



“Stepping Stone “
Youth Voices Count Strategic Plan
2017-2020

About Youth Voices Count

Youth Voices Count (YVC) is a regional community network of sexual and gender minority youth in Asia and the Pacific. Founded in 2010 by 40 young gay men, transgender women, and other men who have sex with men, from 19 countries, YVC addresses issues related to HIV, health, and human rights through capacity building, advocacy and community mobilization. Led by a dynamic group of young persons from the region, YVC brings together community leaders to address stigma and discrimination, including self-stigma, and to leverage the power of young people in regional and international gatherings, including its most recent involvement with UNAIDS High Level Meeting on HIV held in 2016 in New York, USA.

Over the years, YVC has raised concerns and unique needs of their community at various other conferences including the 2011 International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) held in Busan, Korea; 2012 International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Washington, D.C.; 2013 ICAAP in Bangkok, Thailand; 2014 IAC in Melbourne, Australia; NS 2016 IAC in Durban, South Africa.

YVC launched the '*Loud and Proud*' campaign (2013-2016) that produced short documentaries on self-stigma amongst young people from diverse gender and sexual backgrounds living in China, Fiji, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. '*Jumping Hurdles*' (2015) raised the issue of lack of youth-focus on HIV and related services for young gay men, transgender people, and other men who have sex with men, and advocated for youth-friendly health services. YVC's IGNITE Mentorship Program (2014-2016) strengthened capacity of LGBTQ+ youth leadership in areas of advocacy and program management.

After six successful years of building a movement of young persons of differing sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, YVC proudly presents and shares its strategic plan for 2017-2020 with its key focus areas of advocacy and capacity strengthening for young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities that include:

- Promotion of youth-friendly health services;
- Improving mental and physical health and wellbeing;
- Increasing social acceptance in education and employment;
- Monitoring community & public commitments, policies and practices; and
- Expanding and creating an effective and sustainable network in YVC.

Acknowledgements

Youth Voices Count is grateful to the generosity and support of UNAIDS Regional Support Team Asia and the Pacific. Thanks to everyone who contributed to YVC’s online survey on strategic direction. We acknowledge your effort and hope that your recommendations have come through the strategy. YVC also thanks the ‘Core Working Group’ that includes Abhipraya Aroliasyah, Brian Kevin Par, Doan Dhan Tung, Thanakarn Vongisitsin (Bella), and Kami Sid (in absentia); and thanks to Andrey Tran for participating as a member. YVC acknowledges the support of its in-country members and civil society partners, donors and the Secretariat. Thanks to those who provided invaluable insight, including Ben Xue and Gareth Durrant. Our deep appreciation to Niluka Perera for his determination, strength, and inspiration to work beyond the call of duty, and for making sure that YVC continues to grow and function as a meaningful and effective regional advocacy platform for young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons (LGBTQ+). Thanks to Sarah Zaidi for facilitating the strategy meeting and preparing the strategic plan.

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organizations
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer plus persons
MSM	Men who have sex with men
PrEP	Pre-exposure prophylaxis
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
STI	Sexually transmitted illness

The YVC CWG also welcomes any suggestions on this strategic plan to further improve its relevance and engagement with its community and members.

[24 February 2017]

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Explanation of Terminology

YVC applies the *Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2006)* that confirm legal standards for how governments and other actors should end violence, abuse, and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and ensure full equality. LGBTQ+ is an acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons”. Although it is often considered as a Western concept, it also designates a community of people whose sexual orientation and gender identities create shared political and social concern. The term MSM, men who have sex with men, was created to avoid such labels and focus solely on behaviors for public health initiatives. The United Nations has also used the term sexual and gender minorities.

For the purpose of YVC strategy, SOGI is the preferred term but LGBTQ+ is used when necessary. Intersex is not included as it refers to a range of anatomical conditions that do not fall within standard male and female categories. Intersex persons can also have a range of sexual orientation and gender identities as non-intersex persons. YVC defines and include adolescents and youth from 15 to 30 years old.

Refers to each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.	<i>Sexual Orientation</i>
Refers to a person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, or a combination of genders. A person’s gender identity may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth (and may involve modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means such as expression of gender through dress, speech, and mannerisms.	<i>Gender Identity</i>
A woman who is attracted to other women.	<i>Lesbian</i>
A man who is attracted to other men.	<i>Gay</i>
An individual who is attracted to both genders.	<i>Bisexual</i>
An umbrella term that covers individuals with a diversity of gender identities and forms of gender expressions and whose biological sex does not match these identities. Persons who identify themselves in a different gender than that assigned at birth.	<i>Transgender</i>
Persons who experience fluidity in their experience of sexuality or gender, and do not identify themselves as LGBT. It can also include person who do not identify as either gender.	<i>Queer</i>

Introduction

As part of its commitment to stay relevant and engaged to its community, Youth Voices Count (YVC) has taken the opportunity to reflect, and develop its strategy for 2017-2020, which is a result of an extensive consultation of its members, partners and supporters. This strategy emerges at a challenging time when overall HIV resources are shrinking in the region, and yet more than one-half of all new HIV infections are in youth, especially amongst young gay men, transgender women and other men who have sex with men (MSM). There is also very limited knowledge, discussion and acceptance on identifying as a person of differing sexual orientation and gender minority outside of the heteronormative environment.

Since 2010, Youth Voices Count (YVC) has been at the forefront of HIV advocacy on issues that directly affect young men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender people by providing a platform and building capacity of its members. It has established strong and meaningful partnerships with regional community networks, UN agencies, global networks and non-governmental organizations. It has grown its membership from 40 persons to over 140 members in 22 countries. All these successes have taken place despite YVC never registering formally as a regional network.

YVC, while continuing its work on advocacy including on HIV-related investments for youth and youth-friendly health services, has expanded its network to include:

- Persons of differing sexual orientation and gender minority including those that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+); and
- Youth between 15 and less than 18-years old, as adolescence can be a difficult time and especially challenging for young people who feel they are different from societal ideas of normalcy. YVC through its network of young adults can support adolescents by creating safe spaces and providing information.

Recognizing that homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and other forms of stigma and discrimination affect sexual health, social and economic disparities, YVC is the first regional network of LGBTQ+ young people that is youth-led positioning young leaders to advocate for ending discrimination, violence and stigma (including self-stigma) and ensuring that unique needs of young people and commitments made to them are acknowledged, implemented, and met.

The strategy takes into account the *UNAIDS Fast-Track to End AIDS (2016-2020 Strategy)* and the *High Level Meeting Commitments, Bridging the Gaps – UNDP Youth Strategy and Key Populations (August 2016)*, and the *Sustainable Development Goals*. It is based on responses from YVC's online survey, inputs from key supporters including the YVC Core Working Group, and a literature review on the situation and challenges facing young people of differing sexual orientations and gender minorities in the region.

Vision

Youth Voices Count envisions a society in which young people of [all] sexual and gender diversity including [those that identify as] lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer identities lead safe and free lives with equal opportunity to achieve their full potential and well-being.

Mission

YVC is a network connecting and empowering LGBTQ+ adolescents and young adults between ages of 15 to 30 years to advocate on their health, safety and security, and social acceptance in Asia and the Pacific.

Core Values

Youth-led: YVC believes that young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities are the leaders of YVC, engaged in all levels of decision-making, participation, and activities.

Safety and Confidentiality: Every person has an inalienable right to a safe and secure environment, including confidentiality regarding sexual orientations and gender identities. YVC provides a safe and respectful space for members in which every person has an equal voice that is heard without judgment.

Innovation and Creativity: Given the power of new and emerging technologies, pushing forth-new modalities of communication, YVC is committed to exploring innovations to help foster diverse perspectives of young LGBTQ+ people.

Sharing and Collaboration: The spirit of participation and sharing of information, resources, experiences and technical assistance to the best of members' abilities underpins YVC as it strives to address the issues of LGBTQ+ youth with integrity, professionalism, and commitment.

Transparency & Accountability: By promoting widespread participation from members across countries with differing languages and cultures, YVC ensures accountability of the network to its members by operating in an open, visible and predictable manner with easily measurable standards to guide the work of the Secretariat.

Rationale

There is a scarcity of research and information on social and health determinants, health status and risks, health seeking behavior, and other aspects of life for young people of differing sexual orientations and gender identities in Asia and the Pacific. While there have been advances in recognition of rights of gay men and transgender women largely as a result

of HIV programming on male sexual health, the majority of the LGBTQ+ community remains invisible and ignored. UNDP in 2015 hosted *The Regional Dialogue on LGBTI Human Rights and Health in Asia-Pacific* (26-27 February, UN Conference Center, Bangkok)¹, which brought together more than 200 representatives of governments, development partners, national human rights institutions, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people and other civil society members from more than 30 countries to discuss “Being LGBT in Asia”. The *Regional Dialogue* noted that many countries have laws and policies that directly or indirectly discriminate or criminalize people on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity, and that binary gender concepts, often promoted by conservative moral and religious frameworks, are harmful contributing to social alienation, hostility, and violence. For young LGBTQ+ people it is increasingly difficult to fully realize and claim their rights. The issue is not just about decriminalization but also about laws and policies that control young people’s bodies, such as laws relating to parental consent and marital consent as a requirement to access health services.

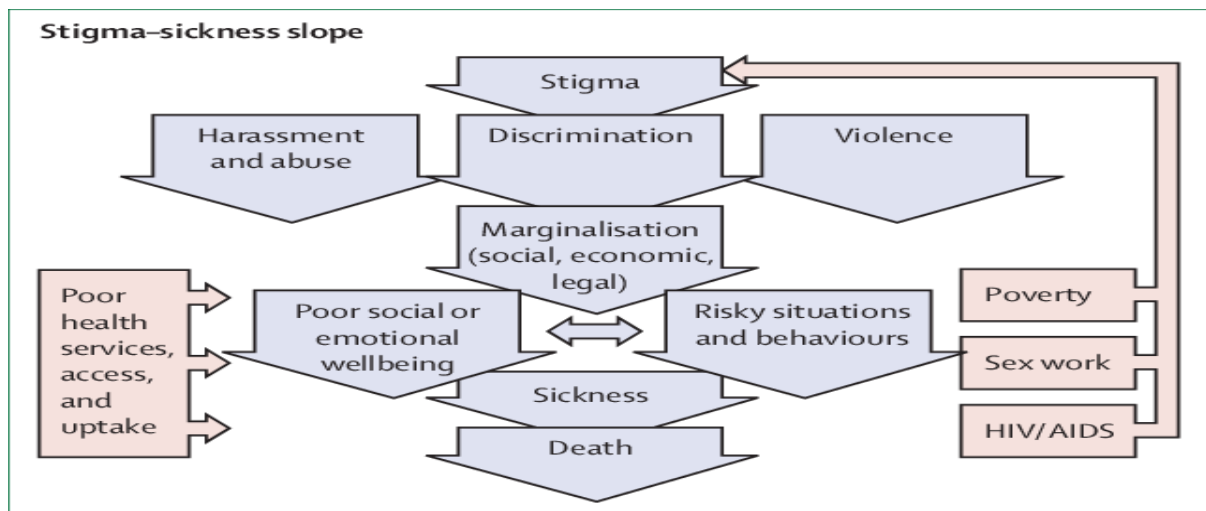
Participants expressed that gender and sexual minorities face stigma and discrimination in employment, health, education, housing, justice, and other government services. Young gay men, transgender women and other bisexual and queer persons are exposed to increased risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted illnesses, but at the same time have limited access to healthcare and often face stigma and discrimination from service providers.

Young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities often share risks linked to belonging to other groups such as race, ethnicity, sex workers, people who use drugs, and migrants. The experience classified as “minority stress” leads to poor health and wellbeing. The ‘Stigma-sickness’ slope (Figure 1) developed by UNDP (2012)² for transgender persons can apply for all LGBTQ+ persons, illustrating not only the role of external factors but also situations and patterns of behavior involving unsafe sex and substance abuse including risk of self-harm.

Figure 1. Stigma-sickness slope. (Winter, 2012)

¹ UNDP (2015). *Report of the Regional Dialogue on LGBTI Human Rights and Health in Asia-Pacific*. 26-27 February 2015. Bangkok.

² Winter S (2012). *Lost in transition. Transgender people, rights and HIV vulnerability in the Asia-Pacific region*. Bangkok. UNDP.



Focus Areas and Network Functions

Based on existing guidance and literature review of youth-related resources, results from YVC's online survey to inform this strategy, YVC members' past experiences, and strategic discussions amongst the Core Working Group (CWG), YVC has identified five areas of opportunities in which it should be involved. These include:

1. Promoting youth-friendly health services;
2. Improving mental and physical health and wellbeing;
3. Increasing social acceptance in education and employment;
4. Monitoring international and national commitments, policies and practices; and
5. Expanding and creating an effective and sustainable network in YVC.

Since its inception, YVC as a regional community network working towards social change has performed several functions admirably, which include but are not limited to:

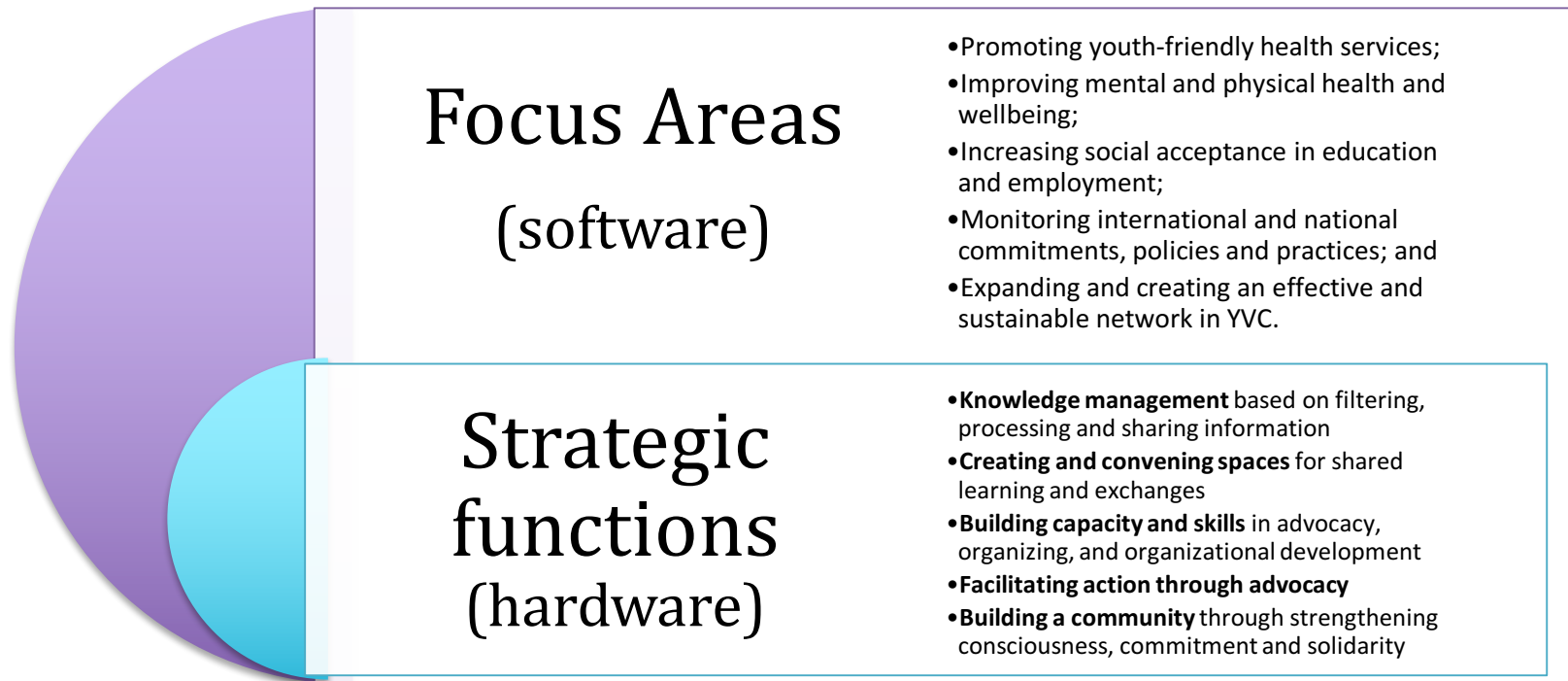
- Community-led knowledge management based on filtering, processing and sharing of relevant information;
- Creating and convening spaces for shared learning and exchanges;
- Building capacities and skills in members' advocacy, organizing, and organizational development;
- Facilitating actions through its close and engaged network; and
- Building a community through shared goals, commitments and solidarity.

It will continue with these strategic functions, essential and stable aspects of network practices that are necessary for catalyzing social change. Applying the analogy of a personal computer, the strategic functions are the hardware machinery of a network and the

substantive issues areas (issues of current concern to the community) are the software (Figure 2). YVC, by using this new strategic plan hopes to not just reboot the entire system, but aims to make it future-proof by investing in the sustainability of its programs and projects through its members working at the intersections of various issues areas and catalyzing broader and effective collective actions.

To this day, YVC strongly believes that young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities have the right to sexual and reproductive health information; confidential, consensual and quality health services; supportive mental health environment and safety from physical harm including gender-based violence; opportunity to pursue education in a non-bullying and respectful setting; and access to meaningful employment and economic security. The YVC strategy is premised on the fact that young LGBTQ+ have an inalienable right to reach their full potential in society.

Figure 2. YVC Focus areas and strategic functions.



YVC Objectives and Strategies for 2017 - 2020

Impact: *A positive change in delivery of health services for young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities as a result of informed, highly trained, and engaged youth leaders.*

Objective 1

Empower and support new leaders of young people to advocate on HIV, mental health and other health services that are 'youth-friendly'.

Strategies:

- Implement the YVC toolkit on 'youth-friendly health services' by building the capacity of national level youth activists and expanding the toolkit to address the syndemics of HIV, substance abuse, sex work, and mental health and social support.
- Engage young LGBTQ+ persons to support self-testing and focus on importance of HIV prevention strategies that includes the use of treatment as prevention for sero-discordant couples and access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).
- Develop the capacity of adolescents to advocate and promote sexual health information and consensual and confidential health services for adolescents.

Impact: *Commitments made to young persons in international and national settings are fulfilled as young leaders have better understanding of policies and programs and recognize the value of evidence-based monitoring.*

Objective 2

Build the capacity of youth leaders to monitor commitments towards LGBTQ+ young people through evidence-based analysis.

Strategies:

- Research and develop a monitoring framework on existing commitments in health, HIV, education, workplace and repealing of discriminatory laws and practices.
- Review and include policies and promises made through international treaties, Political Declaration on HIV, Global Fund Concept Notes for countries, and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Develop a scorecard/report card tracking progress, Youth Watch. Engage in partnerships for analysis and advocacy.

Impact: *Empowered young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities expressing themselves and participating through different mechanisms including an integrated platform that allows them to safely and privately navigated and explore their*

sexuality and gender identity with other regional peers.

Objective 3

Develop physical and online safe spaces for young LGBTQ+ people to exchange information on health-related needs, worries and questions on health, and accessing health services.

Strategies:

- Design an online platform for young LGBTQ+ people in Asia and the Pacific through integrating existing YVC platforms that shifts the sexual health paradigm away from fear, shame, and denial towards acceptance and celebration of differences in sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Collect and present youth-friendly information through a range of communication tools, such as webinars, infographics, videos, online forums and directory of experts and youth-friendly services, including on HIV testing and counseling.
- Facilitate physical gatherings of LGBTQ+ young people in Asia-Pacific ensuring safety, security, and confidentiality to enable sharing of experiences.

Impact: *The formalization of a social change network of young persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identities in Asia-Pacific that aims to shift the social, legal, and cultural paradigm that young LGBTQ+ people have human rights including the right to a normal, healthy, and productive life.*

Objective 4

Strengthen YVC as the first regional network on adolescents and young LGBTQ+ persons in Asia-Pacific.

Strategies:

- Build systems that strengthen the governance, management, and financial capacity of the Secretariat to deliver on the YVC mission.
- Identify and engage new members of differing sexual orientation and gender identities, in particular reach out to lesbians, bisexuals, transgender persons and gender queer persons.
- Implement a fundraising strategy to sustain the network.

These objectives and strategies will be closely monitored and evaluated throughout the next three years to ensure that they are met and kept updated through YVC's internal and external communication channels. At this time, YVC is unable to invest in focus area three on increasing social acceptance in education and employment but it intends to examine its interconnectedness with the above objectives.