

choice.

**FOR
YOUTH &
SEXUALITY**

**Long-term strategy
2014-2018**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the strategy of CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality (CHOICE) for the period 2014-2018.

CHOICE is a youth-led organization that actively promotes and supports the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young people globally, as well as meaningful youth participation in this field. CHOICE is run by an enthusiastic and ambitious team of young people, all aged between 16 and 28. Our youth advocates dedicate their time, energy and expertise on a voluntary basis, supported by our staff, intern(s), board, supervisory board and advisory board. Together we decide on activities, internal policy and CHOICE's strategies and plans.

It is our strong conviction that young people worldwide should be able to freely make informed choices regarding their sexuality, and whether they want to have children. Freedom, mutual respect and equality between partners are important factors in making such choices. The subject of sex and sexuality must be freed from discrimination, coercion, stigmatism and prejudice. Being able to make your own choices about your life and your body is a universal human right.

The recognition of young people's SRHR will also benefit development impact. Those who are young now will be the workforce and leaders of the future. However, issues such as child marriage and unwanted pregnancies prevent young people from living up to their full potential and contributing to their country's development. Recognizing and respecting young people's SRHR will therefore strengthen countries' developmental impact.

Young people are often sexually active, but we rarely have the legal right to freely decide on our sexuality, neither do we have access to adequate health services. Young people are too seldom actively involved in policy and decision-making processes in the domain of SRHR. When decisions are made, or policies and programs concerning young people are developed, we have the fundamental right to co-decide on these matters. Young people all over the world are in dire need of an enabling environment, in which we can make our own choices, supported by comprehensive and correct information, have access to contraceptives and safe abortion, and to youth-friendly health services where we are treated with respect and enjoy confidentiality.

To ensure meaningful youth participation¹, participating in policy development, implementation and evaluation is of great importance. When the voice of young people is heard and taken into account, programs and policies will be more effective, as they would directly reflect the actual needs of young people. Our advocacy² efforts for more meaningful youth participation in the field of SRHR are therefore essential.

Based on this, the CHOICE mission and vision are as follows:

Mission

CHOICE advocates for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people worldwide and empowers them to make personal decisions concerning these issues.

¹ By meaningful youth participation we mean the participation of young people in all stages and at all levels of those decision-making processes that influence their lives. This includes their participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and campaigns concerning the SRHR of young people at the international, regional, national, provincial, local and program-level. Participation is meaningful when young people participate on equal terms, through the access to accurate information and training. A balanced representation of diverse young people should be held in mind, as well as the limited resources young people have access to.

² Advocacy is a political process by an individual or a large group that aims to influence public policy, implementation and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions.

Vision

CHOICE envisages a world in which there is:

- Freedom of choice
- Equality
- Respect for diversity and sexuality
- An enabling environment for the development of every individual
- The opportunity for individuals to make a change
- Positive sexual experience
- Meaningful youth participation in all phases and levels of decision-making

A readers' manual to the document

As mentioned above, this document delineates CHOICE's long-term strategy for the period 2014-2018. The document is structured as follows. The next two chapters will focus on CHOICE's current internal organization and our external working environment, respectively. We will then set out our ambitions for the coming years. Subsequently, we will further define the three roles that CHOICE will take up: CHOICE as an advocate, CHOICE as a capacity builder, and CHOICE as a connector. Finally, we will conclude the strategy with sections on internal capacity, fundraising, and external communication, all in light of CHOICE's three different envisioned roles.

2. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

This section provides an overview of CHOICE's internal and external situation anno 2013, in the form of a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

Strengths

One of CHOICE's strengths is that we are youth-led and relatively non-hierarchical. CHOICE consists of a group of about 20 voluntary youth advocates, a board, an advisory board and supervisory board, and staff. Currently, the staff consists of an Executive Director, Partnerships Officer, Program Officer International Capacity Building, Administrative Officer and intern(s) (2.8 FTE total). All staff, advocates and board members of the organization come together in the General Meeting (GM), where decisions are made on the basis of consensus. The staff furthermore gathers in Office Meetings and the board meets during Board Meetings, which are also attended by the Executive Director. To guarantee that CHOICE remains a youth-led organization, youth advocates, staff, and board members are all under the age of 29.

CHOICE's work depends upon the human resources of our organization: our advocates, staff, and board members. CHOICE has a diverse, ambitious, young, and professional team of staff members and advocates that is intrinsically motivated and inspired to commit to CHOICE.

Each CHOICE individual has unique skills and expertise. Everyone involved in CHOICE is able to level with the target groups of our programs, since we are young ourselves. This enhances the communication and collaboration with other young people and youth organizations: we speak the same language and can understand the challenges young people face. Due to years of experience as an SRHR advocacy organization, CHOICE has built a strong expertise on (international) advocacy and an increasing expertise on the capacity building of youth-led organizations in Africa and Asia. CHOICE advocates furthermore are generally open-minded, collaborative and good negotiators as we make our decisions by consensus.

Weaknesses

CHOICE's unique style results in a bottom-up management of the organization: ideally, all those involved in CHOICE have equal ownership over the strategy of the organization. In return, CHOICE advocates are asked to bear responsibility and to show leadership. Because most CHOICE advocates are enrolled in university or high school, or have jobs next to their CHOICE involvement, internal flexibility is needed and given. CHOICE is an organization that often has more tasks and opportunities than time or capacity. This requires setting clear priorities and careful planning.

We put effort into building the individual skills of CHOICE advocates. However, we also recognize that the skills of CHOICE advocates can always be improved, especially regarding sensitivities to cultural and contextual differences, training skills and didactics, as well as skills concerning external communication, marketing, fundraising and planning monitoring and evaluation (PME). A more continuous plan to build our internal capacity is thus needed. We furthermore need to make sure these skills and knowledge are kept within the organization as individuals leave, through proper documentation and knowledge sharing.

In addition, CHOICE has grown significantly over the last year. We have doubled our annual budget, our output in terms of programs, and our staff. This has enabled us to do much more, but also poses some challenges for our internal structure. Our growth requires a professionalization, an increase in capacities and an adapted structure of CHOICE and our human resources.

Being a youth-led organization is in this sense both an opportunity and a challenge. As mentioned above, being youth-led gives us the advantage of being close to our target group and being able to form our programs in a most effective way. We are also a place where young people get ample opportunities to learn and develop themselves. This is, however, also a pitfall. First of all, we work in an environment run mostly by paid adult professionals, whereas we work mostly with volunteers. There is also a difference in the amount of time individual advocates can invest in CHOICE, and advocates have diverse experience levels. This difference in time investment and experience can create gaps in knowledge and development. We try to close these gaps with constructive communication and internal knowledge sharing.

Overall, it is important that CHOICE keeps a good balance between ambition and capacity. Even though our staff is growing, we are still at just 2.8 FTE. In addition, our board and youth advocates dedicate their time on a voluntary basis, often next to multiple other activities such as jobs or school, limiting their availability. To ensure that we get most out of our human resources, we will have to finalize and refine our human resource policy, which has been set up in 2013, and will have to keep investing in our internal capacity through regular (internal) training and knowledge sharing.

Opportunities

Looking at the facts and figures concerning SRHR worldwide, it becomes evident that SRHR and meaningful youth participation are still desperately needed in many parts of the world. SRHR-related issues are increasingly displayed in popular media, and people speak out against SRHR violations more often. Topics such as the violations of (women's) sexual rights in India, the restriction of LGBTQI rights in Russia, or the limitation of access to legal and safe abortion in the United States garner a lot of public attention.

On a policy level, the international political environment will provide major and defining advocacy opportunities in the upcoming years concerning SRHR and broader international development. The Programme of Action of the International Commission on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals will come to an end in 2014 and 2015 respectively, and new commitments concerning development will be made. To ensure the needs and rights of young people are addressed in this new development framework (the so-called post-2015 development agenda), youth participation and youth-led advocacy is crucial.

Being a youth-led SRHR organization, CHOICE has a niche in the battle for SRHR worldwide; the Dutch government has specified SRHR, and specifically the SRHR of young people, as a priority in its international development policies. This has provided us with funding and advocacy opportunities, and will hopefully continue to do so in the future.

Concerning collaboration in the field of SRHR and human rights, CHOICE has a strong network of both adult and youth organizations. We have close connections with our partners in the SRHR Alliance, Youth Empowerment Alliance, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; partnerships that we wish to continue in the coming years. We can learn and gain a lot from these partnerships and our network provides us with ample opportunities for further collaboration and joint initiatives, with the possibility to build a youth movement on SRHR on UN level. Together with youth organizations as well as other organizations from the International Youth Leadership Working Group, we can work on such a movement.

Threats

A major current threat to our work is the global economic crisis. Governments decrease their budget for development cooperation and the general public supports it less than before. SRHR is not always a primary issue when budgets need to be cut.

This therefore requires CHOICE to focus strongly on the diversification of our funding in 2014-2018. Currently, the larger part of our funds comes from one source and these programs will end in 2015. In order to continue our programs after 2015, we will need to diversify our funding and find sustainable sources of funding.

3. AMBITIONS

Taking into account the internal and external situations set out in the previous chapters, CHOICE has the following ambitions for 2014-2018.

Concerning our project areas, the world will be our playground: we will assess constantly whether there are areas where work for SRHR is urgent, and where we can make a difference. We will proactively look for countries or areas where we want to start projects, rather than allowing ourselves to be led by funding opportunities. In doing so, innovation and thinking outside of the box will be central concepts; being a small-scale youth-led organization gives us the opportunity to try out new, fresh ideas and to take risks in our activities. This will also allow us to take on smaller-scale projects than the multi-annual programs we are currently involved in.

As an advocate for SRHR, CHOICE's focus will remain on international advocacy, as well as facilitating national advocacy in the countries that we work in through our partners. Therefore, Dutch national advocacy will not be a priority for CHOICE in 2014-2018. Although we realize the Dutch SRHR situation is not perfect either, and we recognize the 'practice what you preach' aspect of it, we consider CHOICE currently not capacitated enough to engage in advocacy towards Dutch SRHR policies on a professional level. We have neither the expertise nor the network and over the next years we will not strategically invest in this area. We therefore see we will not be able to expand our activities in this field beyond the ad hoc activities we have been part of so far. We will, however, continue to focus on Dutch foreign policy and the government's role in international (development) processes. Within our international advocacy work, our ambition is to be a key player in international processes as an accountable and professional youth organization.

We want to be a connector; we want to strengthen a global youth movement to make it bigger and stronger. In our globalized world, the formation and implementation of SRHR legislation, policies and programs surpasses levels and boundaries: decisions made on an international level influence national and local realities and vice versa. In order to integrally improve the situation of young people's SRHR, our youth-led activism and advocacy has to cross levels as well. Therefore, CHOICE promotes the formation of partnerships and networks among youth-led organizations operating at different levels. In the coming years, we will expand the unique capacity that CHOICE has to *connect* different actors and different levels of policy making and implementation. We envision CHOICE now and in the future as a professional, constantly developing organization that enables youth actors from around the world to establish connections between the local, national and international level in order to improve the situation of SRHR and youth participation worldwide. Our capacity building efforts are important to increase young people's skills in advocacy and in creating links between the different levels. We therefore also highly value and facilitate the linking of capacity building and (international) advocacy.

A final, crosscutting element of our ambitions is to increase our overall visibility in 2014-2018 and to present CHOICE as young, fresh, professional and bold. This will be a central ambition, intrinsically connected to fundraising opportunities, an increase of our network, and project opportunities. We will increase our visibility through expanding and diversifying our partnerships and communicating our successes and impact to the outside world. Our first target will be to increase our visibility with our strategic network; later we will also focus on secondary target groups such as individuals outside our direct field of work.

Overall, CHOICE's ambitions for 2014-2018 can be described as encompassing three main roles: **CHOICE as an advocate**, **CHOICE as a capacity builder**, and **CHOICE as**

a connector. These three roles, including the accompanying strategies, will be set out further in the following sections.

4. CHOICE AS AN ADVOCATE

The strong articulation of young people's voices is indispensable in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programs that concern their SRHR. Youth-led advocacy activities and campaigns towards the development and implementation of such policies are an effective means through which young people can articulate their viewpoints and needs, and become major catalysts for change.

CHOICE's key strategy is therefore youth-led advocacy towards decision-making processes and strengthening the SRHR situation on international, regional, national and local levels. Through continuous youth-led advocacy on these various governance levels, key decision-makers will be urged to install youth-friendly, rights-based and comprehensive SRHR legislation and policies, and will be kept to their promises in terms of budgeting and implementation. In doing so, youth-led advocacy will foster sustainable change towards the acceptance and promotion of the SRHR of young people, improving the quality of life of young people around the globe. Our advocacy efforts will be implemented through our International Advocacy Program.

The International Advocacy Program

The main goal of the International Advocacy (IA) program is the inclusion of progressive language on the SRHR of young people in outcome documents of relevant international decision-making processes and key events through the meaningful participation of CHOICE advocates. We hereby mainly focus on the processes regarding the MDGs and the ICPD. We strive for continuous advocacy presence in international networks and processes. Where relevant, we will look for opportunities to make these processes known to a wider audience, using (social) media or by organizing events. CHOICE will also be actively present in-between events, e.g. advocating for implementation of international agreements.

How to get there

We will continue our current advocacy efforts, focusing mostly on processes regarding the post-2015 development agenda. We have been working specifically with the ICPD and MDGs processes since our founding in 1997, and foresee cross-fertilization with the Sustainable Development Goals process in the near future. Within our advocacy work, our ambition is to be a key player in international processes as an accountable and professional youth organization. An essential element of becoming a better-known player in the international advocacy field will be to continue organizing and participating in youth caucuses and pre-conferences at international conferences.

Essential for the success of our advocacy efforts is to keep our resources up to date, including but not limited to training materials and evidence-based advocacy materials, and to share these internally. This means that in the coming years, there will have to be a bigger focus on gathering and reviewing resources and studies that may provide us and our partners with evidence for our statements and thus aid us in our advocacy work. To achieve this we will explore how to engage more closely with institutions and organizations that produce and provide such resources. CHOICE might be able to offer grassroots knowledge to research institutions, and may in turn use these institutions studies for advocacy purposes.

To secure and strengthen our position as an established advocacy organization, we will continue to invest in our strategic network. In support of our international advocacy program we will therefore engage in partnerships with other civil society organizations, UN-bodies and governments, coalitions of like-minded organizations, human rights organizations with a broader focus than just SRHR, and resource or research centers.

5. CHOICE AS A CAPACITY BUILDER

Evidently, CHOICE cannot change the world by itself. A critical mass of youth advocates who are able to voice their needs on different levels is crucial. Hence, CHOICE not only practices youth-led advocacy itself but also seeks to build and strengthen the capacities of other sustainable youth-led organizations worldwide in order to engage successfully in advocacy. CHOICE specifically works with youth-led organizations rather than individual young people, to ensure an impact that is as sustainable as possible. We invest in an entire organization, which will be able to keep implementing knowledge gained even after those whose capacity was built have left the organization. International capacity building is therefore another important strategy to support and improve youth-led advocacy for SRHR around the world. This includes building the capacity of our Dutch youth advocates.

There are several central values to CHOICE’s capacity building approach. Firstly, we work in a context-specific manner, meaning that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to capacity building. Instead, we assess the needs of each partner, and what we can offer them, to set up a capacity building trajectory that is most suited to them. Working context-specific also means taking into account local customs and culture. Secondly, we highly value working with our partners on a most equal basis: we learn from our partners as much as they learn from us. Thirdly, CHOICE aims to partner with youth-led organizations with diverse levels in terms of capacity – ranging from starting youth groups with a lot of learning potential to capacitated and established youth-led organizations that we can support in the implementation of successful advocacy campaigns.

In terms of partnerships within the CHOICE international capacity building programs, there are neither geographical nor thematic restrictions, and partner organizations may be local, regional or national organizations. Generally, we engage in partnerships with youth initiatives or organizations to which the added value of CHOICE with regards to the organization’s capacities and potential and the SRHR context is evident and relevant. In other words, the support from CHOICE should make a discernible difference for both the organization as well as the context it’s working in. The process for selecting partners and the accompanying criteria has been further set out in the internal controlling procedures (AO/IC), available at the CHOICE office.

→ To enhance the capacity of the partner organization on SRHR, youth-led advocacy, meaningful youth participation and basic organizational development ←

The CHOICE Youth Leadership Program

CHOICE’s capacity building approach is set out through our Youth Leadership program. CHOICE will not only seek to implement youth-led advocacy activities, but we will also continue to build the capacity of sustainable youth organizations or initiatives around the world which practice advocacy on SRHR on the international, regional, national and local level. In order to do so, CHOICE will establish multi-annual partnerships with youth-led organizations that work towards realizing SRHR for young people as defined in the CHOICE charter in a way that fits an organization’s local context.

Within the Youth Leadership program, these partnerships have the primary goal to enhance the capacity of the partner organization on SRHR, youth-led advocacy, meaningful youth participation and basic organizational development, to ensure sustainability. This program therefore puts great emphasis on a youth leadership trajectory that includes trainings and technical assistance on these issues. As part of this trajectory, the Youth Leadership program also offers partner organizations small grants in order to implement projects, using the lessons learned from their capacity building trajectory. Grants can also be used to include members of partner organizations in international advocacy processes, e.g. through attending a conference. Partner

organizations may have other programs with a focus that is different from youth-led advocacy for SRHR; this is not an issue, however, the CHOICE Youth Leadership program only funds activities related to or supportive of advocacy for youth SRHR.

This program is particularly designed for youth-led initiatives that lack capacity on one or more of the abovementioned issues and therefore have a clear learning potential. These are often (but not necessarily) starting youth organizations that are in the process of formalization/professionalization and are hence not able to meet the requirements to work within the frameworks of other NGOs.

CHOICE will strengthen itself in its capacity building modules on the aforementioned areas of expertise, but will also continue to innovate our program and actively look for opportunities to expand our capacity building expertise to new fields. One field we would like to explore over the coming years is the link between research and advocacy. In addition to the ICB program, CHOICE will employ its capacity building expertise through short-term projects and/or consultancy jobs. In such cases, CHOICE works together with other organizations that have a need for capacity building in a particular, limited issue.

Room for growth

Within the Youth Leadership program, there is of course room for growth: if the capacity building is successful, partners will grow from small and inexperienced groups to more professional and knowledgeable organizations. CHOICE partners that have gained sufficient capacity in the field of SRHR knowledge, youth-led advocacy, meaningful youth

→ To support the implementation of youth-led advocacy projects towards the realization of SRHR of young people ←

participation and basic organizational sustainability will still be central to our Youth Leadership program. Our context- and partner-specific approach to capacity building provides us with the space to adjust the Youth Leadership program to each partner’s needs. As a partner develops, this may mean a switch from active technical assistance and training towards a partnership that is more focused on joint activities and fundraising, with occasional technical assistance and frequent knowledge sharing. Of course it is also possible to start new partnerships with more advanced partner organizations, engaging in a strategic partnership immediately rather than first going through a training trajectory.

With more advanced partners, the focus of the Youth Leadership program is to support the implementation of youth-led advocacy projects towards the realization of MYP and the SRHR of young people. Partners can apply for grants for project implementation, which will help the partner organization with becoming a leading and established youth-led advocacy organization – a point of reference on national level when it comes to young people and SRHR. The main focus will lie on local and national projects, however explicit linkages will be made between advocacy efforts on a national and international level. Capacity building of young people remains part of the program, but will increasingly take place through the self-sustaining structures that are part of the partner organization and less through external inputs from CHOICE.

How to get there

In 2014-2018, we will continue our current approach to long-term capacity building partnerships through our Youth Leadership program. We will continue to offer partner-specific trajectories, without a predefined end. The ending of a partnership will have to be decided on the basis of the partner’s progress and needs. Should a partner ‘outgrow’ our Youth Leadership program, we will gradually decrease the support from CHOICE towards a situation where we are engaged in a collaborative partnership with the partner organization, paving the way for joint projects and fundraising. This process will be made clear to each partner at the beginning of a partnership, including the possible risks (e.g.

when there is a wish to continue the partnership, but a lack of opportunities to jointly raise funds).

For 2014-2018 we thus foresee that CHOICE will engage in partnerships with a mix of starting youth organizations and more advanced youth organizations. The number of partnerships we engage in has not been set in stone; however, the amount of (new) partnerships will have to fit with our internal capacity and possible additions will thus have to be assessed per year.

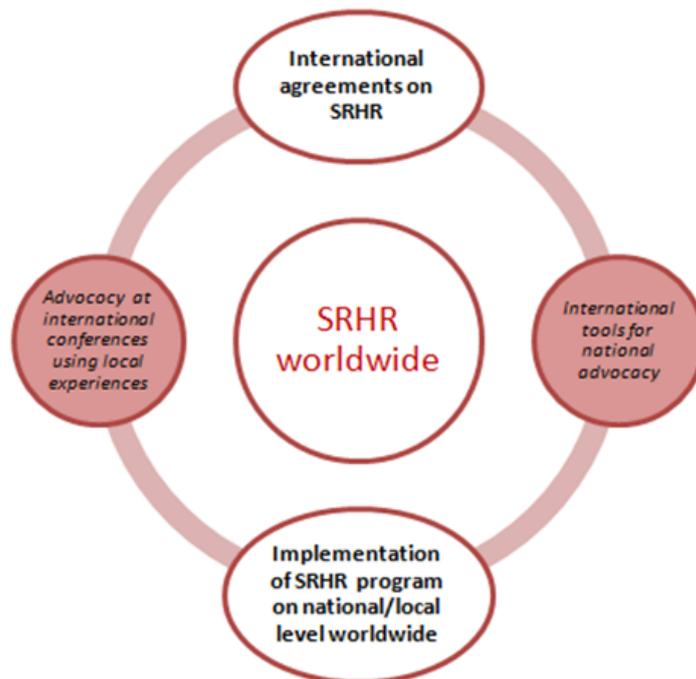
To be able to keep offering a professional and comprehensive capacity building trajectory to partners, we will need to have more and better training materials. Even though we have started reviewing and adding materials over the last years, it will have to be a priority for advocates to develop new materials, supported by staff and/or board, and with external support where needed.

As networking and visibility are crosscutting issues in our work, these are also essential concepts in capacity building. To enhance our program and impact, we will seek collaboration with consultancy agencies and individual consultants (both international and in the project countries), strong national advocacy organizations in project countries, and Dutch embassies in project countries, amongst others, and look for opportunities to form strategic alliances.

6. CHOICE AS A CONNECTOR

As set out in section 3, CHOICE wants to be a connector; we want to strengthen a global youth movement to make it bigger, stronger, and more diverse. In order to integrally improve the situation of young people’s SRHR, our youth-led activism and advocacy has to cross levels. In the coming years, we will expand the unique capacity that CHOICE has to *connect* different actors and different levels of policy making and implementation. CHOICE is, now and in the future, a professional, constantly developing organization that enables youth actors from around the world to establish connections between the local, national and international level in order to improve the situation of SRHR and meaningful youth participation worldwide.

An intrinsic part of this connecting role is linking national advocacy in partner countries to international processes on a high level. National experience and advocacy is essential to create international agreements that reflect national needs, and international agreements can in turn be used to further national advocacy activities. CHOICE therefore links its International Advocacy and Youth Leadership programs. This link is represented in the image below: international agreements are linked to implementation on country-level through providing international tools for national advocacy; the CHOICE International Advocacy program thus benefits the Youth Leadership program. The other way around, experiences from the Youth Leadership program offer resources and evidence for advocacy on an international level.



Linking levels and linking young people

Based on the conviction that many joint voices can do more than one sole voice or many disperse voices, we will sustain and expand our support to *joint* youth-led advocacy efforts or initiatives on international, regional and national levels. This ‘CHOICE linking’ is a crosscutting element in all programs described here. The following paragraph will describe some specific initiatives we would like to continue or enhance to reach this goal.

→ To increase collaboration and partnerships between youth advocates for SRHR / to create a youth movement ←

Within both our International Advocacy and Youth Leadership programs we will undertake projects that encourage the linking and learning within our field, among young people and among our partners. In our Youth Leadership program, we encourage our partner organizations to engage in (youth-adult) partnerships and alliances (including the SRHR Alliance, Youth Empowerment alliance and Youth and ICPD partnership) in order to enhance its outreach, sustainability and development. Furthermore we will enhance the contact between our partners, by organizing events in which they can learn from each other's strategies and lessons learned. Online linking and learning also plays a pivotal role in this, e.g. through social media.

Within the International Advocacy program, CHOICE will also focus, besides on our advocacy efforts, on linking young people who are engaged in these processes. By promoting other young people's awareness raising, participation and learning process, we seek to create strong youth-allies for the SRHR of young people. Examples of such initiatives within the international advocacy program are the organization of Youth Caucuses before events, campaigns like YOU(TH) DO IT! and our participation in international youth working groups that support youth participation in processes around the ICPD and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. We will continue our efforts to build bridges between different levels by supporting our partners in their ambitions in international advocacy.

Finally, our advocacy does not only focus on the improvement of SRHR legislation, policies and programs, but also aims at improving the role of young people and their meaningful participation in the *processes* towards these legislations, policies and programs. The role of connector will therefore also involve "paving the way" for us and other youth organizations to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. Part of this is, as mentioned above, the promotion of youth-adult partnerships among young people, decision-makers and adult organizations.

How to get there

The role of CHOICE as a connector is a relatively new one compared to those of CHOICE as an advocate and a capacity builder. Even though we already actively connect advocacy and capacity building efforts, try to link the levels and individuals, and proactively promote meaningful youth participation, this is a role that will have to be further institutionalized in 2014-2018.

In order to do so, we will join forces with the strategic partners mentioned within sections 5 and 6, as well as our Youth Leadership program partner organizations and organizations affiliated with e.g. the Youth & ICPD partnership.

7. INTERNAL CAPACITY

To successfully carry out the abovementioned strategies and programs, CHOICE needs to secure its internal capacity and ensure a suitable organizational structure. Corresponding with the three roles we see for our organization, individual CHOICE volunteers will have to be advocates, capacity builders, and connectors all in one.

There is currently a mismatch in terms of the needs of the organization and the functioning of the different entities of CHOICE. CHOICE does not make use of its full potential. In order to be able to do so, we need to revise our organizational structure and to proactively adapt to the desired developments in the programs as described above. This means not only optimizing our internal capacity (quality), but also growth in the internal capacity in the number of staff and advocates (quantity).

In terms of the internal organization, CHOICE provides a space in which young people are challenged to learn, develop and employ their talents and become a sustainable workforce to run CHOICE. As employer of this workforce (of both staff and volunteers), we see the importance of structurally and consciously investing in talent development, internal knowledge sharing and skill development. This can be done in several ways and the past has shown that some strategies are very effective for CHOICE, which will be continued in the following years. Examples of these are our take-two principle, in which teams for projects and events are formed on the basis of a combination of an experienced and inexperienced member, and internal knowledge sharing during thematic sessions and internal trainings.

Areas for improvement in the coming years are the role of CHOICE as employer for staff as well as for volunteers. In 2012 and 2013 CHOICE made steps towards being a more professional employer, and this development needs to be continued in 2014 and onwards. First step is the professionalizing our human resource policy, but a central question for the Board in the coming years will have to be what kind of employer we want to be for our staff, how the work of staff relates to that of the advocates, and what kind of role the Board will have to take up in the organization.

How to get there

Towards 2018, CHOICE will not only put effort in the quality of the current capacity, it will also grow in its capacity.

Staff

CHOICE will grow towards a team of 8 paid staff members, the exact details of which (how much FTE, which specific positions) will depend on the development of and additions to our projects in the coming years. CHOICE will continue to provide internship opportunities based on the possible projects that could be offered to interns. In addition, we will continue to invest in the individual development of staff members through (external) training and assessments.

Advocates

With the continuation of our strong value of consensus-based decision making, CHOICE will grow to a maximum of 30 members, who are working voluntarily for CHOICE for at least 4 hours a week. These advocates are crucial in the execution of the core business of CHOICE.

In our recruitment of new advocates, we will continue to focus on specific capacities CHOICE needs, for example capacity in the field of training, advocacy, communication, fundraising and research. Furthermore, we have to make sure CHOICE is a welcoming organization for new members – engaging them from the start and showing the opportunities CHOICE has to offer.

In addition, we will focus on the development of the different skills we need as CHOICE to implement our programs. In 2012 and 2013, CHOICE has made steps towards a focus on individual development of volunteers through the current Personal Development Plans (PDP). This is a process we will have to continue in 2014 and onwards. Although the PDPs have been set up, the system itself has not yet been institutionalized. In the coming years, CHOICE will focus on the individual development of advocates, as they are one of the main workforces within CHOICE. The PDPs will be the starting point, as these describe the ambitions of CHOICE advocates, and Talent Development Trajectories will be developed out of these. In order to have effective Talent Development Trajectories, CHOICE needs to get task-/project-based new members. This is done through specific vacancies, rather than the open vacancies in the past. This switch is also closely related to the structure of CHOICE, which will be described below.

Board

The role of the Board will also have to undergo a change. For the past few years, the board has not just been a strategic but also an executing entity. These are two roles that are difficult to combine, as they require a different focus. With the increase of staff, the role of the board should move towards a strategic one to guide the organization. In the coming years, the board of CHOICE should focus mainly on strategic issues. The board is a body that must ensure the sustainability of CHOICE. This means that for the coming years, decisions that are made have to be in line with this long-term strategy and that the board will continue to discuss strategies towards 2018 in case there are huge (environmental) changes. The writing of a year plan by the board, which operationalizes the long-term strategy in concrete activities, is an integral part of this. The board should also continuously discuss the CHOICE future after 2018.

The structure of the Advisory Board will also change starting late 2013. Currently, the Advisory Board meets the Board four times a year to discuss the most urgent issues. As the Advisory Board has different members with different backgrounds and expertise, the structure of the Advisory Board will be revised. CHOICE will work towards an Advisory Board of around 8 members, who will meet each other two times a year. The rest of the year, these Advisory Board members can be consulted for specific questions or needs. Currently, the Advisory Board is only available for consultation towards the Board; in the future, the Advisory Board will also be accessible to staff.

Finally, CHOICE will have to finalize the internal Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) system that has been started up in 2013. This PME system does not only include our programs, but also our own internal organization. As we are an organization that will change in the future, it is increasingly important to have a good PME system in place. We foresee that the PME system will be finalized in 2014, and fully implemented by the start of 2015.

Organizational Structure

CHOICE needs to revise its organizational structure and the role of the different entities. Although this is something that has been discussed earlier during Annual General Meetings, we foresee the need to have more drastic changes compared to the other years. This change cannot be done without dialogues between staff, board and members, and without expertise on organizational structures.

In 2013 external expertise will be hired to kick off changes in the structure of CHOICE. CHOICE will put emphasis on the development of an optimal and effective structure for until 2015, and will have an implemented structure from 2015 onwards at the latest, that makes use of the full potential of each individual in the organization and that suits the needs of the organization in implementing its programs. In the new structure, we aim for advocates to continue executing the core business of CHOICE, namely the international advocacy activities and the capacity building of partner organizations during trainings. In practice however, some decisions will no longer be made with the organization as a

whole but rather will follow from commitments CHOICE has made to our partner organizations or through our fundraising. For example, offering tailor-made programming means making decisions concerning Youth Leadership trajectories through conversations with partner organizations, not through the General Meeting.

Communication channels

Meeting in person to discuss our strategies and implementation of our programs are and will remain important ways to communicate internally. Other current internal communication channels of CHOICE are email, the portal and general meetings. For informal communication, the CHOICE internal Facebook group is up and running. Due to the fact that the organizational structure will be revised, there is a need to explore if the current communication channels still suit the organization's needs. If changes in these channels are made, these need to be in place by 2015 at the latest, together with the organizational structure. The portal will remain the primary channel for digital communication between the different entities of the organization.

8. FUNDRAISING

An essential prerequisite for realizing all abovementioned activities is of course funding. CHOICE notices that the current fundraising climate is changing; development cooperation is not a priority for governments anymore and the public is increasingly critical of supporting civil society's work. In addition, our two current major sources of funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs will end after 2015. CHOICE's focus should shift from government-oriented to also include other funding opportunities, such as the private sector. We should market ourselves not just as an SRHR organization but also as a youth leadership organization, broadening our scope for funding opportunities.

A possible opportunity for funding in 2014-2018 is the post-2015 development agenda. As the needs and rights of young people are addressed in this agenda, it will also mean that there will be (fundraising) opportunities to implement this agenda. However, since the overall trend is that there is less money allocated by governments to implement the current agendas, it is most likely that this trend will continue in the future.

How to get there

As fundraising is one of the priorities of the CHOICE board, this requires a strategy in itself, more elaborate than a section in this document. The current fundraising strategy will be revised to the current situation and will have a renewed focus towards 2018. It will be structured per flow of funds: governmental, private funds, institutional funds, and individual donors.

A central element for fundraising in the coming years will be to keep an eye on the balance between input and output; we will have to combine smaller funds that require less bureaucracy and reporting obligations than e.g. the big governmental alliance-based funds, especially in light of our organizational capacity. It will be essential to diversify funds, so as to create a most reliable source of income for after 2015. We would still like to keep individual CHOICE youth advocates involved in fundraising, albeit more on a project basis than through the fundraising groups we had in the past.

9. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

To be able to reach the set goals for 2014-2018, professional external communication is essential. CHOICE currently does not use external communication to its full potential, due to a lack of internal capacity. It is an area in which the board sees a huge opportunity to brand CHOICE on a national and international level, and to reach out to a larger public to support our recruitment, fundraising, advocacy leverage and visibility. However, we currently do not see a possibility for fully professionalizing our external communication with the (growing) capacity we have. We plan for more capacity to be available for this issue in the near future, ideally in the form of an extra staff member.

Nevertheless, we have been increasingly professionalizing our external communication during 2013. Elements of our communication have increased greatly, such as our social media presence and our newsletter, and we have had great successes with publications such as the external visual year report.

In the coming years, we will professionalize our external communication in terms of content and what we share outside of our own organization. It is important that we show what the results are of our work and what impact we have, including our financial situation. New approaches that we will use will focus on storytelling and innovative reporting.

How to get there

As stated above, we currently do not have an employee specifically focusing on external communication. We will all collaboratively continue to put effort into our external communication, until we are able to eventually hire an employee focused on communication. For the coming years, it will thus be a task that will be taken up by staff, youth advocates, and board combined.

The primary audience of our external communication for the coming years will be our strategic partners, as set out under the sections on each of CHOICE's roles. Professional external communication will allow us to present ourselves as young, fresh, professional and bold.

The main goals we want to reach through our external communication are broadly, increase our visibility and to show CHOICE as a brand. More specifically, we want to make our results visible and understandable to the outside world, to support our networking, and to show people what they can hire us for and what we are good at. We also aim to involve our youth advocates in our external communication on a more regular basis, e.g. through blogs on the website.

This external communication will be supporting CHOICE's efforts to build a network and engage in partnerships with a diverse group of strategic actors. Besides the actors mentioned in the previous sections on advocacy and capacity building, CHOICE finds it important to engage with (Dutch) young people and other individuals that can be of great help to promote CHOICE (such as former CHOICE members). Eventually, these efforts will lead to the establishment of a closer relationship with our youth constituencies, possibly in the form of a 'friends of CHOICE' concept.