



Impact of an Improved Policy Environment on Youth Reproductive Health Programming in Shanghai

This study evaluated the impact of the China Youth Reproductive Health (YRH) Project on the policy environment for adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) in Shanghai, as well as the effect of the changed policy environment on local youth reproductive health education and services.

Methods

Researchers collected data through in-depth interviews and a literature review of government and project documents, including government policies on ASRH education and services issued before and after the project; funds allocated by the government; mass media reports on project activities and outcomes; project educational materials; and reports on life-planning skills (LPS) training and youth-friendly services. The review was conducted during the fourth year of project activities.

Findings

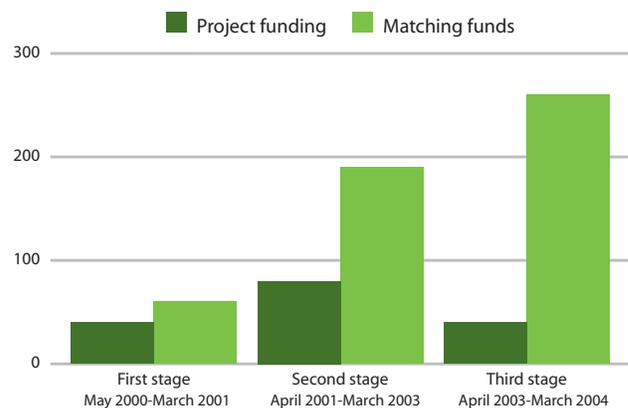
Between fall 2001 and March 2004, the municipal government issued 8 policy documents supportive of the goals of the YRH project; district governments issued 57. Of the municipal documents, 5 were formulated as a direct result of project advocacy initiatives and 3 were already being developed and were further influenced by the project. More than one-half of the documents from both levels were issued jointly by various health, education, labor, social, and cultural youth-serving agencies and clarified the commitments and responsibilities of these organizations. The governance of the project's Youth Health Steering Committee (on which a vice mayor of the municipality and the director of the Shanghai Population and Family Planning Commission served as leader and vice leader,

respectively) and multisectoral participation made this unique collaboration possible.

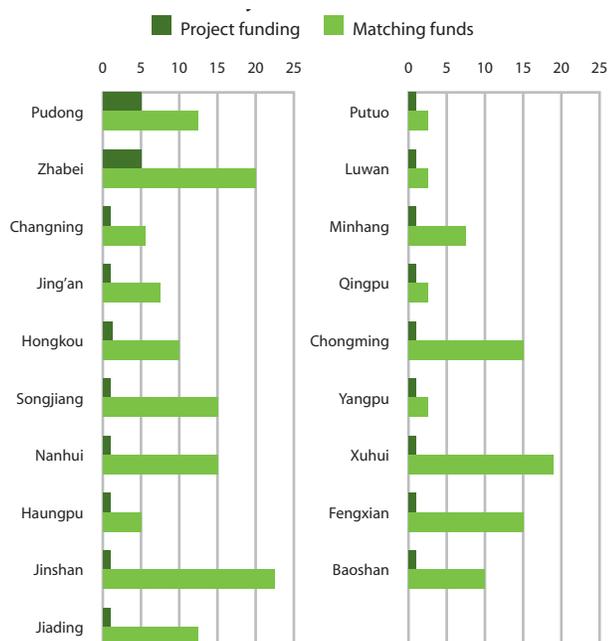
All new policy documents unanimously recognized young people's right to sexual and reproductive health, enabling partner agencies to work vigorously to address potentially controversial issues, such as youth vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and youth access to contraception. In addition, policies outlined specific requirements for curricula and health services, more effectively ensuring youth access to appropriate information and services.

As the impact of the YRH project was demonstrated, the investment of international project funds attracted significant local investment. During the start-up stage, matching funds amounted to nearly double (1.8 times) the project funds allocated by CFPA. This was much higher than the equal contributions expected. In the pilot stage, matching funding had increased

Trends in international project funding vs. local matching funds (in 10,000 RMB increments)



Funding sources in each district during scale-up of pilot trial to whole city (in 10,000 RMB increments)



to well over double project funds (2.4 times), and, by the time of the scale-up stage, matching funds were over six times (6.6 times) greater than project funding.

With the combination of an increasingly favorable policy environment and more government funding, the project advanced within existing project sites and expanded to additional sites, until LPS training was being conducted in all 19 districts in Shanghai. Progressive expansion allowed adequate time and space to improve the policy environment—a prerequisite for sustainability—and expand the project, both to more regions and to more youth. The project reached youth at all types of schools, as well as out-of-school, working, and handicapped youth.

Project activities increasingly were adopted by local educational and professional structures. Departments of education in at least three districts institutionalized project training into their regular teacher training. Several businesses also incorporated

LPS training into their ongoing work plans. At the same time, awareness of the project in the general population increased: in 2003 alone, the media reported on project activities 31 times on television, 14 times on the radio, 51 times in newspapers, twice in magazines, and more than 30 times on websites.

Conclusions

The YRH Project significantly enhanced the policy environment for ASRH programming in Shanghai. Family Planning Association staff were able to create collaborative, multisectoral project leadership groups at municipal and district levels, actively led by high-ranking government officials. Consistent and extensive advocacy ensured significant matching funding, supportive media coverage, issuance of major policy documents, city-wide program coverage, and institutionalization of program approaches in some districts. Researchers conclude that future programming should focus on quality control, expansion, and better promotion of youth-friendly health services, as well as expansion of LPS training coverage to reach even more youth.

For more information

To learn more about this study, please contact Qian Geng, senior program officer, at qgeng@path-dc.org, or Lisa Mueller, program officer, at lmuller@path-dc.org.

"This project is great. The philosophy of students' participation is also part of our teaching reform, and this helps us to understand education reform better. I think this project should be called 'life education.'"

—Headmaster of Gusong Middle School, Songjiang District