:

- encouraging healthy, wanted pregnancies
- preventing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- improving nutrition
- reducing harmful cultural practices
- reducing human trafficking and sexual abuse and coercion
- stimulating economic development and reducing poverty

The site provides guidance about and examples of policies at the international, national, sub-national, and local levels. It offers information about various types of policies, such as constitutional provisions, laws, national population policy, youth reproductive health policy, or operational guidelines. The site also includes discussions about types of authors of a policy (government, professional association, private business, or NGOs) and the role for YRH in sectors such as education, health, and labor.

The Web site discusses guiding principles for making YRH policy, linking to more in-depth information. These principles emphasize the need to acknowledge gender differences, segment the youth population by age and life stage, and recognize the needs of marginalized sub-populations. Other principles are to promote youth involvement, respect culture, treat youth as assets rather than as problems, promote access to information and care, be consistent, and reinforce the interconnectedness of key YRH elements.
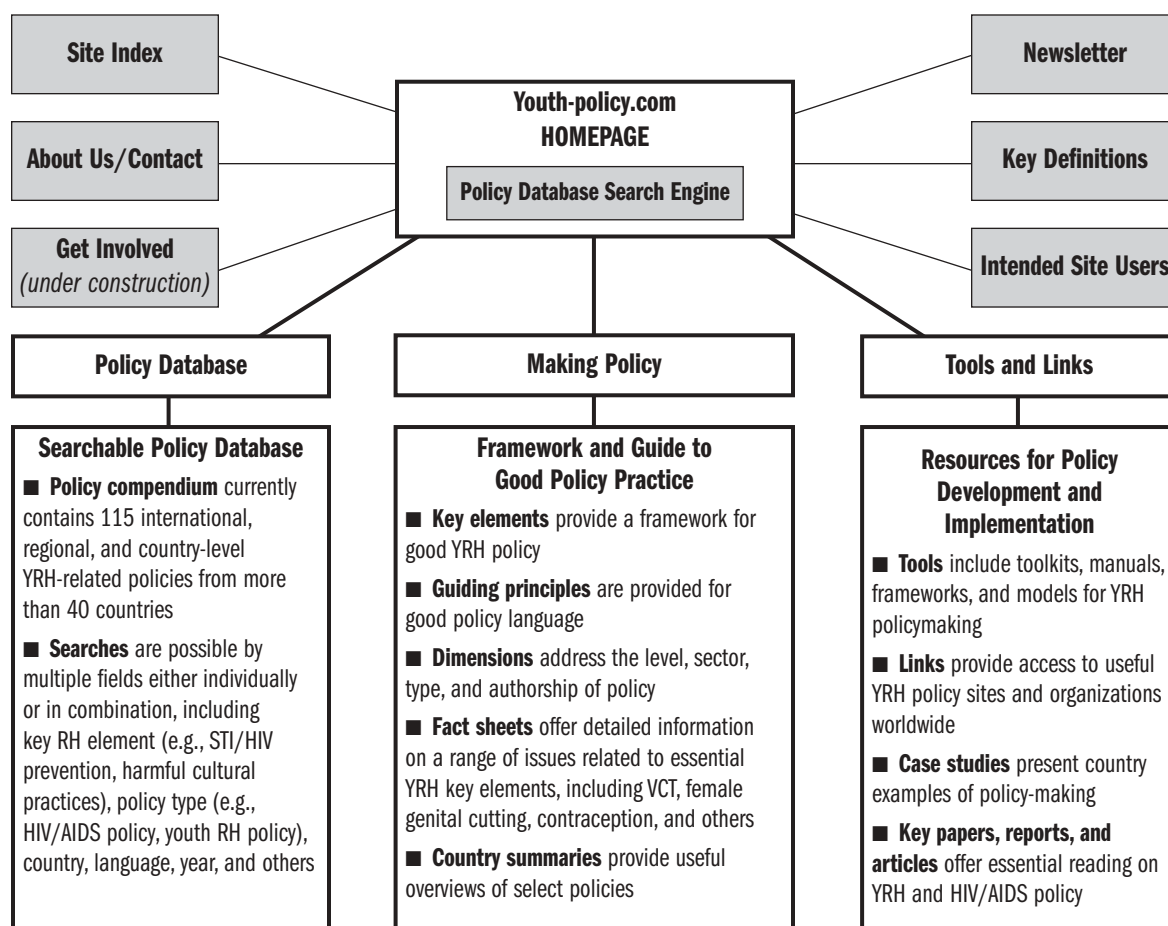
Through the site, viewers can access technical resources such as reports, case studies, and a list of organizations working in YRH policy and programming. Also, the site features YRH fact sheets, case studies, and policy-making tools. Those involved in YRH policy have the opportunity to contribute relevant policies from their own countries to the site, as well as network with others and stay current on policy developments and related information. These interactive features are being modified to improve the sharing of documents and other information among users.

The policy database is the site's most popular feature, with nearly 5,000 visitors in the first year. Visitors can search by country and specific topic such as VCT, gender equality, maternal care, and poverty reduction. The nearly 115 youth-related policies come from more than 40 countries.

— *Shawn Aldridge and Haguerenesh Woldeyohannes*

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Policy Database Search Engine

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(under construction)

Intended Site Users

Policy Database

Searchable Policy Database

■ **Policy compendium** currently contains 115 international, regional, and country-level YRH-related policies from more than 40 countries

■ **Searches** are possible by multiple fields either individually or in combination, including key RH element (e.g., STI/HIV prevention, harmful cultural practices), policy type (e.g., HIV/AIDS policy, youth RH policy), country, language, year, and others

Making Policy

Framework and Guide to Good Policy Practice

■ **Key elements** provide a framework for good YRH policy

■ **Guiding principles** are provided for good policy language

■ **Dimensions** address the level, sector, type, and authorship of policy

■ **Fact sheets** offer detailed information on a range of issues related to essential YRH key elements, including VCT, female genital cutting, contraception, and others

■ **Country summaries** provide useful overviews of select policies

Tools and Links

Resources for Policy Development and Implementation

■ **Tools** include toolkits, manuals, frameworks, and models for YRH policymaking

■ **Links** provide access to useful YRH policy sites and organizations worldwide

■ **Case studies** present country examples of policy-making

■ **Key papers, reports, and articles** offer essential reading on YRH and HIV/AIDS policy

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