The Ohangwena Youth Health Taskforce (OYHTF) is a coordination platform of all relevant stakeholders who are working on improving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and lives of young people in the Ohangwena Region in Namibia. This multi-sectoral task force strives to provide more accessible youth-friendly SRH services and increase the use of these services by the youth in the region. It operates under the leadership of three key government ministries involved in youth well-being – the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS), Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MEAC) and Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Services (MSYNS).

**Background**

The task force is all about creating synergy, coordination, and enthusiasm, and then ‘institutionalising’ this attitude! This is clearly a new form of cooperation and coordination rarely seen in our region.

— OYHTF Member

**Why Was It Established?**

In the Ohangwena Region, as in the rest of Namibia, the three ministries working with youth face specific challenges:

- **MoHSS**: High numbers of new HIV infections, poor male involvement in HIV testing and SRH care and low rate in the uptake of male circumcision.
- **MEAC**: High rates of school dropout as a result of teenage pregnancy.
- **MSYNS**: High rates of youth unemployment and lack of recreational facilities, which often lead to alcohol abuse.

The communities also faced a high burden of HIV, with most new infections occurring among the youth, high rate of baby dumping and recurrent incidences of gender-based violence. The task force was therefore, formed to address these challenges.
HOW DID THE TASK FORCE START?

The task force was established in May 2014 with 20 members. Since then, the task force has held mini-workshops every six to eight weeks. During the first few workshops, the terms of reference were developed and two technical working groups for coordinated activities established (teenage pregnancy and male involvement).

GOAL OF THE TASK FORCE

The overall goal of the OYTHF is ‘the creation of a smart partnership through coordinated and collaborative efforts aimed at designing tailor-made youth health interventions within the region that consider and address the needs of young people using a consultative participatory approach.’

“We as a task force refuse to accept the status quo of Ohangwena Region. If something is not working, then why keep doing the same old thing?” — OYHTF Member

OBJECTIVES

• To improve access to HIV prevention and integrated SRH services for the youth.
• To strengthen the HIV and other sexually transmitted infection prevention programme for young people.
• To create more awareness on SRH services and on gender-based violence among young people.
• To develop mechanisms to monitor progress and document lessons learned.
• To increase overall youth involvement and offer a platform for them to become involved.
• To design participatory, tailor-made health interventions that address the needs of young people.
• To create synergies through coordinated and collaborative efforts.

MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP

The following member organisations are represented on the OYHTF.

• The three key government ministries, MoHSS, MEAC and MSYNS and the Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology.
• Administrative bodies, including the Ohangwena Regional Council and the Eenhana Town Council.
• Various NGOs working in the areas of SRH, family planning, alcohol abuse, gender-based violence, human rights, childcare and protection, youth recreational and sports activities, such as Namibia Planned Parenthood Association, Total Control of the Epidemic, Lifeline/Childline Namibia, Star for Life and Galz & Goals.
• Youth organisations.
• Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (German Development Cooperation).

SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OF THE YOUTH IN OHANGWENA REGION – SOME FACTS

HIV infection
• Of new HIV infections in Ohangwena Region in 2012, 40% were among young people aged 15–24.

Teenage pregnancy
• Ohangwena Region has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates amongst Namibia’s 14 regions. In 2013, it was 22.7% (NDHS).
• 690 teenage pregnancies were reported between January and August in 2015 (DHIS).

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BEST PRINCIPLES

The task force endeavours to work on the following principles:

• Efficiency and sustainability through the principle of combination of resources, not relying on external resources.
• Scheduled time for joint planning and knowledge exchange leads to creation of synergies and coordination.
• Personal commitment - no delegation accepted - and non-hierarchical structures leads to successful implementation.
• Interventions integrate youth and respond to culturally and regionally specific needs of young people in regard to SRH leading to greater impact.
• Scaling up impact: cooperation and use of synergies lead to better results and opportunity to reach more young people.

The task force has developed a work plan, which includes a budget based on shared resources, both in terms of financial and capacity resources. If and when needed, it mobilises resources from willing donors.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

Since its establishment in June 2014, the OYHTF has rendered commendable service and recorded some significant achievements:

• Several HIV awareness and testing days were organised for young people and males in particular. In 2015, over 2000 young people and community members were tested during various activities organised by the OYHTF.
• The World AIDS Day Road Show, 2015 was conducted from November 9 to 13 2015. During this period programmes raising HIV and AIDS awareness and HIV testing were carried out at 11 sites across Ohangwena’s three health districts.
• Training sessions for HIV peer educators and awareness raising on gender-based violence were organised among young people. A teenage pregnancy awareness march was also held.
• The task force’s efforts have resulted in increased participation by young people in activities at the government-run Eenhana Multi-purpose Youth Resource Centre, leading to an active and vibrant atmosphere at the facility.
• Increased use of SRH services at the youth-friendly clinic at the Eenhana Multi-purpose Youth Resource Centre. The centre, run by NAPPA, has noted that the number of youths coming for HIV counselling and testing has increased by 240%.
• With the support of the Ombetja Yehinga Organisation, youth groups have been trained to give innovative performances using dance, singing and drama to raise their awareness on HIV and AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and other topics. The groups reached over 40,000 learners between 2013 and 2015.
• About 4000 students and more than 400 out-of-school youth have participated in life-skills classes run by a local NGO, Star for Life between 2014 and 2015. Lessons and activities in these classes help enhance knowledge of HIV and STIs and build self-esteem.

QUOTES

"We think there are fewer cases of teen pregnancies since these awareness-raising events started."
— Members of a youth group in Eenhana

"We performed our dances on the New Start Day for promoting HIV awareness, counselling and testing. We really drew a crowd, who watched us dance and then went inside for a HIV test."
— 17-year-old female dancer

"Besides dancing, our Youth Club also sings and performs a drama about HIV and AIDS, and Teen Pregnancy. We travel to many different communities in Ohangwena Region and talk to the youth before and after our performance. I really think fewer girls are getting pregnant now."
— 23-year-old member of EYC
BEYOND OHANGWENA – CONTRIBUTING TO THE ESA MINISTERIAL COMMITMENT

The OYHTF is considered as a ‘good practice’ for the implementation of the Ministerial Commitment on improving sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV prevention among young people in Eastern and Southern Africa at a local level. The Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Commitment was first endorsed in December 2013 by Ministers of Health and Education from 20 Eastern and Southern African countries. Since then, participation has increased and in 2016, 23 countries affirmed their commitment to the nine ESA targets. The main goal of the Commitment is to deliver good quality comprehensive education on sexuality and a better access to youth-friendly health services for young people. The OYHTF contributes directly to the indicators of the ESA Ministerial Commitment. The task force has been acclaimed as a good practice exercise and efforts are being made to replicate the initiative in other regions of the country. Between April 2015 and May 2016, an OYHTF team, together with a national level team consisting of representatives of MoHSS, MSYNS, MEAC, UN and GIZ visited the 13 regions of Namibia to educate the stakeholders on the ESA Commitment and to portray the achievements of OYHTF as an example of local level implementation.

For further information contact:

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For more information on the Ohangwena Youth Health Task Force also see the video documentary:
http://health.bmz.de/what_we_do/HIV-and-AIDS/studies_and_articles/Together_we_shine_youth_health_development_in_Namibia___s_Ohangwena_region/index.html

For more information on the ESA commitment visit:
http://youngpeopletoday.net/