



## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN STUDENTS AND HEALTH TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

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*Strengthening the capacity for effective communication is critical in improving relationship and accountability between HTI management and the student body*

### The Challenge

Communication is important in any institution to promote mutual understanding. It improves awareness, management responsiveness, decision-making and relationship building. One of the findings of the Women for Health Gender Audit of the health training institutions was that the majority of the schools did not have clear communication guidelines or mechanisms in place. Students who had personal and social problems did not know who to turn to and structures to ensure that students' views were heard were unclear. Research has shown that unresolved personal and emotional issues can have a negative impact on a students' ability to achieve good grades in examinations. Moreover without effective student representation and platforms for communication between management and the student body, a school will have no means of receiving and responding to student voices, which in turn can impact negatively on the quality of learning and teaching and on student experience within the institution.

### The Response

The W4H approach is to undertake a gradual process of change, keeping the HTI management on board, gradually introducing ideas and supporting the HTIs to bring about changes for themselves. The approach has four main actions:

1. W4H is strengthening the capacity of the management of the health training institutions on gender and equity. Each school has developed a gender management plan and completes an annual self-assessment on the gender-responsiveness of the institution. This is aimed at creating an enabling environment for students and promoting the training institutions' accountability towards students.



2. Strengthening capacity in effective counselling skills and processes of 64 class coordinators and guidance and counselling officers. This has been followed by quarterly review meetings of counsellors, aimed at discussing the main types of issues brought by students and engaging with the managers of the institutions to address them.
3. Supporting the revival of the student union through the training of 17 student affairs officers in effective communication and representation, who in turn trained 218 student representatives and built the capacity of the Student Union Governments on their role; working with their class mates and the class coordinators to make improvements, resolve problems and relate student voices and issues to the school management.
4. Supporting the institutions to develop students' charters. These charters contain short, clear statements of student rights and responsibilities. They were designed to enable students to know broadly what they can expect from the institutions, what is required of them, and what to do if things do not meet expected standards.

## **The Results**

- Gender-responsiveness of the institutions improved by a further 10% in 2015
- Communication between the students and the Principals improved significantly after the training of the Class Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors.
- The number of students counselled increased significantly. In the first 6 months of 2015, 618 students were counselled and 29 management decisions were made to address issues arising from the quarterly counselling meetings.
- The training of the student unions on student voice boosted the morale and confidence of the representatives and within two months 43% of the SUG had held meetings with the management of their institutions.
- The management of the institutions supported the development of their student charter, assigned the responsibilities to selected tutors and ensured that the SUG played a significant role in the development.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **1. The Importance of Incremental Steps**

Establishing communication mechanisms within the training institutions was carried out through several incremental strategic processes. This created an enabling environment for bringing about a gradual shift in and transformation of the organisational culture within the Health Training Institutions

### **2. The Crucial Role of Capacity Strengthening**



Students voice training

Strengthening the skills of key persons involved in the communication process has been an essential part of the process. For example, strengthening the counselling, guidance and communication skills, knowledge and practices of the class coordinators/counsellors and counselling and guidance staff has improved the relationships between them and their students with students more likely to come for counselling as a result. It has also built their confidence in themselves and the role they play. Similarly building the student representatives' knowledge and skills in communication, consultation and representation has enhanced their ability to effectively represent the students and communicate with management.

### **3. Next Steps: Improved Platforms for Communication and Accountability**

An additional lesson learned and next steps for the programme is to further build the capacity of management and student representatives in negotiation and accountability and a the range of communication platforms and mechanisms available to them for effectively resolving disputes.

#### **Tag words**

Students' Union, Students' Voice, Communication, Counselling, Women for Health, Health Training Institutions, Student representatives



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