Best Practices and Lessons from Connecting Conversations

KNOWLEDGE SUCCESS AND FP2030

A Series of Discussions on Timely AYSRH Topics

Knowledge SUCCESS

FP 2030

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Photos courtesy of Images of Empowerment.

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Introduction

For Connecting Conversations' organizers, planning and implementation was an iterative process that we (Knowledge SUCCESS and FP2030) continuously adapted based on the interests and needs of our audiences. Here, we will describe our ever-evolving experimentation with the Zoom webinar format that has dominated the COVID-19 era. We will also explore the success stories and hard-earned lessons that we gleaned from the process, drawing from feedback collected from over a dozen interviews with participants, speakers, and moderators. Invoking the series' spirit of knowledge sharing, we will review the programmatic considerations and resources that were most useful to us—or that we wished we'd had from the start. Overall, we hope that these findings will be valuable to other parties looking to create open dialogues and expanded, informal communities of practice.

"Describe Connecting Conversations in one word or phrase."

Structuring Sessions and Allowing for Spontaneity

The Five Themes of Connecting Conversations

1. A Framework for Understanding Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health & Implementing Stronger Programs With and for Young People
2. Parents, Preachers, Partners, and Phones: Engaging Critical Influencers in Improving Young People's Reproductive Health
3. One Size Does Not Fit All: Reproductive Health Services Within the Greater Health System Must Respond to Young People's Diverse Needs
4. Celebrating the Diversity of Young People, Finding New Opportunities to Address Challenges, Building New Partnerships
5. Emerging Trends and Transformational Approaches in AYSRH

We began our series with a foundational understanding of adolescent development. Initially, we had only one speaker per session and slides prepared in advance. While this format worked well for the human development aspects of adolescent health, we quickly realized that it worked less well for other topics of AYSRH, so we shifted our approach. Subsequent themes expanded the conversation to include three speakers with different perspectives—from global technical advisors and researchers to local program implementers working with local CSOs and NGOs. We also recognized that we needed youth perspectives, so we invited young people as speakers.

The short PowerPoint presentations were replaced by more organic, less scripted opportunities for speakers to reflect on their experiences. Other attendees were encouraged to contribute their own comments. The chatbox became especially active as an open forum for everyone to share their thoughts without cutting speakers off.

Most speakers embraced and valued the new flexibility in format. One speaker from Uganda was relieved to discover that the session would be relatively relaxed and "just [give] us that platform to share our experiences freely, no presentation, just having a discussion." Another speaker from the Philippines appreciated that the sessions were "never a one-way conversation." Participants' contributions sparked unexpected moments of insight; for example, during one session, leaders with lived expertise working in humanitarian settings were able to riff on the speaker's points and share their perspectives on adapting to changing environmental factors. This was a development that would not have been possible had the series not made the space for these spur-of-the-moment contributions. In the pandemic-enforced absence of in-person interactions that would allow for sidebars and coffee break chats, one moderator from the United States appreciated our replication of "the kind of conversations that experts would have around the watercooler."

“It was an interesting experience for me. What worked well was how I was informed in advance and given the opportunity to prepare something for the given theme. It was an informal session, without requiring a presentation.”

- Nigerien speaker

Though speakers were given freedom with how they approached each theme, we provided continuous guidance on preparing for their session, including session logistics and what they could expect day-of. One speaker from Uganda liked being able to do extensive research on the session’s overarching themes beforehand. They also found the “prep call” that we held in advance of the sessions useful.

“I was originally a bit unsure, but after the prep call discussing how it would be run and how the conversation would go, it really calmed me down.”

- Ugandan speaker

These prep calls included all moderators and speakers of a given set of conversations (i.e., a handful of sessions), as well as the central organizing team. The calls were an easy way to reinforce the content of the instructions that had been disseminated and ensure that all speakers were on the same page.

In the last four sessions, we experimented with guest moderation. We invited people other than Knowledge SUCCESS or FP2030 team members working on the topics to facilitate the conversations. This guest moderation further contributed to the informal tone and interactive format that set this series apart. Both the moderators and the speakers had the chance to provide input on the questions that the speakers would cover in advance. One moderator from the United States was pleased to find that they were allowed to contribute in a meaningful manner.

Participants and speakers alike appreciated the moderators’ presence. Instead of merely answering a pre-written script of questions, they were happy to engage in naturally flowing conversations with the moderator and the other speakers. Questions weren’t assigned to specific speakers in advance, so no one was ever put on the spot and pressured to contribute, while everyone still had a chance to speak to each topic thanks to the roundtable format. Overall, the casual, conversational atmosphere made speakers feel less isolated and more comfortable with sharing their experiences.

“The other thing that really made me enjoy the discussions was the moderator. She did more than ask questions. It made it feel like we really had something to talk about. It made everything feel so easy to explain and easy to understand.”

- Ugandan speaker

From Knowledge Sharing to Knowledge Application: Examples of Our Impact

"It is a library, a bank of information, for people working in FP."

- Senegalese speaker

One of our primary goals in creating this series was sparking meaningful knowledge exchange regarding AYSRH across different countries, organizations, and sectors. Overall, we received positive feedback in regards to facilitating these sharing opportunities.

Knowledge sharing across different groups was already central to the work of a Ugandan speaker and participant that we interviewed. They added that since lay people don't usually dig through academic papers, it is especially important to share relevant information through more accessible opportunities like this one.

When asked about specific examples of adopting new practices, a participant from Nigeria noted that the series improved their ability to examine adolescents' needs in their work. Before, they would not segment the population by age, but now they include it when planning initiatives regarding AYSRH.

"There was lots of knowledge to share with my people here, especially on family planning. There is much that is not known about family planning, and even in the community, they are negative about family planning uptake—all of which contributes to women having low decision-making in so many things… So sharing that knowledge that I've gotten from you, I will help people and young ones to overcome challenges. Also, to liaise with other organizations for identifying what is needed for these young people."

- Ugandan speaker

"I wouldn't attribute that to Connecting Conversations. That wouldn't be accurate data. But I will say that Connecting Conversations itself has given an opportunity to share across the globe…And I imagine that people shared firsthand knowledge, and that's sharing knowledge too."

- Ugandan speaker and participant

"I have had the chance to participate in the formulation and review of different policies and programs [since participating], and Connecting Conversations has provided tools to keep in mind when fulfilling those duties…These were fruitful brainstorming and discussion sessions."

- Senegalese participant

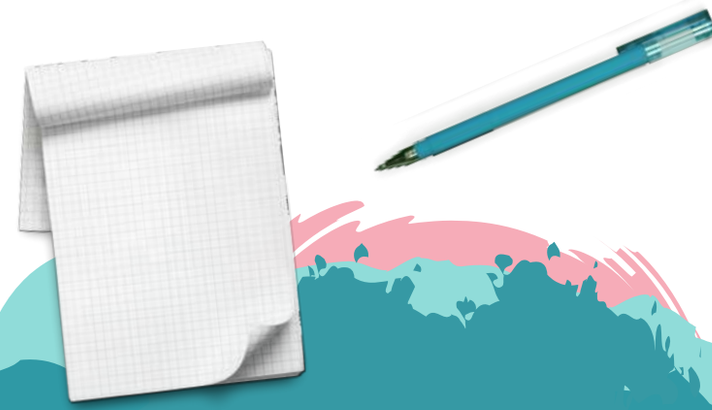
A participant from Senegal also described noticing how each session was organized, how the moderators ran the session, and how the presentations were tightened to meet the time, especially using visuals to capture participants' attention and understanding. Now, they have taken the initiative to improve their own presentations and communications in order to reflect these demonstrated practices. Another speaker and participant, also from Senegal, shared that their organization held subsequent sessions where they essentially had Connecting Conversations at a local level, with similar overarching topics.

Even when the sessions didn't translate to tangible changes in organizations' KM processes, attendees still internalized much of the key messaging. The sessions introduced them to new tools and encouraged them to think critically and expand their knowledge in the area of AYSRH.

"It affected me personally in my views on certain topics related to FP. For example, I participated in a session relating to religion. This prompted reflection on my country and how we tended to address questions related to this topic."

- Senegalese participant and speaker

Creating conversations across different sectors and professions related to AYSRH was one of our priorities from the start of the series. One speaker from Uganda said that their involvement informed their work with both the community health worker programs and the peer education programs that their organization oversees.



"I have been able to help them understand things better. I learned so much with the literature about youth development…how it can be integrated into our community."

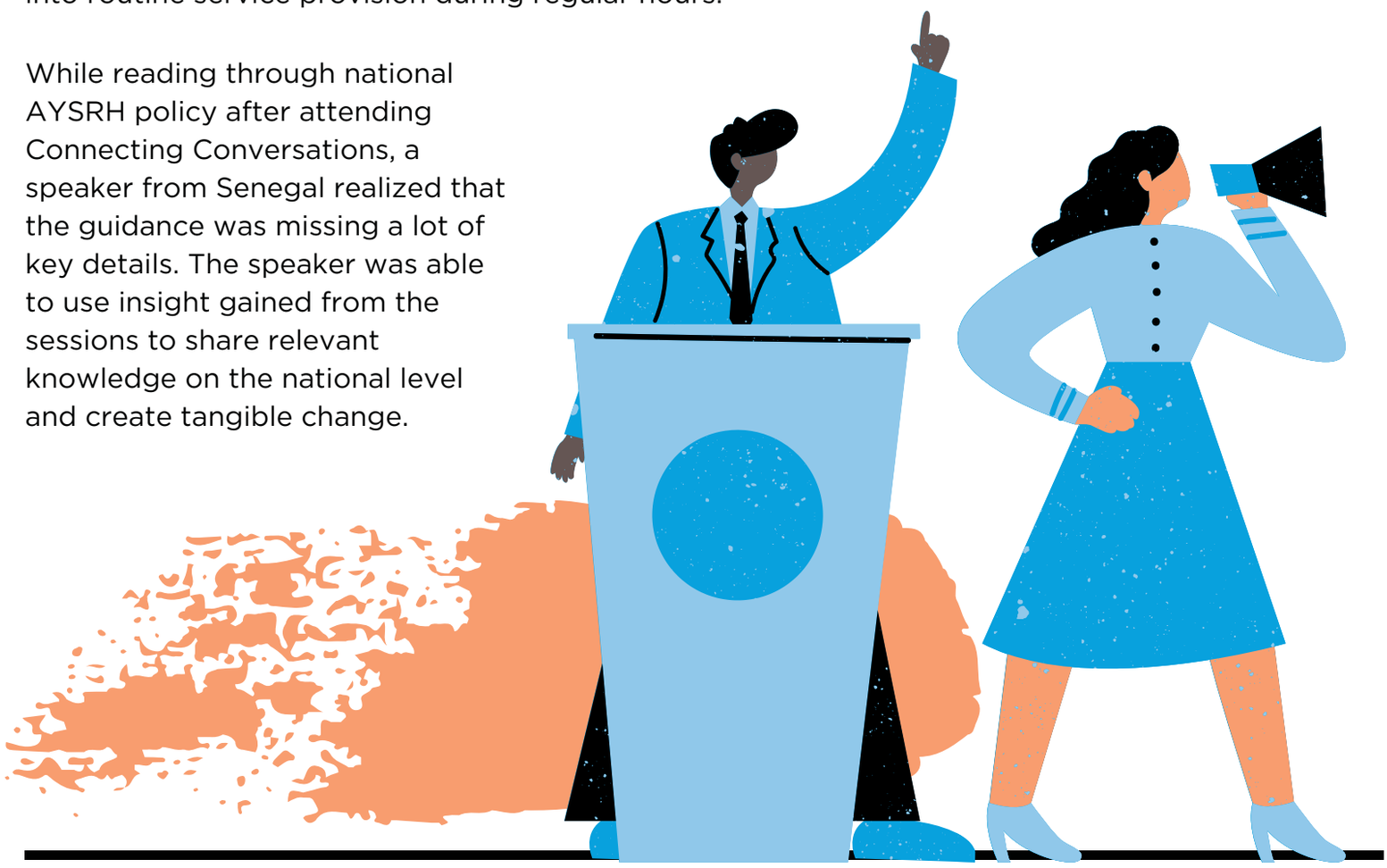
- Ugandan participant

How Participants Integrated Takeaways Into Programs, Policies, and Practice

After attending Connecting Conversations, participants changed programs, policies, and practices as a result of what they learned during the series.

For instance, one participant from Ghana had a colleague from Nigeria to thank for recounting their experiences with integrating different services at a Connecting Conversations session. Now, the Ghanian participant's organization is collaborating with child welfare planning partners in order to maintain a new contraceptive supplies program that makes these products available to grab at different community sites that young people frequent. "Through Connecting Conversations, I realized the need for the involvement of the community stakeholders and religious leaders. When we brought them on board, they knew what they were doing." While implementing all of this, they also began making note of the number of adolescents accessing services. Having this concrete data—as was recommended to them during a Connecting Conversations session—enabled them to show authorities that AYSRH services can be integrated into routine service provision during regular hours.

While reading through national AYSRH policy after attending Connecting Conversations, a speaker from Senegal realized that the guidance was missing a lot of key details. The speaker was able to use insight gained from the sessions to share relevant knowledge on the national level and create tangible change.



"We were able to reflect on our own practices within the context of our own programs … Our methods are similar, universal, between contexts, but there are key adaptations that we make."

- Nigerien speaker

A participant from Nigeria began using age-specific audience segmentation in their work after being inspired by others' anecdotes on the benefits of such practices. They ensured that their organization's AYSRH-related discussions would now include parents, religious leaders, and other influences in adolescents' lives. They are now running focus groups with parents and youth. There is one for youth 15–19 in-school, 15–19 out-of-school, 15–19 married, 15–19 unmarried, and then groups for 19–24-year-olds in the same categories. Drawing from a specific detail that a colleague shared during Connecting Conversations, this participant has begun regularly asking parents, "Do you disclose FP services to your family/your children?" According to them, the parents' responses have been enlightening.

Finally, a speaker from Niger expressed "no doubt" that the sessions had a positive impact. For them, it was a chance to "receive" (that is to say, to learn about something in a different context and then apply it to their own) as well as "share" knowledge. Their organization's programming historically separated couples in order to deliver separate messages, but after learning that others often hosted mixed groups of different genders, of couples and adolescents, all present and exchanging experiences, they changed their discussion formats: "We learned that it can be valuable to have visits at the same time, conjoined, for example with couples, or an adolescent and their parent, in order to lend some weight to the messages and facilitate the exchange/comprehension of knowledge, promoting further reception."

Fostering Pride and Recognizing Success with Attendees

All parties involved seemed excited at the prospect of describing their work to peers. A speaker from Niger said that having this opportunity to share their stories with youth leaders and young people from across the globe had a positive effect on their organization's personnel: "I already had experience with similar occasions, like conferences. But with these sessions, what was uniquely valuable was the chance to share the essentials of the intervention that we'd implemented and explain the elements of success that we took away in aspects other than strictly intervention … I was pleasantly surprised to receive praises from my colleagues who had participated in that session and who were happy to learn about our program, so that it could be recognized outside of our usual context."

A speaker and moderator from Nepal brought the sessions to their context by showing the recordings to Nepalese officials and politicians. Both within and outside of their organization, many congratulated them on their contributions to this initiative. Drawing on this increased recognition—as well as practical recommendations on how to create change, as explored during the Connecting Conversations sessions—this speaker and their colleagues asked the government of Nepal to include disability services under their guidelines on reproductive health. The government had acknowledged these gaps and was looking to proactively address them. "Now when the government identifies an accessibility gap, we are able to be their go-to partner in order to have people with lived experience on-board … Now members are acting as consultants for the government's CSE [(comprehensive sexuality education)] curriculum."

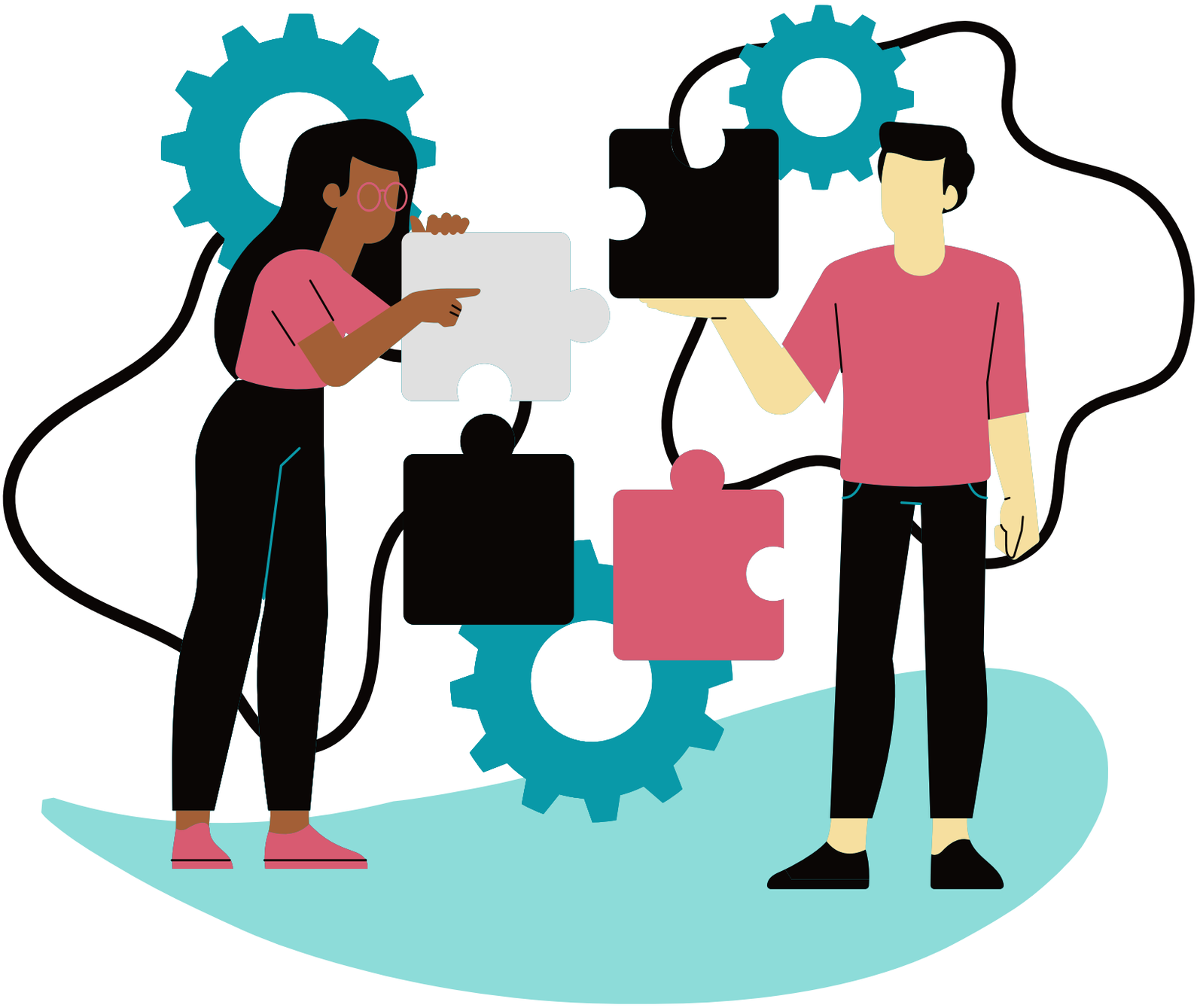
Spotlighting Stories from a Diversity of Perspectives

A participant from Senegal commented that even when the information isn't new, "it's valuable to see it presented in diverse manners. Things get simplified, easier to understand, reinterpreted. Sharing these innovations and developments is good." In a similar vein, a speaker from the Philippines affirmed that it was validating to be met with choruses of "yes, I've seen/experienced that too" from people working with similar populations across different countries and sectors.

Meanwhile, a speaker from Niger found that it was most helpful to hear from people who had encountered issues that they themselves had not yet confronted in practice. After being briefed on potential problems that hadn't yet occurred to them, they were able to plan for these new contingencies and integrate preventative measures into their own programming. Advice gained from the Connecting Conversations sessions therefore became roadmaps so these issues could be anticipated in advance and resolved should they ever arise in these new contexts. A Ghanaian participant similarly found it valuable to hear from attendees from very different backgrounds. A speaker from Senegal echoed these thoughts, concluding, "What really worked was the sharing of different points of view. There were different speakers in each session and we could learn from each other."

One participant found the diversity of perspectives especially useful for enriching their research as well as their fieldwork: "Especially in my country, when we relate our challenges and relate them to other countries, we can look for solutions." Given how personal, expansive, and "human" the sessions came to be, it was interesting to learn that they could still provide unique insights to attendees conducting focused research in an academic milieu that is often dominated by other ways of obtaining and validating knowledge. We made a conscious effort to bring in youth voices wherever possible, recognizing the importance of considering "who is speaking for who" when discussing topics pertinent to specific communities. On the technical side, we used tools like closed captioning for those with hearing impairments or auditory processing disorders; that said, it was pointed out that more could have been done for those with visual impairments. For instance, as a consistent practice, we could have encouraged all those speaking to verbally identify themselves and, if comfortable, describe their appearance to the group.

Indeed, there is still great work to be done in ensuring that terms like "diversity" and "inclusion" are more than just buzzwords to include in initiatives' promotional materials. One speaker based in the United States appreciated that they were "asked to represent folks with disabilities in regards to access to sexual and reproductive health services, especially in majority world countries." They went on to express their interest in participating in similar initiatives, especially since this genre of partnership definitely should not be a tokenized, one-time spotlight. This speaker commented that it would have been nice to see more attention paid to approaches that emphasize intersectionality and acknowledge the realities of facing different challenges at once. For example, there could have been a session dedicated to and led by youth with disabilities who are also living with HIV. The speaker noted that poverty is often highlighted during these broad, global discussions, but that is obviously not the only experience dimension relevant to AYSRH.



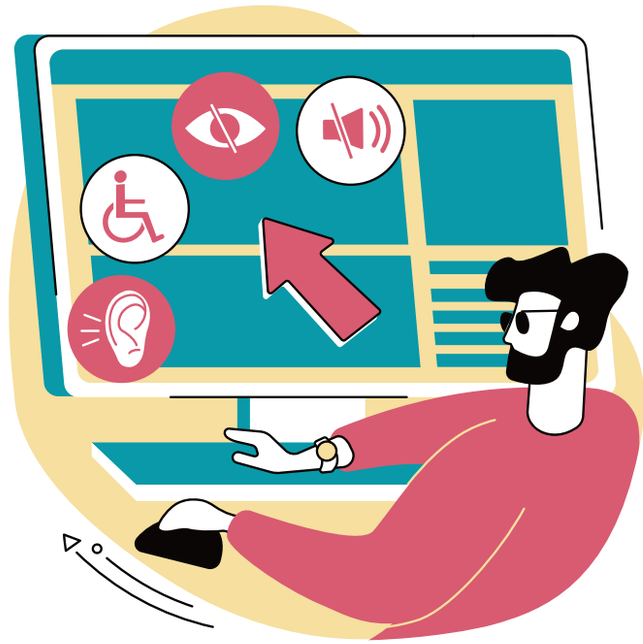
Live Interpretation to Increase Reach, Representation, and Accessibility

Throughout the series, we ensured that live interpretation and corresponding closed captioning was available so that those who wanted to participate in French were able to do so. The follow-up recordings and written recaps of each session were also made available in both English and French. During the evaluation process, we made sure to interview several French-speaking participants and speakers in order to gauge the efficacy of engaging in the discussions via synchronous interpretation. A Francophone speaker from Niger shared that it was nice to have content in both languages readily accessible.

Over the course of the series, our French-speaking following only grew in size; clearly, there is value and demand for planning and promoting synchronous programming that considers attendees who speak different languages.

On the note of potential improvements, a speaker and participant from Senegal suggested that we consider hosting separate sessions centered on the same topics, but specifically for French-speakers, “so that we don’t need to engage via translation methods or jump through other hurdles.” As a team, we will look into weighing the advantages of connecting knowledge leaders across language barriers when they might not have otherwise crossed paths vs. the advantages of running language-specific sessions without concerns regarding interpretation delays, extra technological considerations, and pauses in the otherwise free-flowing discussion format.

Of course, it could also be productive to split participants into smaller groups based on other attributes. One speaker and participant from Nigeria suggested that we consider organizing sessions for specific countries, program types, etc. This would bring more depth and focus to the conversations. After all, “if one country is talking about a potential program, it would be valuable to gather specific relevant connections for collaborations and have that smaller group meet. This is where more precise exchange of knowledge can happen."



Maintaining Audience Members and Continuity Across Sessions

Each Connecting Conversations session was designed to be able to stand alone, and be digestible and beneficial to anyone tuning in for the first time. Still, the series had an overarching structure that doubled as an informal "curriculum" of sorts, and attendees following all of the discussions in order could receive a comprehensive look at key AYSRH concepts—beginning with a review of foundational adolescent development before examining specific stakeholders to engage with, and so on. For any participants who attended or watched all of the sessions, we granted certificates of completion to those who requested them. We hoped that this documentation could support them in a professional capacity and legitimize the time that they spent here, while also incentivizing them to learn more about topics which they might not have otherwise explored.

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3
A Framework for Understanding Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health & Implementing Stronger Programs With and for Young People	**Parents, Preachers, Partners, and Phones: Engaging Critical Influencers in Improving Young People's Reproductive Health**	**One Size Does Not Fit All: Reproductive Health Services Within the Greater Health System Must Respond to Young People's Diverse Needs**
1 Setting the Stage for Understanding and Investing in Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health	6 Parents	10 Adolescent Responsive Approaches
2 Historical Overview of Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health	7 Preachers	11 Program Designs for the Diverse Needs of Young People
3 How Social Norms and Cultural Practices Influence and Affect Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health	8 Partners	12 Implementing an Adolescent Responsive Approach
4 Learning From Our Mistakes	9 Phones	13 Adapting to Meet Young People's Needs as they Grow
5 Conducting a Strong Needs Assessment		

THEME 4 **Celebrating the Diversity of Young People, Finding New Opportunities to Address Challenges, Building New Partnerships**	THEME 5 **Emerging Trends and Transformational Approaches in AYSRH**
14 Young People With Disabilities: Ensuring Inclusive Access to SRH Services	18 Positive Youth Development: Young People as Assets, Allies, and Agents
15 Very Young Adolescents: Leveraging a Key Life Stage to Improve SRH	19 Multi-Sectoral AYSRH Programming — What Works, What Doesn't, Why it Matters
16 Addressing Young People's SRH Needs in Humanitarian Settings	20 Scaling Up AYSRH Programs: Increasing Impact Without Affecting Quality
17 Young People from Sexual and Gender Minorities	21 Relationships between Youth-Led Organizations, Donors, and NGOs

Many attendees served as both participants and speakers over the course of the series. Many participants of the initial sessions were, in fact, inspired to get more involved themselves by later leading discussions on the subjects and programs that they personally cared about. On a practical level, a speaker from the Philippines said that they "found it really useful to attend sessions as a guest before acting as a speaker, as [that first outing] was able to help demonstrate what to expect."

Participants' degree of interest in the specific topic discussed on any given day was a major determinant of whether or not they would decide to attend the live webinar. A speaker from Niger who had also attended as a participant said that it was especially encouraging to join sessions where they felt prepared and confident to speak on the subject. That way, they felt motivated to come and bring something distinct and meaningful to the table.

A participant from Senegal was proud to say that they had attended about 90% of the live sessions. Even in this case, the participant cited interest in each specific topic as their motivation for returning over and over again: "Every time I've seen Knowledge SUCCESS' activities, it was always a topic relevant to my work … Even when I cannot attend, I'd listen in or follow the link afterwards." A participant from Nigeria who attended eight of the sessions explained that they kept on coming back because of how the series continued to "flow" between sessions.

This kind of positive feedback suggests that we should continue utilizing a structure that promotes continuity between sessions. Though there is no assumed expectation that everyone will attend or even view every session, there is still a clear benefit in choosing topics that are interesting in their own right as well as suitable for building on the ideas introduced earlier in the topic theme or the series as a whole.

Making Concrete Plans to Follow Up

From the series' onset, we wrote a recap blog post for every session that we hosted. These summaries presented the key points and takeaways for people unable to attend, or for those who wanted a concise way to look back at sessions. Each section also included timestamps and corresponding links to the video recordings. According to our analytics, more people looked at the recap blog posts than the recordings for most of the sessions. Often, people sign up specifically for virtual events so that they can receive the post-event recording, but many people do not have time to watch the entire recording or don't prefer to consume information in video format. We found that the written recaps presented important information in an alternative format that is easy to navigate. Interns from FP2030 worked on many of these recap posts, and they were able to hone their writing and content creation skills and critically engage with these AYSRH topics in the process of extracting the most important information.

A participant from Nigeria specifically shared that they had experienced network connectivity issues during the live session. Since they found the speakers to be of "such a high caliber," they appreciated having the written recaps, follow-ups via email, and other references that kept them engaged right as the pandemic was changing the ways people communicated.

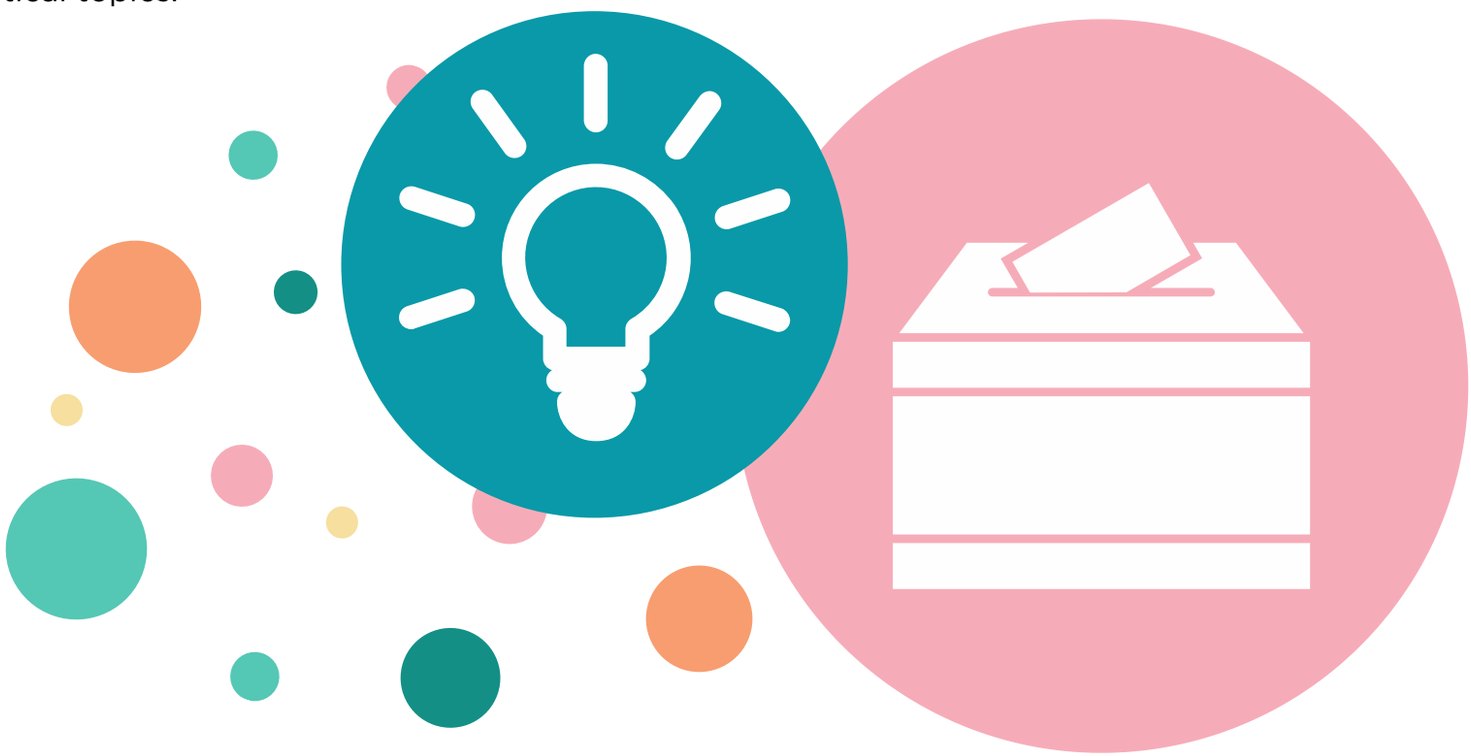
A speaker and participant, also from Nigeria, similarly expressed that the recording helped them catch up on the sessions that they were unable to attend. It also led them to browse the other content hosted on FP2030's YouTube channel (where the session recordings are hosted), thereby organically linking them to additional resources relevant to their work.

In a novel and creative move, one participant began playing the video recordings to colleagues during their organization's meetings. The participant's peers were thus able to make program changes while being on the same page. They also went on to share their knowledge with parents, religious leaders, and other influential figures to the youth that they serve.

Logistical Considerations

All of this said, the attendees that we interviewed after the series offered great suggestions for building on these existing follow-up channels. A speaker from Uganda mentioned that participants often had an overwhelming amount of interesting questions that speakers didn't have the time to get through. For a few sessions, speakers would collect unanswered questions and then address them in writing after the live event. The responses were then forwarded to the attendees and incorporated into the published recap of the session. In the future, we hope to make this a standard practice from the start.

Finally, since we already have discussion recordings in both English and French, a moderator from the United States suggested that we hold scheduled "reruns" of these videos in order to attract new viewers. After all, there are too many webinar recordings nowadays, and people are rarely motivated to return to missed live talks even if they had originally planned to do so. Establishing set times for replaying the recording could prompt people to mark the occasion in their calendar and ensure that they won't miss out on ultimately getting the content. In addition, picking key dates such as International Youth Day, Day of the Girl Child, or World Contraception Day to play recordings from relevant sessions could also serve as a way to continue discussions around critical topics.



Creating Conversations That Lead to Lasting Connections and Collaborations

"It's certain that with this series and other similar opportunities that we took part in, we see collaborations differently. It showed us different ways to work together."

- Nigerien speaker

One of the most critical aspects of the planning process was the partnership between Knowledge SUCCESS and FP2030. Developing a meaningful relationship between both organizations helped to ensure that any ideas on the series were valued, all members of both teams could contribute freely and openly to discussion and brainstorming, responsibilities were clear, and deliverables were kept on track. While the series required considerable time to produce, having a well-established relationship with implementing partners, as well as developing clear processes, meant that tasks became even more streamlined as time went on, requiring less and less time to accomplish.

It was important to account for time for Knowledge SUCCESS and FP2030 planning meetings and speaker prep orientation. In addition, it was also important to consider time for coordinating with speakers (and later moderators as well) and the interpretation team, creating promotional materials, setting up Zoom logistics, and preparing discussion and poll questions for each session.

We had hoped that the sessions we planned could similarly create and nurture new partnerships. We were pleased to discover that the initiative also allowed existing collaborators to grow closer to one another during the pandemic. One speaker said, "I think Connecting Conversations is part of the platforms that made me and [an existing participant] collaborate more. It was the first time we were on the same [session]." The shared experience made working together easier. The interviewee had previously been a fan of this person's work, and was excited to get to know them better through an external initiative like this one. They continued to work together on a Nigeria-based project, and are also now personal friends.

Many of the interviewed speakers, participants, and moderators agreed that more could have been done to break the ice between people that weren't previously familiar with one another. A guest moderator and speaker from Nepal suggested that in order to make the sessions "more alive, continuous, and sustainable, we should maybe expand in a different model … I want Connecting Conversations to not follow the 'business as usual,' since the content is already that way, but the current structure is still 'business as usual' … When you watch a movie, you're inspired. But you may not apply the knowledge from the movie until it's relevant to your life … In the same way, without a follow-up event or just in relying on email, it's overly formal and it's difficult to reconnect with people unless they have very similar work setups or interest areas … True knowledge comes from the more personal connections after the initial networking and relationship-building process. It goes beyond those initial conversations. Only like that can we achieve true 'knowledge success.'" In line with providing better follow-up mechanisms overall, we are thus looking into including networking sessions, "reunion" events for speakers and guest moderators, and more casual opportunities to socialize in our future programming in order to help attendees build new relationships that are meaningful, productive, and long-lasting.

Navigating Different Time Zones and Preferred Lengths of Session Time

Since we had attendees and organizers from all over the globe, there was no way to host a synchronous session that would be convenient for every time zone. During our initial discussions, the team noted that many online events are forced to fit into timeframes that are most accessible to American audiences. Thus, we decided to prioritize Asian and African participants in our scheduling.

While most found no issue with the event times that we settled on, there was a consensus that the sessions themselves (each clocking in at about an hour) were too short. Though lengthy webinars have fallen out of favor in the COVID-19 era, the attendees that we interviewed repeatedly said that they would have been fine with staying longer and continuing to discuss the topics that they are truly passionate about, right as the conversations are picking up momentum. Participants wanted more time to chat among themselves, and speakers wanted more time to tackle all the questions that came their way. Having witnessed their dismay in seeing the participant-driven, highly personalized discussions cut short, we also plan to build on the improvements we made to lengthen the session time, taking questions directly from the audience instead of previously prepared questions designed to explore introductory concepts to each topic.

One participant from Senegal also suggested running these events like a weekend-long conference, instead of over the course of several months: “If you could even organize sessions that are two or three days, then people can really discuss, dig into, and even work on the given themes as they relate to family planning. Often, webinars are short, an hour or two, and that doesn’t give everyone the opportunity to sufficiently participate. But across several days, participants might find other ways to interact with one another.”

Improvements to Consider for the Future

Increased youth involvement.

"I will say [this] no matter what the subject is."
(Moderator, United States)

Speakers should introduce themselves by describing what they look like and what might be on-screen.

"This is a good accessibility practice for any event."
(Moderator, United States)

Formally building in more opportunities for participants to speak up.

"It would be nice if the participants could express themselves a little more."
(Participant/Speaker, Senegal)

Having more visuals, data, and diagrams available while still retaining the conversational format.

"I know not everyone likes those elements, but many still appreciate them and require them if they are visual learners."
(Moderator, United States)

Topics Demanding Further Discussion

The attendees that we interviewed after the series wrapped all had great suggestions for what topics to cover in any future iteration of the initiative. These include:

Human resources around FP and adolescent health.

"One of the things we talk a lot about is providers, providers being judgmental. We need to look at the reasons for the judgment, the bias, we need to look at what is making the providers be like that in the first place … we have not really discussed the underlying factors. If someone attends to 100,000 people, then your workload is so extreme that of course you may seem rude to patients. We expect them to be perfect, but it's a human resource issue."
(Speaker and participant, Nigeria)

Menstrual health and hygiene.

"According to my research, there is a lot we have to talk about. The personal hygiene to young ones—we [should] talk about how we could help to disseminate knowledge to them."
(Participant, Uganda)

Process-centered topics and topics relevant to specific communities—any topic that draws upon the capacity of youth,

"so that they can speak to and fight for the causes that they're passionate about."
(Participant and speaker, Senegal)

Frank discussions between donors and implementers in order to have better facilitated conversations about expectations on both ends.

"Some honest dialogue with the decision-makers."
(Moderator, United States)

Finally, one guest moderator and speaker from Nepal proposed including sessions with no set subject at all. Moderators can maintain an open space so that any topic can be addressed according to the participants' unique needs. They envisioned this as a "friendly space where people are not only sharing their 'expert ideas'—which can be obtained on YouTube, on websites, in articles, elsewhere." They added, "It would be nice to use this as an opportunity to explore the crazy, boundary-pushing ideas … When set topics are given, people feel bound to that exclusively. Creating boundless, more open topics, then there can be true innovation from everyone's spontaneous synergy."

A summary of what we learned throughout the process:

- Not having slides sets a more conversational and casual tone.
- Inundating panels with prepped discussion questions can sometimes be limiting. Consider only introducing 2-3 questions, then letting participants drive the rest of the conversation.
- Break down the barriers between participants and "experts." Open the dialogue to everyone.
- A relaxed conversational format can be easier for all speakers' perspectives to have weight and importance, avoiding a hierarchy of expertise.
- Ensure language interpretation is available (including closed captioning) to increase an event's reach and accessibility.
- Ask guest speakers for feedback on their preferences for participation and language used to describe the event.
- Consider other ways besides the recording that audiences will interact with content after your event, such as the recap blog post format we used. Check out our recap writing guide for tips.
- Implement an after-action review to understand what went well and what could be improved.

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