

# **Dissertation**

**Masters Programme in International Health (MIH)**

**TropEd-Programme**

**Swiss Tropical Institute, Basel**

## **“Working with young people”**

Curriculum Design of an International Training Course for  
Health Workers on Adolescent Health in Developing  
Countries.

Relevance and Challenges

Tutor: Dr. Keith Sullivan (Centre for International Child  
Health (CICH), London)

Co-Tutor: Dr. Axel Hoffmann, Swiss Tropical Institute

## **Executive Summary**

Today, it is generally agreed that the ability of a society to develop is based at least in part on the extent to which it can integrate the potential and input of the younger generation into development processes. Youth promotion has therefore become a cornerstone in the policies of many donors and developing countries alike. And this with good reasons: Young people are the real experts of their life world. They are no longer children and are to be taken serious. Adults and development professionals should therefore trust far more in adolescents' skills, knowledge and creativeness to find suitable solutions to their problems.

Furthermore, it is young people in particular who are affected by structural problems and their accompanying phenomena such as increasing poverty, civil war, migration, exclusion from social services, education programmes and unemployment.

But the perception of young people has changed over the last years. They are no longer viewed only as a problem group or as passive recipients of assistance and interventions designed by adults and so called experts but increasingly as social actors in their own right.

Adolescence is the time in life for developing attitudes, skills, values, behaviours and practices which considerably affect the health situation of adults. Therefore, it makes adolescents the perfect target group of health education activities. The significance of addressing adolescents in particular lies not only in their perceived enhanced practices and attitudes towards health issues as future adults, but as qualified "health promoters": They might also play an important role in sensitising communities and peers alike. But despite the alarming figures of HIV/AIDS and other negative health indicators, health is one, but not the most important issue on the personal agenda of the majority of young people in developing countries. While planning and designing health programmes for adolescents it has to be taken into account that what ever adolescents learn has to be "marketable" and must promote so called soft skills, which help young

people to “survive” in the modern world. One of the reasons why many health education programmes are bound to fail or are at least not effective as they could be, is the fact that the training element of life skills is missing or not addressed properly. Because of this, there is a rising acceptance among public health professionals that the strategies used to prevent and react to important health issues in adults have to be adapted if they are to meet the particular needs of young people. Health professionals working with youth need therefore special training courses and ongoing professional development to enhance their skills and keep them up to date. To be a qualified health worker does not necessarily mean that they are automatically good “youth workers”. Especially in developing countries many health professionals have been raised in the same traditions and beliefs as the parents of the adolescents and do not know how to reach and deal effectively with young people.

An extensive internet research has proven, that there are only very few training courses for professionals working with young people that try to combine adolescent health issues with youth work methods, and none of these taught practical skills on how to approach and work with young people. In conclusion, there is not a single training course which prepares health professionals to be effective youth trainers in the area of adolescent health.

Even the IPPF/GTZ-Course on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health had, despite a strong methodological approach, its own short-comings with regard to cost-effectiveness, sustainability and coverage of relevant youth topics,. The TWIGA-training in Uganda, on the other hand, reaches young people quite successfully but has little information on health. But both these programmes demonstrate clearly that specific youth approaches can be effective means of youth empowerment – they are examples of how youth social work approaches and methods contribute to promoting a healthy life and improving livelihoods and poverty alleviation.

These findings - stemming from a literature review, an extensive internet research, many discussions with colleagues in Europe and Africa and my own professional experience in working with adolescents – have lead me to the attempt of developing a practical course which aims to familiarise health professionals and youth social workers with the distinguished characteristics of adolescents and to suitable approaches to addressing their health requirements and problems. At the end of the course, participants should be able to develop and implement strategies for effective involvement and participation of young people and their communities, to improve the situation of the health status of young people, and to motivate stakeholders to invest in and promote health advocacy projects for adolescent health.