

**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**  
POWERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE



# WE LEAD MID-TERM EVALUATION BRIEF

**2021 - 2023**

**Consortium Partners:**



# The Challenge

Young people outnumber adults in our program countries, yet adults decide about their sexuality and access to SRH–R information and services; in particular when they are young women. The impact is disastrous. For example, every year at least 10 million unwanted pregnancies among girls aged 15–19 occur in the developing world, leading to 5.7 million abortions, the majority of which are unsafe.<sup>1</sup> In addition to their lack of agency and access to SRH–R services, the young women and adolescent girls (15–30 years) the We Lead programme focuses on, are disproportionately affected by discrimination and gender–based violence; even more so when they are at the intersection of multiple stigmatised identities. Yet SRH–R services, including support in case of gender–based violence, are often inaccessible to them, also because of costs, and lack of understanding and sensitivity by service providers.

## Response

We Lead, seeks to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH–R) of four specific groups of young women: those living with HIV, those living with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities and those affected by displacement. Through mutual capacity building strengthening, young women involved in the program are put in the driver’s seat. At the same time, they are supported in making sustainable changes for their SRH–R. The program is implemented in nine countries in Sub–Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Central America, by a consortium of six partners: Positive Vibes, Restless Development, Marsa, FEMNET, the Central American Women’s Foundation and Hivos. The latter organisation leads the program. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is part of the partnership, both as funder and as partner.

We Lead has four closely interlinked objectives. Firstly, it aims to strengthen local organizations’ and rightsholders’ capacities to promote their SRH–R. Secondly, it supports the development and implementation of strategies to shift social and gender norms, starting from the immediate environment and expanding to the general public. Thirdly, it seeks to influence health–service providers to improve access to SRH–R information and services. Lastly, it aims to lobby duty–bearers to change laws and policies in favor of rightsholders’ SRH–R. These four intermediate outcomes contribute to We Lead’s overall strategic objective within a five–year program period.

On Country level, Communities of Action (COAs) are set up that consists of between 7 and 18 Youth and/ or Women Led organisations that provide support, services and/ or organize activities for four specific groups of young women and girls: those living with HIV, those living with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities and those affected by displacement, also called the Rightsholders. The COAs are supported by Host Organizations on a country level.

## Evaluation, Goals and Objectives

The MTR was geared to reviewing progress made in the We Lead program from its inception in 2021 to December 2023 against the set outcomes, reflect on changes in context, and its implications to the program.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.gutmacher.org/sites/default/files/factsheet/adding-it-up-investing-in-sexual-reproductive-health-adolescents.pdf>



# Methodology

This internal MTR report is based on various sources of primary data, and secondary data derived from We Lead narrative and baseline reports, the [global MTR report](#), program annual reports, and any other relevant documents that could be sources of reliable and accurate information. Once the data was sourced and evaluated, the next step was to synthesize and analyze the information. This involved organizing the data into meaningful categories and extracting the key findings and insights. The aim of this stage was to gain a deeper understanding of the information and to identify patterns and trends. This helped to ensure that the report was well-structured, easy to read, and that the findings were meaningful and relevant. In conclusion, using secondary data as a methodology for writing this report offered a cost-effective and efficient way to gather information, and communicate results from this program to date.

# Impact

Restless Development has delivered impact on the following areas:

- 1. Vibrant and resilient youth collective SRH-R networks across 9 countries:** Restless Development strengthened the capacity of 101 youth organisations across the 9 countries to power up youth-led change in their communities, through contextualised youth-led methodologies. *“The community of action works like a dream. We have grown thanks to our membership of this platform. Our knowledge and approaches to implementing sexual and reproductive health projects have been really strengthened”* 1-1 interview in Niger.<sup>2</sup>
- 2. Highly localised innovative advocacy driven by young women:** 86% of the members of local organisations have engaged in lobby and advocacy at local levels, 57% at regional/ provincial levels and 64% at the national level. The focus on lobby and advocacy resulted from participants adapting their strategies to mostly, national level political and/or legislative developments and shifts. For example, given the restrictive political context, rightsholder groups in Lebanon directed lobbying and advocacy activities at other actors, such as grassroots movements and alternative media, and accelerated their online presence to rally support for their cause and circumvent limitations imposed by challenging on-ground conditions.
- 3. Rightsholder voices amplified in global and regional advocacy spaces:** Young people used the advocacy spaces like CSW 66, International AIDs conference, International Family Planning Conference, CSW 67, CPD 56 and women deliver to push for their SRH-R key messaging, directly lobbying member states and the UN to include their collective SRHR messaging as part of their global commitments. Engagement in the spaces strengthened young people’s voice and agency to advocate for themselves, and connected their national level advocacy efforts to global level spaces.
- 4. Increased collaboration and joint action:** Collaboration between rightsholder organisations has enabled members to engage in advocacy spaces within which these members did not take part previously – participants believed that involvement in the SRH-R movement positively contributed to their organisation’s collaboration with relevant authorities.

<sup>2</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V3UNIYCNzpH0x79sqo-jBI0dJQx-b0Ut/view>

**5.**

**Improved access and utilisation of SRHR information and services:** In most countries young women reported that they experienced progress in health care providers' awareness of young women's SRHR needs and situations. Access to face-to-face SRHR services and information improved since the initiation of We Lead activities: 75% reporting better access to services and 82% reporting easier access to information. 72% of the young women noted that, as a result of their involvement in We Lead and the improvement in access to SRHR information and services, they now used SRHR information and services more frequently.

**6.**

**Improved credibility and sustainability of rightsholder organisations:** Organizations experienced an increase in credibility and sustainability, rising from 55.36% to 64.94%. This improvement was linked to factors such as available resources, accountable management, and effective resource mobilization. While African countries showed better results, supporting organizations in diversifying funding sources, exploring innovative approaches to resource mobilization and developing partnerships were emphasized.

**7.**

**More young women rightsholders in organisation leadership:** Most organisations reported increased awareness and action for more inclusive staffing. This has resulted in more organizations being led by young women right-holders and the inclusion of youth in leadership positions. In Guatemala, the program has played a significant role in promoting greater involvement of women and young people in organizations' programs, even if they are not necessarily in decision-making positions. These changes underscore the importance of We Lead in promoting gender equality, grassroots embeddedness, LGBTIQ inclusion, and meaningful youth participation. By providing support and resources, the program has enabled organizations to develop gender policies, establish participation mechanisms, and create spaces for young women's leadership.





## SPOTLIGHT YOUTH LEADERSHIP

**Young rightsholders leading the program.** Trained and accompanied 9 young leaders to lead the youth collective SRH-R networks, supporting them to enhance their leadership skills and empower them to lead change through 1:1 calls, global group calls, WhatsApp/Signal groups and leadership bootcamps. As a result, the young leaders have proven to be an indispensable part of the structure of the CoAs, they assume responsibilities for promoting lobbying and advocacy, Capacity Building, security and protection and well-being.

- 70% increase in skills such as conflict resolution, inclusive facilitation, effective communication, and using social media for advocacy.
- 80% increase in knowledge levels regarding essential leadership skills.
- They led the Theory of Change (TOC) localization process in their respective countries. This indicates their ability to apply strategic thinking and planning to advance their CoAs' objectives.
- We Lead has provided the facilitators with personal growth, strengthening their skills and experience. This allowed four of them to obtain jobs and scholarships.

**“ I am no longer who I was when I joined the We Lead Project as a COAF. I have gained so many leadership skills and have more confidence now to lead the Mozambique COA. ”**

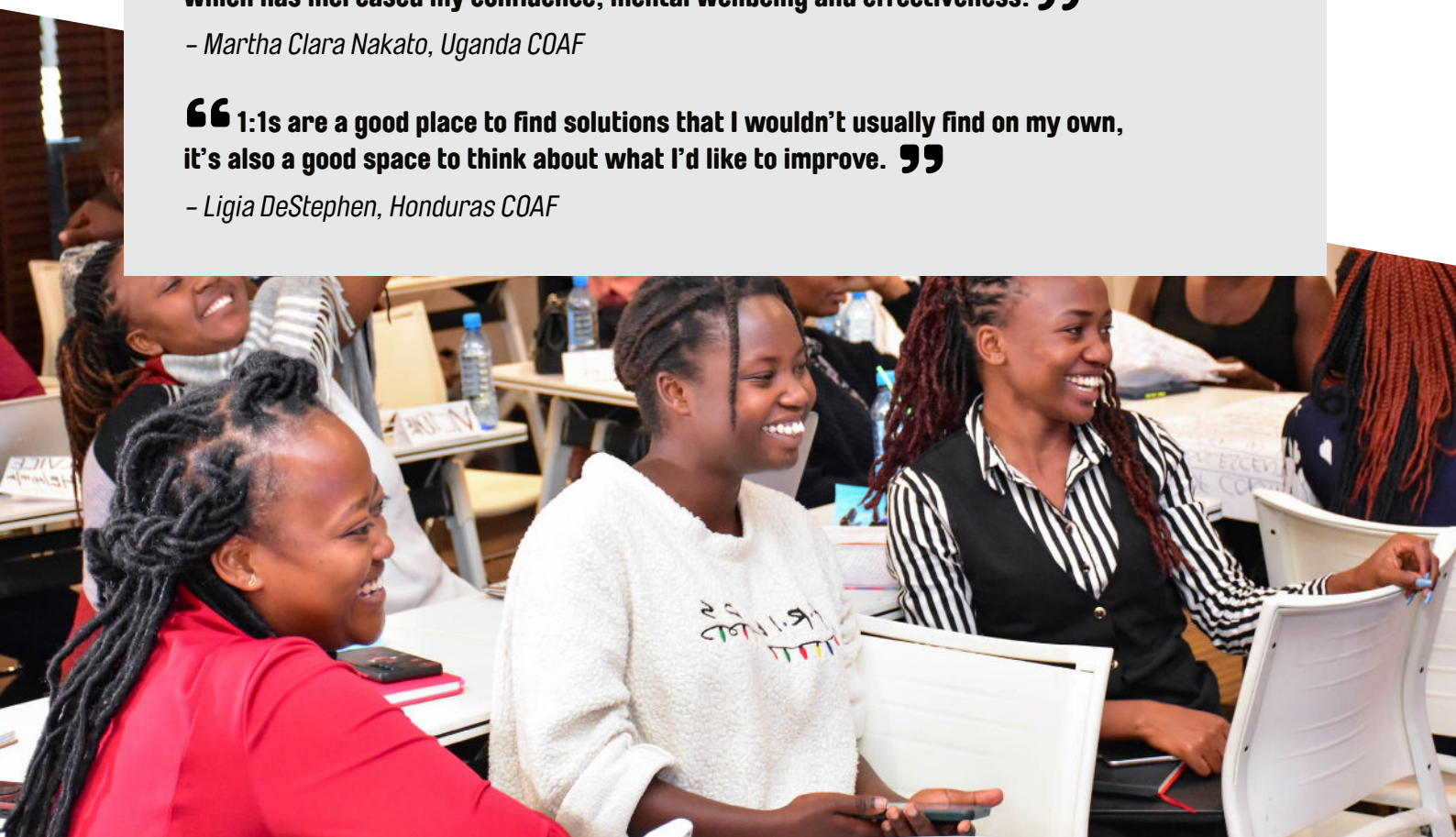
*- Aldovanda Theodosio Djive, Mozambique COAF*

**“ Leadership accompaniment has indeed been very instrumental in my personal leadership development journey. It has helped me refine my managerial skills and gain valuable insights on people management. I've been provided with support and guidance which has increased my confidence, mental wellbeing and effectiveness. ”**

*- Martha Clara Nakato, Uganda COAF*

**“ 1:1s are a good place to find solutions that I wouldn't usually find on my own, it's also a good space to think about what I'd like to improve. ”**

*- Ligia DeStephen, Honduras COAF*

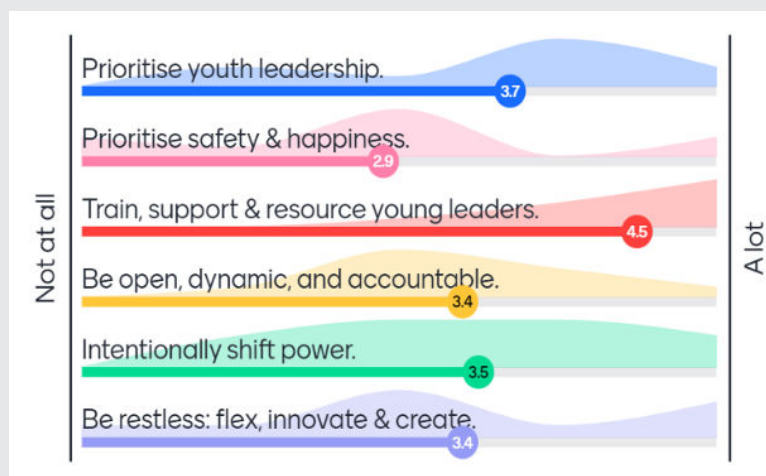






## SPOTLIGHT DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

- Youth Voices in the governance of the consortium: Developed [7 Meaningful Youth Engagement Principles](#) in collaboration with rightsholders in the steering committee. This strengthened meaningful youth engagement in the consortium because the principles define how the consortium engages rightsholders at all levels. A meaningful youth engagement scorecard was implemented to hold the consortium accountable for implementation of these principles; findings from the assessments have been used to improve meaningful engagement of rightsholders across the consortium.
- A We Lead powershifting model was documented and devised with two critical learning questions at its core; firstly, how do Restless Development and other key stakeholders involved in the We Lead program define power shifting? Secondly, in practical terms, how and to what extent is power shifting realized within the We Lead program? The detailed findings from this inquiry were disseminated across the consortium and some of the key insights gleaned around the following: Local ownership initiatives as core strategies of power shifting like training, supporting and resourcing young leaders in the program were overall positively appraised by rightsholders and are perceived to facilitate implementation; rightsholders expressed appreciation for activities designed to strengthen local COA organizations especially participatory grant making; while prioritizing safety and happiness require a bit more concerted effort and attention.



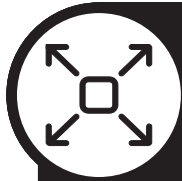


## SPOTLIGHT ACTIONING RESEARCH

- We supported rightsholders in Lebanon, Guatemala, Mozambique, Uganda and Nigeria to lead research on “[Sexual health and rights advocacy in the face of covid-19](#)”. Key findings were launched virtually, attracting seventy-five participants from nine program countries. Organisations in Nigeria, Uganda, Mozambique and Kenya developed action plans in response to the research findings.
- Youth-led Research (YLR) training conducted in Nigeria, Lebanon, and Jordan resulted in increased knowledge of youth-led research methodology. In Nigeria, rightsholders got the opportunity to collaborate with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health on a national level research. The rightsholders participated in the research on Adolescent Health and Development (AHD) in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Health. The lead researcher collaborated with the rightsholders to inform the national research agenda, and validated the data collection tools to make them more youth-friendly and pertinent to a diverse needs of young adolescents.
- In Nigeria, after the Youth Led Research training, [Today For Tomorrow Foundation](#) developed the SRHR programming roadmap with clear roles for the youth led CSOs and NGOs in Adamawa State. It included a pathway to the meaningful participation of 15 youth-led CSOs’ directors and program managers, in the same country Great Women Initiative for Health and Rights is concluding a research on discriminatory practices experienced by sex workers accessing SRHR services, and Girl Power Initiative continued collaborating with youth-led and youth-focused SRHR organizations identified in 2022, forming state-level community action groups. Together, they developed an advocacy kit based on research findings and utilized it during advocacy engagements with stakeholders.
- In Kenya, Resilience Action International (RAI), a youth organisation in Kenya, transitioned to Kobo Collect for data management in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement Scheme. This shift from Google Forms to Kobo Collect simplified data collection and analysis, enabled offline use, and enhanced accessibility. Inuka Success Organization also adopted this tool for its operations.







## SPOTLIGHT

# CAPACITY STRENGTHENING OF RIGHTSHOLDER LED ORGANISATIONS

- We conducted 21 training workshops in Youth Led Research (YLR), Youth Led Accountability Training and Meaningful Youth Engagement, reaching 280 rightsholders across the 9 countries.
- In Jordan, MYE training for 26 COA members resulted in an [MYE code of conduct](#) in Arabic, localizing the Global MYE principles.
- Kenyan organizations like Action for Sustainability Initiative (AFOSI) and [Positive Young Women Voices](#) (PYWV) developed plans to cascade MYE training to their rightsholders, Dream Achievers Youth Organization (DAYO) planned to sensitize duty bearers in Kilifi County on MYE, and Nyimine Community based organization–NYECBO plan on supporting rightsholders to participate in the budget–making process in Siaya County.
- CoA organisations also mapped how they will integrate the MYE principles in their work, including 1) revising their policies and governance structures to include diverse young rightsholders in leadership positions, and 2) ensuring that rightsholders are represented in national, regional and global advocacy spaces, and committed to train rightsholders on youth leadership.
- In Honduras, the COA developed a national youth–led accountability model that will be implemented in 2024–2025, placing rightsholders at the forefront of advocacy and overcoming traditional barriers to conducting advocacy.
- In Uganda, [Uganda Network on Law Ethics and HIV/AIDS](#) (UGANET), a COA member, hosted a key dialogue to evaluate efforts to bridge gaps in SRHR, HIV, and legal access to healthcare services for adolescent girls and young women. Stakeholders from government, policymakers, CSOs, media, and rightsholders convened to synchronize SRHR and HIV policies for young women in Uganda. and Fem Alliance did an Assessment of the challenges faced by LBG women living with HIV and used the results to inform their advocacy work.







## SPOTLIGHT

# RIGHTSHOLDER VOICES IN GLOBAL AND REGIONAL SPACES

- In 2022, we supported 30+ rightsholders to participate in three global conferences; The CSW 66, virtual conference, attracting 70+ participants from youth civil society, donors, and We Lead COAs. The International AIDS Conference in Montreal, Canada and the International Family Planning Conference (ICFP) in Thailand. We developed a [podcast](#) on Spotify and YouTube, with rightsholders sharing their experiences at the AIDS conference and during the ICFP conference in Thailand.
- We supported rightsholder with media and communications opportunities. Rouba Kiprianos, for instance, one of the rightsholders who championed youth-led research in Lebanon, appeared on the Canada Radio channel sharing the researchs' findings and recommendations.
- The 2022 Instagram live chat led by a community of action facilitators reached 202 people with key tools and strategies to advocate for their Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights.
- In 2022, we united LBTQI+ voices around the world during Pride Month through sharing their experiences, successes and challenges in a global podcast that reached 1500 young people.
- In 2023, we accompanied 2 rightsholders to participate in the Commission on the Status of Women. Rightsholders spoke in multiple sessions such as the Youth Forum, Young Feminist Caucus Launch, the feminist futures event by YP Foundation, Global Fund for Women, UN Women, Generation Equality among others.
- In 2023, Restless Development accompanied two CoA members, Haltek from Lebanon and iDare from Jordan, to attend the CPD6 sessions at UN headquarters and moderated a session around comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and youth with disabilities.
- In collaboration with Hivos and Marsa, we spearheaded and moderated an event at the UN Foundation Nest Hub, facilitated 3 rightsholder participation at Women Deliver in Rwanda, where they contributed to a side event launching the SOYCS report and highlighted feminist movements in their countries, and arranged for a Jordan CoA member to speak at a side event titled "Strategies for Equality in the Arab Region," where she discussed the region's major challenges and proposed solutions as a young Jordanian woman. [We Lead's impact at the Women Deliver Conference 2023.](#)





## SPOTLIGHT LINKING AND LEARNING

- 8 virtual and 6 physical leadership labs provided safe, inclusive and peer led spaces that connected 3,762 youth civil society members to share their leadership skills and tools.
- The 2 leadership labs in 2021 looked at grassroots innovations to strengthen the resilience of youth civil society and led to stronger collaborations through the inclusive spaces.
- The 3 virtual leadership labs in 2022, explored how to mobilise for resources effectively and how to create effective adult youth partnerships to advance issues affecting young people. CSOs attained practical tools to mobilise and to be successful in their advocacy efforts.
- The physical leadership lab organised as part of the MENA convention in 2022, resulted in a strengthened network of diverse COAs uniting to champion sexual rights for rightsholders in the MENA region.
- In Guatemala and Honduras, the physical leadership labs organised in 2022, provided a stronger voice to young rightsholders in the region.
- The Art and Healing leadership lab in Guatemala in 2023, gave opportunity to rightsholders to exhibit their creative work, enhancing public awareness of artistic, community-driven methods for highlighting rights violations and advocacy efforts during the election period.
- The leadership lab on “Standing in Solidarity: Feminism and Colonialism” in 2023, ignited significant conversations and strengthened connections among the organisations that participated in the Lab session.
- Through the virtual leadership on “[Gender Equality More than just buzzwords](#)” organised in 2023, young women from Nigeria, Lebanon, and Uganda shared expertise on gender and social inclusion for youth civil society. 78% of participants gained new knowledge.
- 2 virtual leadership labs held in 2023, titled “[Empowering Youth For Climate Justice](#)” and “[Strategic Advocacy for Gender Equality Investment: Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics](#)”, led to informed advocacy and action among the next generation of leaders.
- Through the [Linking and Learning Conference in Jordan](#) in 2023, MYE was strengthened in the MENA region by shared [key practice tips on MYE](#).





# Lessons learnt

- Leadership development was noted between different sets of young women. Participants in Latin America noted, for example, that while LGBTQ young women were generally perceived as most ‘empowered,’ and that whilst this outcome was aided by We Lead, it was also or mostly the result of years of struggle and mobilisation in their associations of origin. Women with disabilities or displaced women, most of whom were exposed to SRHR-related information for the first time in Latin America, as well as actions that develop their leadership skills, have had less visible advances than other groups, but almost entirely as a result of the program. In the context of, for example, Lebanon, young women with disabilities also appeared to have benefited most directly from We Lead. That is, campaigning efforts generated broader public support for this group of young women, and the results of advocacy efforts were thus far more positive than for more politically contentious groups such as LGBTQ young women.
- We Lead’s training sessions and funding have led to the development and implementation of operational safety and security policies, increasing awareness and mitigation strategies against risks. Despite these advancements, challenges such as limited resources and adverse contexts hinder the full implementation and updating of safety protocols. To address these issues, organizations need comprehensive, regularly updated safety and security policies, crisis communication strategies, and digital security tools. Adequate resource allocation, comprehensive staff training, and robust emergency response protocols are essential.
- There’s also a need for more effective cross-learning spaces, referral pathways for safety issues, and specialized training for individuals with disabilities and those facing intersecting vulnerabilities. Overall, additional support from various stakeholders like government officials is necessary to further enhance capabilities in safety and security.
- There is a need to support MEL capacity, admin and financial strengthening, resource management, financial transparency, institutional strategy, communication, accountability, and policy revision/development. Prioritizing these needs based on each country’s results can enhance organizations’ credibility and sustainability while utilizing resources strategically.
- Accessibility should be prioritized in budget planning, even if it means reducing the number of activities to ensure inclusivity. Manuals, policies, materials, monitoring and evaluation, and research, among others, should also be adapted to cater to different capacities. We Lead may consider hiring expert organizations to support these processes and ensure accessibility throughout the CoA.
- Ensure that on- and offline advocacy opportunities and spaces are mapped and regularly updated and seek where possible cooperation with other advocacy programs.
- The capacity strengthening process should consider the different stages of growth and development of organizations. Grouping Organizations based on their needs and levels of establishment rather than just targeting rightsholders can be a strategic approach. Smaller organizations may struggle to participate in all activities due to limited time and resources, so prioritization and offering optional activities can be beneficial. Allowing organizations to prioritize and select certain activities that align with their capacities and priorities is important. Also, setting a reasonable limit on joint activities per quarter and improving planning and coordination between consortium members and country teams is recommended to avoid overwhelming smaller organizations.
- Incorporate entrepreneurial skills and service delivery alongside the already existing SRHR advocacy efforts in the future when writing proposals as this will lure more rightsholders to be involved in the programs.

# Recommendations

- Make greater use of online campaigning to reach diverse groups of people and communities. Where this is not yet in place, develop an ‘online presence’ communication plan.
- Consider using (more) humor in content production and make use of stories that offer points of recognition to resonate with experiences of a broader audience.
- Ensure on- and offline advocacy opportunities/spaces are mapped and regularly updated (for CoA communication focal points) and seek possible cooperation with other advocacy programs (possibly in collaboration with the Dutch Embassies).
- Convey advocacy messages to the general public during casual discussions and interactions at existing spaces like community meeting points, water collection points, medical facilities, and village gatherings – This recommendation is ultimately within the mandate of the CoA. The national context in which We Lead works is very specific and asks for a localized approach.
- Consider a programmatic shift in advocacy focus from government and legislative level changes to communities/mobilizing activists at this level.
- Capacity-building sessions are of great value. However, provide additional training to understand legislation and its impact on SRH–R of different groups of young women.
- Collaboration among consortium partners: Greater collaboration amongst the consortium members is desirable, especially to coordinate who is offering which capacity building tools to the CoAs. Strategic planning can help shape the CoAs to further professionalize so they can continue the movement around SRH–R after We Lead has finished.

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The MTR generated and collaborated on the relevance of existing questions: what is local ownership, and how is it felt by different actors. It generated questions on what can realistically be achieved considering the influence of the ongoing anti-rights ideologica fractions to rally public support and way political leaders to un-do SRHR policies. That said, the innovative approach of the We Lead program, and the success of localisation registered a lot of milestones to be embraced and celebrated.

For a copy of the evaluation reports detailing these key results, as well as internal progress reports see [www.restlessdevelopment.org/we-lead/](http://www.restlessdevelopment.org/we-lead/)

