



Strategy for engaging young people as champions of change

Background

To achieve its mission of creating an enabling environment so that women and girls in Nigeria can reach their full potential, Voices for Change (V4C) chose to work with young women and men, especially those enrolled in post-secondary institutions. These young people are in a unique position to affect wide reaching and lasting change and to revitalise movements for gender equality and women's empowerment as future leaders, teachers and parents.

V4C's approach

V4C has developed a curriculum that engages young people in a process that encourages personal reflection and change; building on their personal transformation, young people are supported to make changes in their own lives and in the community and society to achieve greater gender equality. The process is guided by three key principles:

- Learning and personal transformation are best enabled by a pedagogical approach that values **participation and empowerment**;
- As young people become engaged, they need to be encouraged to channel their new found commitment into **actions** that will support gender equality; and,
- The curriculum and the delivery need to be **context sensitive and adaptable**, such that all young people can access it and objections can be managed and concerns allayed.

V4C's experience

V4C developed a curriculum that was delivered in small face-to-face groups called 'Purple Spaces', in post-secondary institutions across the four target states. This curriculum was also adapted and provided digitally through 'Purple Academy' to reach more young people. Finally, V4C began early testing of a model called 'Purple Fusion' whereby the digital curriculum was accessed by small groups of young people, hoping this would bring the transformative experience of small group discussions to the low cost and highly scalable curriculum of the Purple Academy. This last model was successfully tested but not rolled out due to time constraints.

The V4C experience shows that young people who engage with the curriculum, through whichever approach, undergo a significant personal transformation and then actively seek to engage in their communities to affect wider change for women and girls. The process has been most effective on post-secondary campuses. This success is due to some important factors: not

least the conscribed nature of student life on campus, which allows students to meet frequently and to have defined targets for change; the fact that this approach ran for the longest time in V4C; and the fact that the intense nature of the Purple Spaces approach effected the deepest transformational change V4C was able to measure. Students on campuses also built on their learning and formed action groups (Purple Clubs) at their own initiative. Through these Clubs, they organised to support each other, for example to take up leadership roles, and to target discriminatory policies and practices. Emerging evidence shows similar levels of engagement and of a desire to take action among participants in the digital learning space, Purple Academy.

The challenges and V4C's response to them

By charting new, untested ground V4C faced many challenges. Because of the innovative nature of this work, V4C's approach needed to be able to respond to what we were learning, as such we built in regular reviews of the curriculum with facilitators, students, and partners. The curriculum underwent three versions in the space of four years, and has been made stronger and more effective with each change. For example, the curriculum now challenges young men and women to think about relationships and power, including how money can function between intimate partners, and to explore how they have used or experienced violence; various participatory tools are used to encourage young people to speak and to engage with the issues through drama, role play, debate and small discussions.

Similarly, V4C adapted the physical space curriculum to the digital sphere – something for which we found no known precedent – through an iterative approach, learning from feedback and from data on usage patterns. The access to detailed, regular data on users' journeys and patterns of use has been vital to guiding adaptations.

Drawing from learning from organisations – who have some similar experiences, albeit not in Nigeria and with different target groups – especially Every1Mobile and Sonke, has also been important. Additionally, V4C's Nigerian implementing partners have come with a deep knowledge of the areas in which they have implemented the programme and V4C has relied heavily on them to adapt to and manage local challenges.

As such, building on relevant, existing experience, taking an iterative, adaptive approach, and ensuring deep engagement with young people have together ensured that V4C produces an empowering, participatory and transformative learning experience – resulting in over 70,500 young people who have learned with us, many of whom have gone on to take concrete actions in support of gender equality and women's empowerment in under four years.

Conclusions and practical implications

The theory of change of V4C posits that young people have the potential to become active 'change champions' – carrying new norms about gender equality and women's empowerment to their friends and families and to demand changes in the communities and institutions that affect them. The programme's work and results have proven this theory. V4C has learned that young people become change champions and contribute to change when they are exposed to new norms, personally connect with these new norms, and when they gain connections to other individuals and groups who can support them to make changes in the world.

As such, a key learning is the need to work with multiple actors – including young women *and* young men, women in politics and business, religious and traditional leaders, and the media. When young people are transformed and impassioned about the issues, and then linked to wider networks, they become champions for gender equality. In turn, they revitalise and re-energise the movement for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Key results

Over the four years since initial implementation of this strategy:

- Over 70,500 young women and men have deepened their knowledge and understanding of gender equality through Purple Spaces and Purple Academy.
- There is documented evidence of 10,700 of them going on to take actions that promote gender equality in their lives, among their family and friends and to influence the institutions around them.
- The young people we have reached have also gone on to spread the word about Purple to almost 60,000 new people.