READY ACADEMY REPORT

Simunye Country Club & Lodge, Eswatini

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

May 2024

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Simunye Country Club & Lodge, Eswatini, 19 – 25 May 2024

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1. Context

The anti-rights movements have contributed to the heightened stigma and discrimination targeting key populations, the continued criminalisation of HIV, and hindrances to people's access to life-saving services due to safety concerns. This has made community outreach and the provision of services much more challenging and, at times, dangerous for communities working at the intersection of gender, rights, and HIV.

In response to this, Y+ Global, Frontline AIDS, and UNDP, with support from the regional Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands (EKN) in Mozambique, hosted the READY Academy 2.0 under the theme: 'Strengthening the Capacity of Young Activists to Navigate and Thrive in an Ever-Challenging Anti-Rights Landscape'. The READY Academy 2.0 was held in Eswatini from the 19th to the 25th of May 2024. It brought together 30 adolescents and young people (18-29) across the region, including the READY peer educators and allied youth movements representing diversity and inclusion.

The Academy 2.0 aimed to equip young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to effectively document and raise awareness about human rights violations, advocate for removing discriminatory/punitive laws, and influence social norms change. It sought to build and promote alternative solutions to the realisation of young people's sexual and reproductive health rights and the AIDS response in Africa and beyond. The Academy was designed to help build a stronger movement of young African advocates and activists at the forefront of HIV and SRHR issues through a 'Doing Development Differently' framing, harnessing knowledge and expertise towards a global health and rights agenda. It was held with the following objectives:

- To strengthen the participant's advocacy and programming skills;
- To build cross-movement collaboration among young leaders in all their diversity;
- To strengthen emerging advocates' leadership and strategic focus when working in hostile environments;
- To enhance collaboration between EKN-funded grantees and other allied movements;
- To develop measurable country action plans to implement, disseminate, and evaluate the seed grants.

As a result of the READY Academy, young activists within the East and Southern African region were expected to be equipped with knowledge of approaches and concepts in human rights, gender, SRHR, and HIV programming; be linked to industry practitioners for sustained mentorship; and access seed funding opportunities after submitting concept notes.

The READY Academy 2.0 was designed and delivered through a regional collaborative approach, with partners involved in co-creating the Academy concept and format; co-developing and teaching modules; learning and innovation through the ethical engagement of young people; and ensuring joint visibility and amplification of the READY Academy as an innovative and sustainable platform for building the capacity of young activists and advocates. The six day Academy was guided by a master schedule agenda and course outline developed by the faculty.

2. Overview of Sessions and Discussions

DAY 1

The READY Academy kicked off with remarks from Maximina Jokonya, the Executive Director of Y+ Global, who introduced the purpose of the Academy, agenda and the expected outcomes. A significant amount of time was spent in ensuring participants had a shared understanding of the objectives of the Academy and in agreeing on norms that would allow for an inclusive and engaging learning experience. Participants were then taken through a pre-test questionnaire, and interactive panel discussions with donors and READY Academy alumni.

Learning sessions on the first day focused getting participants well-versed with the theoretical foundations of key concepts that would be explored during the Academy. Participants were introduced to the perspectives and approaches of different donor agencies, as well as to the concepts of safeguarding, advocacy and international human rights standards.

| LEARNING SESSION	FACILITATOR
Safeguarding, an Introduction to Safeguarding: Key Terms and Concepts	**Leigh-Anne Agnew** (Frontline AIDS)
Strengthening SRHR and HIV Responses Across the African Region: the Dutch Government's Strategy for Leaving No One Behind	**Joao Chongo** (Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mozambique)
Investing in Impact and Transformation: EJAF's Vision for Africa	**Columbus Ndeloa** (Elton John AIDS Foundation)
What is Advocacy? Ethical Engagement of Young People in the Global SRHR and HIV Field	**Maximina Jokonya** (Y Plus Global)
An Introduction to International Human Rights Standards	**Oratile Moseki** (Frontline AIDS)

DAY 2

Learning sessions on the second day focused on exploring themes of safeguarding, human rights, gender, power, security, sex and sexuality as well as technical knowledge on concept note writing, learning through drama, monitoring and evaluation. The day had an overall focus on evidence generation and analysis but included thematic sessions to cater for the limited availability of visiting faculty.

The sessions provided foundational information on concept note writing, monitoring and evaluation, and learning through drama. The sessions explored thematic content on health, gender and power; rights to health, gender, sex, and sexuality; and safety and security from a risk perspective. Some of the sessions were conducted using interactive tools including group work, a power walk, role play and a fireside chat in the evening.

| LEARNING SESSION	FACILITATOR
Safety and Security from a Risk Perspective	**Leigh-Anne Agnew** (Frontline AIDS)
A Focus on Rights to Health, Gender, Sex and Sexuality	**Oratile Moseki** (Frontline AIDS)
Introduction to Concept Note Writing – Winning Proposals!	**Tumie Komanyane** (Frontline AIDS)
Health, Gender and Power	**Tumie Komanyane** (Frontline AIDS) and **Petronella Mulenga** (READY Academy Alumni)
Monitoring and Evaluation: – Unlocking Project Potential	**Chenge Dziwa** (Frontline AIDS) and Maxwell Katekwe (Y+ Global)
Learning through Drama: Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the Theatre of the Oppressed (Part 1)	**Tumie Komanyane** (Frontline AIDS)
Fireside Chat	**Maximina Jokonya** (Y+ Global)
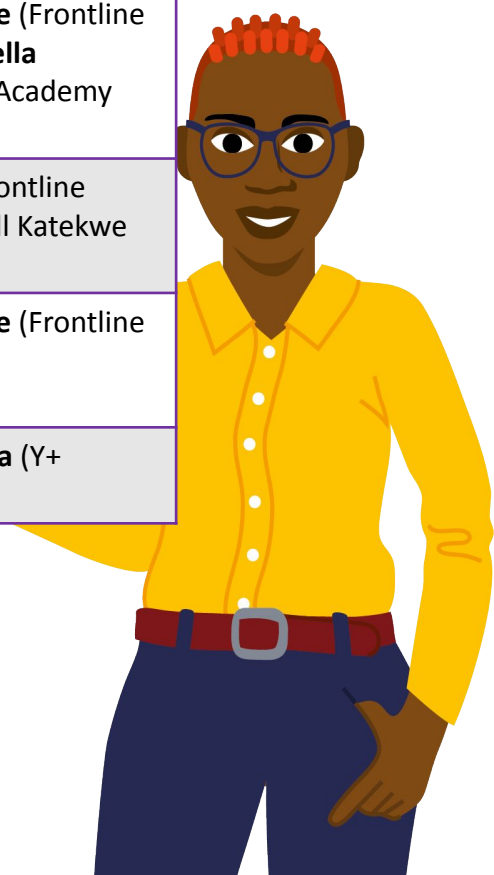
DAY 3

The main focus of the third day's sessions was on The day focused on leadership and accountability through thematic presentations covering the topics of activism, human rights, and responding to anti-rights and anti-gender movements. Sessions on the third day enhanced participants' knowledge about the operations of diverse movements and aimed to provide them with strategies and abilities to promote human rights in difficult contexts.

The format of some of the sessions was adjusted following the previous day's feedback, with more group work, technological tools and multi-media content incorporated into presentations. Participants also had more time to share feedback, ask questions and find a resolution to their concerns. This meant greater percentage of the session for the day and following days will promote active participation and usage of Kahoot, Menti-meter, Jamboard and other interactive platforms

LEARNING SESSION	FACILITATOR
Learning Through Drama: Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the Theatre of the Oppressed (Part 2)	**Tumie Komanyane** (Frontline AIDS)
The Anti-Gender Movement and its Impact on the HIV Response – and What We Can Do About It	**Yumnah Hattas** (Frontline AIDS)
The Anti-Rights Movement, and its Impact on the HIV Response – and What We Can Do About It	**Oratile Moseki** (Frontline AIDS)
Gender Transformative Approaches and Anti-Gender Movements	**Yumnah Hattas** (Frontline AIDS)
Rising Conservatism and the Future of Advocacy in Action: An Advocate's Viewpoint	**Lyle Muns** (Aidsfonds)
Accountability: What It Is and How It Plays Out (or not) in Our Lives	**Berry Nibogora** (UNDP)
Movie Screening: "The Commission: From Silence to Resistance"	**Berry Nibogora** (UNDP)
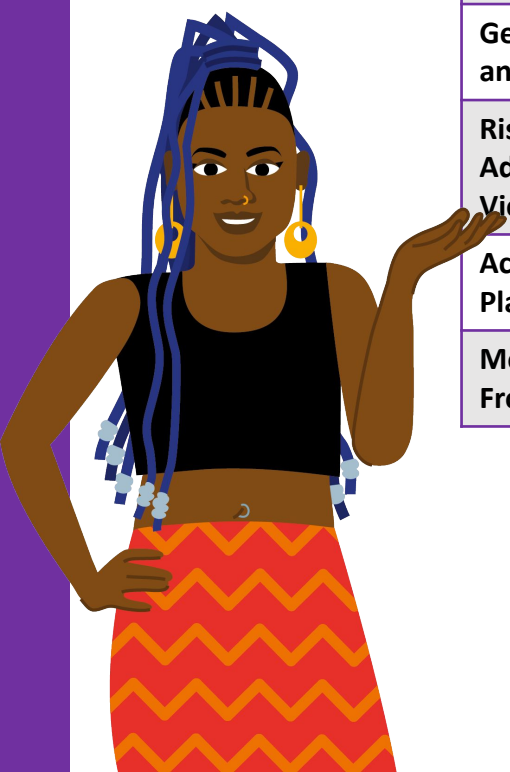
DAY 4

The fourth day of the Academy focused on programming and implementation through sharing practical information on how participants could translate their ideas for change into tangible advocacy projects. It covered topics on concept note development, work planning, movement building, storytelling for data gathering, leadership, and policy advocacy. The sessions incorporated thematic content on disability inclusion to help participants apply different approaches to advance advocacy for youth with disabilities.

LEARNING SESSION	FACILITATOR
Movement Building Strategy and the READY to Evolve Strategy	**Joyce Ouma** (Y+ Global)
Young People: Disability and Rights	**Maria Bakaroudis** (UNFPA)
Concept Note Budgeting and Work Plans	**Tumie Komanyane** (Frontline AIDS)
Storytelling for Data Gathering	**Maxwell Katekwe** (Y+ Global)
Leadership: Policy Advocacy and the Use of Digital Tools to Engage Decision-Makers	**Berry Nibogora** (UNDP)

DAY 5

The fifth day focused on partnership and community engagement, with participants spending the entire day on a field trip off-campus. The first visit was to the CANGO offices to convene a virtual session with a representative of the Global Fund, and the second visit was to participate in the launch of the Stigma Index Preliminary Report upon invitation by the Eswatini Network of Young Positives.

LEARNING SESSION	FACILITATOR
Mbabane Field Visit – CANGO Offices	**Thembinkosi Dlamini** (CANGO)
Community, Rights and Gender	**Vuyiseka Dubula** (Global Fund)
Mbabane Field Visit – Stigma Index Preliminary Report Launch	**Precious Shongwe** (Eswatini Network of Young Positives)

DAY 6

There were no learning sessions on the final day. The day was primarily used for finalizing the assessment of concept notes for funding, administering the post-test for participants, awarding certificates, and evaluating participants at the end of the training. 17 concept notes were submitted in total and an marking rubric developed for the criteria used to mark and assess.

Five concept notes were selected to win the $2,000 seed grant prize each, with four individuals and one country team receiving funding. The list of young people who won represented the following countries:

- **Zambia**
- **Kenya**
- **Malawi**
- **Zimbabwe**
- **Team Tanzania.**

3. Evaluation Findings

EFFECTIVENESS

Participants marginally increased their knowledge and confidence in different advocacy areas as a result of the READY Academy. Participants recorded a combined increase of 13% in knowledge and confidence from a pre-test average score of 68% to a post-test average score of 81%. The assessment sections were divided into two, that is, Section A which was a self-assessment of participants' confidence with content, and Sections B and C which were more of a knowledge test. Section A was scored out of 50 and Sections B and C were scored out of 25. In the pre-test, participants scored an average of 37 out of 50 (74%) in Section A and 14 out of 25 (56%) in Sections B and C. This brought the combined pre-test score to 51 out of 75 (68%). In the post-test, participants scored an average of 44 out of 50 (88%) in Section A and 17 out of 25 (68%) in Sections B and C. This brought the combined pre-test score to 61 out of 75 (81%).

The test results indicated the changes in knowledge and confidence that took place in participants through the READY Academy. They give a full reflection of the extent of learning with participants responding that the training actually covered all the topics they expected against the set clear objectives. However, some data was incomparable as participants used different unique identifiers for the pre and post-tests, whilst two participants who were not present for the pre-test, responded to the post-test, and this was taken as a key learning for future.

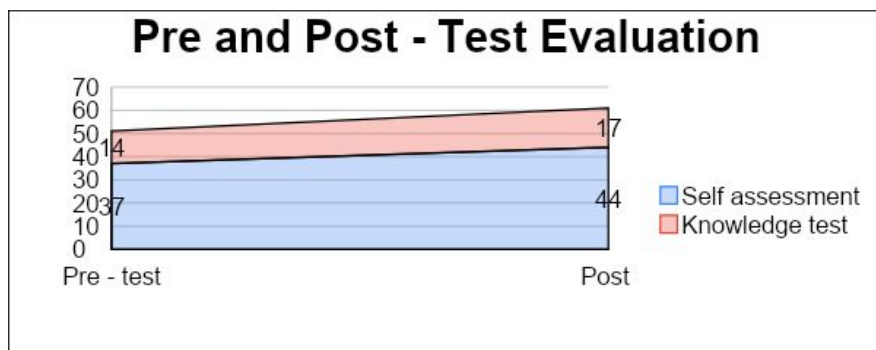*Figure 1: READY Academy Pre/Post-Test Evaluation*

Figure 2: Participant Survey Results

RELEVANCE OF CONTENT

Feedback from participants revealed that majority of the sessions were easy to understand and follow the outline process.
Participants expressed satisfaction with the timely dissemination of the agenda and appreciated the responsiveness to any adjustments, with feedback promptly provided. When queried about the consideration given to their input, participants indicated that they perceived the program as customized to their needs, highly relevant, and responsive to their feedback, aligning with their everyday experiences and national context. Faculty members actively sought and discussed participant feedback on a daily basis, subsequently deliberating on methods to enhance the program and integrate the feedback received. Each session consisted of a session plan that described how the session would be delivered and the facilitator will first explain the program's aims and objectives to participants

How do you rate the clarity of presentations?

Rating	Count
Excellent	15
Very Good	8
Good	3
Fair	1
Poor	

"*Self-care day is needed cause the information can be too much*" – **Participant**.

RELEVANCE OF DELIVERY

Quality, coherence and consistency of the session The responses from the participants outlined that the READY Academy organisers engaged all the facilitators ahead of time to ensure a shared understanding of the demands of running an Academy. The pacing, quality and flow of all sessions were streamlined before the READY Academy begins. The faculty developed session plan template and core modules for the academy as standard guide, with process having started months prior the Academy. However, some session were cut on time though the organisers need to ensure that the quality of content is upheld for all sessions, regardless of cuts in the quantity and time.

The time allocation for some sessions was not enough, however, significant improvements were noted and this was taken as a key learning to adjust the schedule in the next READY Academy In as much as there was a session plan and methodology of delivering the sessions in the course outline, some participants reported not having enough time during few sessions to ask questions, reflect on learning, and complete assignments. Faculty members also reported facing difficulties in deciding whether to provide more content in a limited timeframe or to reduce the amount of content to allow more time for reflection. This also showed that the level of engagement of the participants and facilitators was high and that's why more time was spent on discussions and engagements also giving specific country contexts examples and experiences.

Participants were afforded time to interact with each other, reflect on learning, and give feedback to facilitators during some sessions and also outside the classroom. Feedback from participants highlighted a preference for sessions incorporating group work, technology utilization, and interactive question-and-answer segments. Additionally, they expressed an appreciation for extended opportunities for informal engagement, such as evening fireside chats and morning self-care periods. Out-of-campus activities, including attending the Eswatini stigma index and off-site lunch events, were also well-received. However, faculty members noted that a few sessions seemed to adopt a workshop format rather than aligning with the intended academy-style learning approach.

Some participant's engagement was negatively affected by language differences, mobile phone use, and delays in participants' adaptation to the new environment. Few participants were observed to have struggled to engage with other participants and with facilitators during the first few days of the READY Academy. During the first few days, some participants were observed to be distracted and using their mobile phones during sessions. Additionally, some participants needed translation of course content into Swahili and Portuguese. Those who required support on translation were supported by the alumni participants to better understand and comprehend the information. On the second day going forward the faculty had to agree with participants on the management of phones, and to be only used during online feedback time like when using kahoot, and mentimeter.

> *"More time should be given for the concept note writing"* – **Participant**.

LOGISTICS AND ADMINISTRATION

Most invited participants arrived safely at the READY Academy and took part in all its sessions. Most expected participants arrived in time for the first day of the READY Academy, however, few participants arrived late due to unexpected flight changes. A few invited participants did not take part in the READY Academy due to delays from their source organizations in processing their logistics as some young people were to be supported from other partner organisations.

The READY Academy experience was largely inclusive and supportive for participants. Feedback from most participants reflected that the READY Academy was inclusive and allowed for the participation of a diversity of young people. Participants reported feeling comfortable and gradually integrating with young people from a mixture of different identities and backgrounds. Despite the positive experiences, participants noted that there were no people with disabilities in the READY Academy.

Food from the resort was not always made available on time. On some days, participants did not receive food on time, and in some instances, their food was cold. Upon investigation, the faculty identified that there was a breakdown in communication for pre-ordered meals as the resort did not notify participants when their food was ready, and participants did not want to eat at the time that the resort delivered the food.

Addressing the technological access and accommodating diverse group of participants to fully participate in the seed grant challenge. The faculty made sure all participants are accommodated during the concept note by tailor making the concept note templates for both that have access to laptops and others who prefer or had to hand write their application. This was to ensure fairness and equity for the seed grant winners. More so, the faculty team was open at all time and made themselves available for an participant who would want support and guidance in the concept note development process. However, the Wi-Fi in the resort did not have a strong signal and affected the time taken for those who wanted to do desk research and also delaying virtual sessions.

DELIVERY

4. Key Considerations for Advancing the READY Academy

RECOMMENDATION 1: Create a safe learning environment for all learners as per the principles of 'Do No Harm'. All facilitators need to commit to creating a safe space for learners to share their experiences and connect with the experiences of others without harming their mental health. In cases where content is likely to take a heavy toll on learners' mental health, such content should be adjusted or removed from the session. Facilitators should also consider including success stories and other positive narratives when presenting sessions with difficult content.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Introduce measures to minimise distractions, focus learning and improve participant interactions with each other. READY Academy organisers should introduce robust rules on mobile phone use during sessions and should do so in a way that fosters ownership from participants. Seating arrangements need to be adjusted to encourage participants from different countries to sit together, and to keep participants visually focused on the facilitators during sessions. One faculty member recommended introducing a horseshoe seating arrangement to ensure focused learning.

RECOMMENDATION 3: READY Academy organisers to spare more time for pre and post test so that and a self care session just prior to the academy Academy organisers need to be more particular on the time and due diligence to the pre and post test sessions for the data to be easy to compare and analyse. More so, there is need for the organisers to be intentional on providing self care sessions and skills to participants prior to the Academy.

LOGISTICS AND ADMINISTRATION

RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve preparation and resourcing for prospective participants before the start of the Academy. The READY Academy organisers should strictly follow the selection criteria and consider coordinating prospective participants per country and holding preparatory sessions with them. The organisers should consider providing laptops for participants who will not be able to secure a laptop to use during the Academy.

RECOMMENDATION 5: As standard to always compile all course content before the start of the next Academy. All prospective facilitators need to submit their content well before the next READY Academy. All existing content needs to be compiled and regularised to be replicated for future use. The upcoming READY Academy website can be used as a repository of learning materials for future facilitators and learners to access.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Provide dedicated mental health support for participants in future Academies. The READY Academy organisers need to include trained counsellors in the faculty to provide mental health support to participants throughout any future READY Academy programmes. Additionally, organisers need to forecast which sessions are likely to trigger participants emotionally and to prepare participants in advance.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Include dedicated communications personnel in the faculty of future READY Academies. Organisations responsible for the READY Academy need to avail at least one communications officer/specialist to support the READY Academy's social media posting on-site and to amplify the academy in real-time

Learning Outcomes

1. The learners demonstrated adeptness in critical thinking and creativity through their innovative design of concept notes and proposals. These submissions exhibited a high degree of creativity and structured communication, effectively addressing the diverse needs and challenges encountered by young people. Furthermore, the proposed solutions and interventions were thoughtfully executed. Notably, despite most participants lacking prior experience in proposal writing, their knowledge and skills culminated in a positive outcome during the academy.

2. During the observation period, participants exhibited a strong commitment to upholding human rights, respecting human dignity, and embracing diversity. This was particularly evident from the fourth day onwards, following sessions focused on combating discrimination and promoting gender equality. Practical assessments were conducted to evaluate participants' attitudes and behaviors as advocates for human rights. Moreover, participants displayed enhanced confidence through their engagement in role-playing activities and the delivery of presentations to their peers during the academy.

3. In the realm of teamwork and collaboration, participants adeptly engaged in team environments, demonstrating proficiency in their assigned tasks and providing constructive feedback within the learner's WhatsApp group. Throughout the academy, participants were regularly reorganized into diverse groups, showcasing their ability to collaborate and support one another, transcending language barriers. They effectively distributed tasks among themselves, yielding the anticipated outcomes for each assignment. Moreover, some participants took the initiative to collectively submit their proposals for seed grants.

4. After the in-person academy, the participants are expected to continue receiving mentorship to prepare them to lead and support advocacy initiatives at national, regional, and global levels. They should also be able to facilitate sessions, make presentations, and engage key players in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Human Rights discussions. This progress will be assessed after six months. Participants who receive the seed grant are expected to initiate projects that will enhance the capacity of other young people in their communities.

Reflections from one of the seed grant winners three months after the academy training

Gender Equality, Monitoring and evaluation, sex and gender security, and rights related to health

Gender equality

From the sessions I learned under gender equality, I find it beneficial as I am applying the information to encourage discussions about gender to help young people understand their own identities and the societal norms that shape them. This understanding leads to greater self-acceptance and respect for others.

As I am under organisation where young people who are at risk of contracting HIV are empowered economically, I am inspiring young people to challenge gender norms to motivate young people to pursue their goals and advocate for equality in their communities.

Rights related to health

On rights related to health, I am advocating access to healthcare, as I am linking up young people who at school with healthcare workers and bringing contraceptives to the institute for easy access, regardless of gender

Comprehensive Education, by being a life skills and sexual health trainer I am empowering young with comprehensive sexual health sessions as I educate young people to understand their bodies, rights, and responsibilities.

Gender and sex, safety and security,

From the session under gender, safety, and security, I am acting and pursuing a safe space at school where young people address issues related to identity, rights, and equality. I also started sensitizing young people to understand and appreciate differences in terms of gender

Monitoring and evaluation

At the academy, we also learnt about monitoring and evaluation. I am conducting focus groups, interviews, and case studies to gather in-depth insights into the experiences of young people regarding gender equality.

I am doing surveys and questionnaires to collect numerical data that can be analyzed statistically. Before I educate young people on sexual health, I am Conducting a baseline assessment to understand the initial status of gender equality among youth before the implementation of any session.

Next Steps

The faculty for the READY Academy will conduct a review survey encompassing all participants to gather comprehensive insights into the learning outcomes and overall impact of the academy after seed grants implementation. This initiative will serve as a platform for evaluating and providing feedback on the progress of the seed grant winners' initiatives and their resultant impact.