



Attendees actively participate during the training on sex education in Zanzibar, Tanzania. (Joke Lannoye/UNV programme, 2012).

Training in Tanzania stresses importance of sex education and youth development

How do you equip youth with the necessary skills to avoid unwanted sex? What factors lead to risky sexual behaviour? How do you prevent HIV transmission among youth? These topics form but a snapshot of the issues that fuelled lively discussions during a recent training session on comprehensive sexuality education that I attended in my duty station, Zanzibar, Tanzania.

Joke Lannoye (Belgium) is assigned to the Youth Development programme with UNFPA Tanzania, in Zanzibar, as United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Intern. Before becoming a UN Volunteer, Joke worked with a Belgian NGO which advocates for the inclusion of disability

as an integral theme within Belgian and international policies on development cooperation. Here Joke gives an account of her volunteer contributions in Tanzania:

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The participants, from across Tanzania and Indian Ocean Islands, representing different organisations and institutions, made for an excellent combination of minds and expertise. As a UN Volunteer Intern working on Youth Development, I represented the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with the Zanzibar Liaison Office.

This prevailing myth about sex education is exactly what the training session aimed to address. Research from all around the world shows that equipping young people, with the knowledge and skills to make responsible choices about their sexual lives, does not hasten the initiation to sexual activity or increase it. An emphasis on both abstinence and use of protection for those who are already sexually active is not confusing to young people, but rather, can be realistic and effective.

Attendees exchanged many eye opening experiences during coffee breaks. A participant from Madagascar shared a method for young people in her country to "say no to sex". There, youth can pull out a red card named "aoka aloha" whenever they find themselves in a situation where they feel forced to have unwanted sexual contact.

Discussions on gender equality revealed different perspectives on power relations between men and women and uncovered gender norms. My own values were challenged. Although exchange is very important, it became clear that there is no one-size-fits-all solution and the local context should be taken into account.

As programme officer for youth, I will follow up on the Ministry's action plan and provide technical assistance where necessary. After all, one of the most important commitments a country can make for its future social progress is to invest in the growth and development needs of young people."

Bio: *Joke Lannoye has an advanced degree in cultures and development studies and in clinical psychology. She has collaborated with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) - UNV programme in Youth Development and Sexual and Reproductive Health programmes.*

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