

# TOGETHER ON THE PATH TO CHANGE:

A Young Advocate's Guide to Advancing  
Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)



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Front cover photo: Women Deliver Young Leader Alumni Nnamdi John Eseme leading a lesson with girls in Sierra Leone. Photo courtesy Nnamdi John Eseme.

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# TERMS & ACRONYMS

<b>Beijing</b> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action	<b>SRHR</b> Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>COVID-19</b> Coronavirus Disease 2019 (caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2)	<b>SRMNAH</b> Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health
<b>CPD</b> Commission on Population Development	<b>STIs</b> Sexually Transmitted Infections
<b>CSE</b> Comprehensive Sexuality Education	<b>The Global Fund</b> The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
<b>CSW</b> Commission on the Status of Women	<b>UHC</b> Universal Health Coverage
<b>GPE</b> Global Partnership for Education	<b>UN</b> United Nations
<b>GRES</b> Gender-responsive Education Sector Planning	<b>UNAIDS</b> The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>HIV/AIDS</b> Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome	<b>UNESCO</b> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>ICPD</b> International Conference on Population and Development	<b>UNFPA</b> United Nations Population Fund
<b>IPPF</b> International Planned Parenthood Federation	<b>UNGEI</b> United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
<b>ITGSE</b> International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education	<b>UNICEF</b> The United Nations Children's Fund
<b>LGBTQIA+</b> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual	<b>UN Women</b> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>PMNCH</b> Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health	<b>WHO</b> World Health Organization
<b>SDGs</b> Sustainable Development Goals	
<b>SGBV</b> Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	
<b>SRGBV</b> School-related Gender-based Violence	

## BACKGROUND

### CSE IN THE GLOBAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

Welcome to “Together on the Path to Change: A Young Advocate’s Guide to Advancing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).” Young<sup>1</sup> advocates—like you—have been demanding, promoting, and delivering quality CSE in their communities, countries, and regions for decades.<sup>2</sup> Women Deliver recognizes and celebrates the role you have played and continue to play in unlocking progress on some of the world’s most entrenched problems. You and other changemakers are at the forefront of local, regional, and national advocacy:<sup>3</sup> working with policymakers, programmers, funders, and influencers to create a better world for everyone. This guide is part of our commitment to meaningful and authentic youth engagement in policy and practice, and to the continued shift of power into your hands.<sup>4</sup>

1 In this guide, Women Deliver defines young people and young advocates between the ages of 15–30, adolescents as 10–19, and children as anyone under the age of 18—without prejudice to national definitions of youth or young people that include other age ranges. In this guide, youth is used in reference to advocates and movements, and adolescents and children when talking about the evidence base on CSE. CSE is a lifelong learning process—it begins in childhood and continues into adulthood.

2 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Emerging Evidence, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Global Review*. Paris: UNESCO, 2015.

3 In this guide, advocacy is defined as the process of building support for a specific issue or cause and influencing others to take action in order to achieve a desired change.

4 For more on Women Deliver’s commitment and approach, see our position paper: [Meaningful Youth Engagement: Sharing Power, Advancing Progress, Driving Change](#).



You have grown up in a world shaped by the landmark commitments to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health made at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The agreements adopted at these conferences, and reaffirmed in their follow-up and review processes, have laid a foundation that advocates have used to expand global recognition of the rights of adolescents to CSE. In addition, they have highlighted the value of CSE as a strategy to promote gender equality, reduce the burden of unintended pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission on adolescents, and improve life skills education.

As the world celebrates the 25-year anniversary of the Beijing Conference in 2020 and beyond, and is working through response and recovery efforts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, advocates like you continue to defend and expand the gains made through these processes while also facing a changing and challenging global policy landscape. Evidence shows that pandemics exacerbate inequalities, including those associated with gender inequalities related to SGBV, the equitable access to education, and the deprioritization and defunding of essential health and social services.

COVID-19 has altered the environment in which you must work; it brings new challenges but also presents a new opportunity to strategically consider with whom to partner and which tactics to utilize. Beginning with the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and evolving into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world has seen the United Nations (UN), national governments, major funders, and other international actors take on more holistic, inclusive, and intersectional approaches to how we understand and practice development. COVID-19 is contributing to this by creating opportunities to “build back better.”

This is good news for those of you who have been advocating for CSE in schools, communities, countries, and regions. CSE works at the intersection of health, education, youth, and gender equality, all of which are crucial elements to a development framework that hopes to *leave no one behind*.<sup>6</sup> Delivering CSE through both formal and non-formal education—both inside and outside of school settings—is key to making sure that all children, adolescents, and young people (including the most vulnerable groups<sup>7</sup>) have access to the specific information and skills they need to safely and consensually explore, experience, and protect their sexuality and sexual rights.

5 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Mapping of Online Articles on Covid-19 and Gender*. Paris: UNESCO, 2020.

6 The SDG Framework is grounded in and framed by a pledge to “leave no one behind,” a recognition that development gains must reach all people, without distinction for any reason, in order to reach the goals.

7 There are many ways of understanding and defining vulnerability. Advocates are encouraged to think intersectionally about how young people experience stigma and discrimination, including how they may experience compounded stigmas based on their age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, migration status, ability, economic opportunity, race, vulnerability to HIV, and other factors. In particular, young people living with HIV, adolescents experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, or sex characteristics, pregnant and/or married adolescents, adolescents experiencing homelessness and poverty, adolescents in crisis or emergency settings, rural adolescents, and adolescents with disabilities frequently have less access to formal education systems, requiring investments particularly into CSE that reach beyond the school to ensure that they have the access they need.



Women Deliver Young Leader Alumni Michelle Belfor taking part in a regional workshop for young advocates in Panama City in 2019.



## OVERVIEW


## USING THIS GUIDE

This guide provides evidence and arguments for CSE from different sectors and offers advice to young advocates like you who are interested in pushing for increased investments in and favorable policy environments for CSE at the global level. It draws on existing tools and guidelines, such as the SDGs. It particularly draws on the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE) commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and developed by a robust coalition of UN agencies.

This tool is designed as a practical guide to help you to:

- Better understand and use opportunities to advance CSE in global policy, accountability, and funding mechanisms;

- Work with other young advocates from different sectors to develop a common language on the value and definition of CSE; and
- Educate policy and decision-makers to create new champions for CSE.

This guide is designed for use by you, the young advocate, working in global policy spaces in full recognition that global advocacy is and should remain rooted in local and national movements. *It is not an advocacy training tool, an assessment of the field of CSE implementation, nor a review of the evidence for CSE; those resources exist in other forms.* This global roadmap is complementary to existing tools and guidance documents for CSE, which are referenced along with other helpful resources throughout the guide. To locate these tools, look for the  symbol,

or refer to the detailed list of existing tools in the “Resources for Advocates” section at the end of the guide.

This guide is meant specifically for young advocates like you who are working to advance global policy for CSE and is designed to be actionable. It incorporates candid and up-to-date information (like key policy terms and agreements) and insight and input from leading CSE experts and implementers. You can use this guide not only to understand the work that needs to be done but also to benefit from the experience and successes of like-minded colleagues. **Advocates working to advance CSE are strongest when working together.**

To provide feedback on this guide, and for all other inquiries, please contact Women Deliver via email at [info@womendeliver.org](mailto:info@womendeliver.org).



Women Deliver Young Leader Alumni Kinga Wisniewska, an advocate for CSE, leading a discussion in the Youth Zone at the Women Deliver 2019 Conference.

# INTRODUCTION TO CSE ADVOCACY

CSE lays the foundation for healthy adolescence. CSE is grounded in principles of human rights, critical consciousness, leadership, and social justice.<sup>8</sup> Adolescents, and particularly adolescent girls, continue to face unacceptably high levels of morbidity and mortality related to their sexual and reproductive health, in particular from HIV, early pregnancy, and unsafe abortion.

CSE, implemented alongside complementary health system reforms, is the most effective and evidence-based strategy for reducing the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, and preventing early and unintended pregnancy.<sup>9</sup> The need to understand and address the role of gender-based violence in upholding and replicating systems of harmful gender norms and gender inequality has been central to development goals and funding. CSE offers the opportunity to reach children and adolescents with crucial information and skills to prevent, report, and break the cycle of violence<sup>10</sup> while also tackling harmful gender norms.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to better health outcomes, CSE delivered as part of a skills-based, learner-centered curriculum also has the potential to “disrupt harmful gender norms and promote gender equality,” prevent and reduce violence, promote civic engagement, build soft skills necessary for leadership, improve employability, and turn the tide on gender discrimination and inequality.<sup>12</sup>

8 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach*. Paris: UNESCO, 2018.

9 Ibid.

10 Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice. *Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Violence: The Promise of Psychosocial Interventions to Address Children's Exposure to Violence*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US and Cape Town: Sonke Gender Justice, 2018.

11 Heymann, J, et al. “Improving health with programmatic, legal, and policy approaches to reduce gender inequality and change restrictive gender norms.” *The Lancet* (2019), 393: 2522-34.

This is why advocates have worked for decades to establish a solid policy ground for the right to *evidence-based comprehensive education on human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, human rights, and gender equality*<sup>13</sup> to empower children and adolescents to have autonomy over their bodies, sexuality, right to safety, and future.

Understanding the importance of CSE in advancing adolescent rights, development, and gender equality is crucial as you face barriers, resistance, and even backlash to your advocacy efforts. Because CSE sits at the nexus of adolescence, gender equality, and sexuality, it remains vulnerable to attacks. Regressive fundamentalist, nationalist, and anti-gender movements have gained traction in many regions and countries around the world, bringing with them increased hostility to human rights, gender-mainstreaming, and science, all important components of the CSE approach.

Conservative advocates, religious fundamentalists, and other opposition leaders continue to focus their efforts on reducing or eliminating access to CSE, incorrectly claiming that it will encourage risky, promiscuous sexual activities among children and claiming that advocates for CSE are “sex-obsessed” or promoting a radical redefinition of gender.<sup>14</sup> The term CSE is all too often misunderstood, feared, or deliberately mischaracterized. All of these factors contribute to a landscape in which CSE remains a battleground: in communities, in schools and local school boards, in national ministries and parliaments, and in the halls of the United Nations and other international policy forums.

12 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Policy Paper 39 Facing the Facts: the case for comprehensive sexuality education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2019.

13 CPD Resolution. Adolescents and Youth. [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/pdf/commission/2012/country/Agenda%20item%208/Decisions%20and%20resolution/Resolution%202012\\_1\\_Adolescents%20and%20Youth.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/pdf/commission/2012/country/Agenda%20item%208/Decisions%20and%20resolution/Resolution%202012_1_Adolescents%20and%20Youth.pdf) Published 2012. Accessed August 8, 2020.

14 For one example, see popular CSE opposition site “The War on Children” <https://www.comprehensive sexuality education.org/videos/the-war-on-children-the-comprehensive-sexuality-education-agenda/>.

## Definition of Comprehensive Sexuality Education:

CSE is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

(Source: ITGSE)

*Advocates should note that while the ITGSE definition of CSE is focused on curriculum-based approaches, inclusive CSE advocacy requires pushing beyond the existing definitions to reflect the realities of young people and adolescents in your contexts who may not have access to school-based CSE. See the Inclusive CSE textbox on pg. 16 for more on building a broader coalition for progressive advocacy.*



In this environment, you must also be an educator: you will need clear messages, discourse analysis, information, and evidence to bring your governments and other allies on board with the CSE agenda. This starts with helping policymakers understand the definition and importance of CSE included in the UN Guidance. You will need to support policymakers to withstand the same attacks that you face by giving them the evidence and language they need to push back. The more you can draw the connections between CSE and other adolescent development goals through working collectively with young advocates from other sectors, the better you will be able to prepare the policymakers you work with to resist backlash and defend CSE themselves.

**To better support you in navigating the current environment, this guide will outline three priority areas for CSE advocacy:**

- 1) language and policy;**
- 2) cross-sectoral collaboration; and**
- 3) connecting the global to the local through funding for implementation and accountability.**

These priority areas will take on new dimensions, opportunities, and challenges due to COVID-19. By working to advance policy, connect CSE to a broad range of goals and programs and increase funding and accountability for commitments made to CSE—both in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery as well as other

development institutions and initiatives—you can broaden your coalition of allies at the global level and provide more support to your fellow advocates and colleagues working locally. Only when CSE is available both in-school and out-of-school to all children, adolescents, and young people (without stigma or discrimination) will they be able to fulfill their right to grow up healthy, safe, and in control of their sexual and reproductive lives without fear of violence, coercion, or discrimination.<sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup> The YP Foundation. *A Policy Brief on Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. New Delhi: The YP Foundation, 2018.



## PRIORITY 1:


# CSE LANGUAGE & POLICY

In general, when it comes to CSE advocacy around policies, you must continue to work to ensure and hold ground on the recognition of CSE as a right. Moving forward, you will also need to work with other young advocates—not only those committed to health but also those working to promote access to education, end gender-based violence, and achieve gender equality; in this way, we can position CSE as a proven program strategy to make advances on these fronts.

At the global level, advocacy for recognition of the right to CSE comes down to getting binding or “agreed” language into the right

documents and places. Policy advocacy at the global level can be challenging, as it frequently relies on your ability as an advocate to quickly and easily reference documents and language used before or to justify changing or creating new language. Fortunately, there are many different ways to talk about CSE when it comes to policy language (which you can tailor to the audience you are facing) and many sources to draw from when convincing your government or other high-level targets to advance CSE (see green box on page 15).

The UN works with a very particular set of rules when it comes to how documents are written and negotiated between member states. At the most basic level, “agreed language” means text that has been debated and agreed upon by all 192 member states at the UN.<sup>16</sup> When advocating with governments, agreed language is useful because it effectively outranks other documents or policy language, and due to the consensus decisions, the government will have already agreed to it. Once a government agrees to a document through a negotiation process, they can be held accountable for delivering on the commitments made within that document.

 For more on UN language and the agreed consensus process, see [The Advocate's Guide to UN Language](#).

Fortunately, progressive language you can use to advocate for CSE also appears in other international and regional documents. While these texts are not “agreed” language

Some sources of agreed or binding language in the global policy world. For a searchable database of language from official UN documents, you can register and search at [unadvocacy.org](http://unadvocacy.org).

STATES SHOULD... take immediate and effective action to prevent violence against women and girls by: **developing and implementing educational programmes and teaching materials, including comprehensive sexuality education...** (HRC Resolution 2018)

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD... **commit to efforts to scale up scientifically accurate, age-appropriate comprehensive education... that provides adolescent girls and boys and young men and women, in and out of school, consistent with their evolving capacities, with information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, gender equality and women's empowerment, human rights...** (GA Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS (2016))

because they have not been adopted by all member states, you can still use them to shape your advocacy messages. In particular, you can look for support from:

- [The Bali Youth Forum Declaration](#)
- [International AIDS Conference Youth Call to Action](#)
- [The Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Commitment on CSE](#)
- [The Mexico City Ministerial Declaration “Educating to Prevent”](#)

The Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Commitment on CSE and the Mexico City Ministerial Declaration “Educating to Prevent”

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD... **develop and implement educational programmes and teaching materials, including comprehensive evidence-based education for human sexuality, based on full and accurate information, for all adolescents and youth...** (CSW 2013)

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PROVIDE... **evidence-based comprehensive education on human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, human rights and gender equality to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality.** (CPD 2012)

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS BY... **working more effectively to achieve equality between women and men ... in education at all levels, and by protecting the human rights of adolescents to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality...** (CPD 2012)

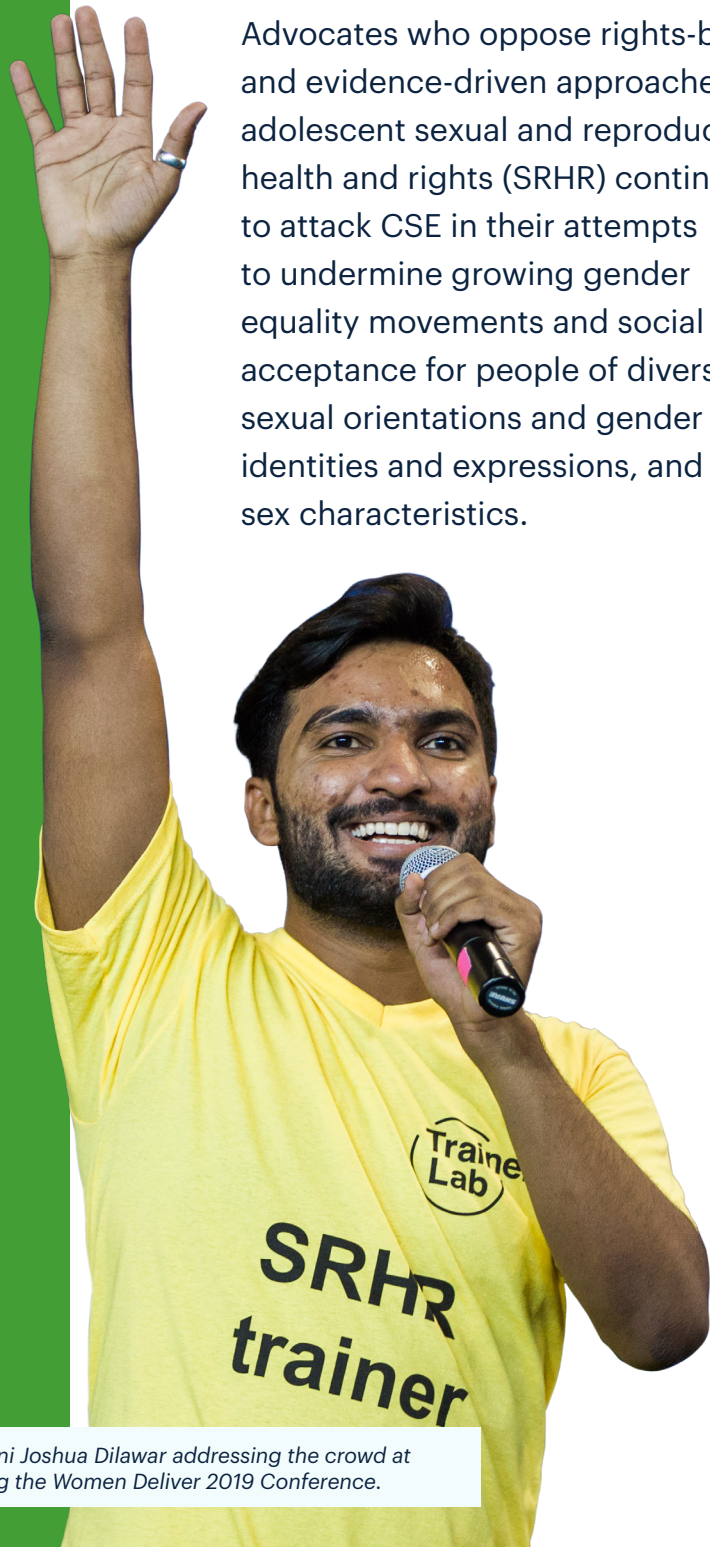
in particular stand out: both are agreements made by health and education ministers from a regional block to implement and improve CSE and provide more accessible services. These commitments are incredibly valuable for advocates working at the national level looking to work with governments and other stakeholders to implement and deliver CSE. The Bali Youth Forum Declaration and the Call to Action from the 2016 International AIDS Conference (as well as previous conferences) have the benefit of being negotiated and determined by young advocates themselves and are therefore representative of young people's voices and priorities.

<sup>16</sup> CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality. *The Advocate's Guide to UN Language*. Amsterdam: CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality, 2017.



INCLUSIVE CSE

While global support for CSE is generally growing, advocates are aware that there are some groups of children, adolescents, and young people who tend to be left behind. Out of school adolescents and young people without homes may not have access to the same information as their peers. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) young people are frequently missing from curricula, which include information that assumes all adolescents are interested in heterosexual partnerships. Children, adolescents, and young people with disabilities may be left out of CSE classes or given less information than their peers due to misinformed assumptions about their sexual interests or abilities. Individuals who are displaced by conflict or crisis face interruptions to their education, and all too frequently, CSE is an afterthought when resources are scarce. Policies and implementation must be designed to deliberately include all children, adolescents, and young people. Building your coalitions to be inclusive of LGTBQIA+ young advocates, those with disabilities, young people and advocates who have been displaced by crisis or conflict, and other historically disadvantaged or marginalized groups strengthens your advocacy. Additionally, you may find new areas of common ground, new opportunities to grow your knowledge and skills, and new entry points to improve access to CSE for all.



KEY TERMS IN CSE POLICY ADVOCACY

It can sometimes be easy to think that because advocates have so far managed to advance the understanding of CSE and its value in international forums, they have moved beyond the need to defend it. This is a false sense of security. Advocates who oppose rights-based and evidence-driven approaches to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) continue to attack CSE in their attempts to undermine growing gender equality movements and social acceptance for people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics.

In particular, we need to be on constant guard about the use of qualifying language in commitments to CSE (which can make a statement either more or less certain and also weaken or strengthen an action) and also for movements to redefine what CSE means. In particular, there have been attempts in global policy spaces to redefine CSE in order to convince policymakers that they can meet their commitments through abstinence-focused, abstinence-only, or narrowly focused health promotion curricula. Even where governments have committed to CSE, global anti-sexuality advocates push for biased approaches that leave out topics that they deem controversial like sexuality, sexual pleasure, and consent in favor of focusing on

topics like puberty, negotiation, assertiveness, and agency. CSE must encompass health, life skills, gender, and norms around sexuality in order to be comprehensive.

In order to counter this rhetoric, you will need to not only have the clear definition of CSE provided in the UN Guidance but also be able to explain clearly the meaning of some of the relevant policy language. The following language and opposition guide is designed to help you navigate some of the current battlegrounds for CSE, but it is not definitive; this is a rapidly changing and shifting space. Historically, opposition groups frequently shift their language to match and redefine policy terms used by CSE advocates.

Term	What We Mean	Common Attacks & Misinformation	Potential Rebuttals
AGE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Includes staged learning targets for all ages, including younger children.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“CSE sexualizes young children by teaching them about sex before they are ready.”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Children’s and adolescents’ need to understand and respect their bodies does not begin at puberty.</li><li>CSE from a young age helps children treat each other with respect, set boundaries with their bodies, and prepare for puberty.</li></ul>
COMPREHENSIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Cannot focus narrowly on one topic or be a one-off lesson or intervention.</li><li>Covers sexual and reproductive health, gender norms, consent, and critical life skills without avoiding “controversial” topics.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“CSE goes beyond what adolescents need to know to protect themselves and attacks traditional norms.”</li><li>“CSE must include lessons about the emotional harms of early sexual activity to be called comprehensive.”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The norms CSE seeks to change are those that underpin inequality, violence, discrimination, and abuse.</li><li>CSE must be unbiased and centered in the available evidence and science in order to have positive effects on health and well-being.</li></ul>

Term	What We Mean	Common Attacks & Misinformation	Potential Rebuttals
<b>CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND CONTEXTUALIZED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grounded in the local and national context in which CSE is delivered through collaboration with local advocates and experts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“CSE promotes a single Western liberal ideology that is imposed on other cultures.”</li> <li>“Not all topics are relevant to all countries: for example, ‘There is no homosexuality here.’”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSE promotes universal values of equality, empathy, and respect for all people.</li> <li>Contextualization should not be used as cover for people who have access to power to keep vital health information from those who do not.</li> </ul>
<b>EVIDENCE-BASED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes approaches shown to have positive health and gender outcomes, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>information on condoms and contraception, gender norms, consent, and violence;</li> <li>connection to health service delivery;</li> <li>integration with teacher training; and,</li> <li>availability in multiple settings and for all ages.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The ‘evidence’ is inconclusive or biased.”</li> <li>“Abstinence is the only effective approach.”</li> <li>“CSE goes beyond the established evidence to promote radical progressive ideology.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are now decades of evidence to show that comprehensive approaches work to reduce risk of pregnancy and STI transmission, and growing evidence about their impact on gender equality.</li> <li>Abstinence approaches have been shown to be ineffective at best and harmful in many cases.</li> </ul>
<b>GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes gender equality through active discussion about gender norms, stereotypes, and expectations.</li> <li>Builds critical thinking and healthy relationship skills to reduce gender-based discrimination and violence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“CSE contributes to gender confusion and a world where gender is meaningless.”</li> <li>“CSE attacks the traditional norms that distinguish and value the differences between men and women.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSE promotes a world where no one faces discrimination or violence because of their gender.</li> <li>CSE values all gender expressions, including traditional ones, and builds skills that reinforce empathy and respect for all people.</li> <li>Evidence shows that CSE, which directly addresses gender and power, is more effective at reducing violence and risk.</li> </ul>

Term	What We Mean	Common Attacks & Misinformation	Potential Rebuttals
<b>RIGHTS-BASED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grounded in universal rights principles of non-discrimination, equality, and access to health, information, and education.</li> <li>Teaches human rights concepts as part of the curriculum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The ‘rights’ that CSE promotes are a fabrication of the liberal West.”</li> <li>“The rights of parents and the nation are more important than the rights of children, adolescents, and young people.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human rights principles have been universally agreed to by all nations and are found in all cultures and societies.</li> <li>CSE supports children, adolescents, and young people to know their own rights and prevents abuse.</li> </ul>
<b>SCIENTIFICALLY ACCURATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive, non-biased, and up-to-date information about sex, gender, and sexuality.</li> <li>Presents accurate representation of the risks of sexual activity not based in fear or shame.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Lacks ‘morals’ or values.”</li> <li>“Promotes homosexuality or ‘gender confusion.’”</li> <li>“Downplays the emotional and physical risks of sexual activity or overstates the benefits of condoms.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSE is centered in the values of equality, justice, non-discrimination, and empathy while grounding itself in data and evidence.</li> <li>Trying to scare or shame adolescents out of having sex only contributes to stigma and increases risk.</li> </ul>
<b>SEX-POSITIVE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents accurate and unbiased information about sexuality in a positive light that acknowledges sexual pleasure.</li> <li>Includes discussion of sexual pleasure, masturbation, sexual desire, and positive consent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“CSE promotes sexual activity.”</li> <li>“Conversations about sexual pleasure, desire, and masturbation are inappropriate for children and adolescents.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no evidence that discussions of sexuality lead to increased sexual activity in adolescents.</li> <li>Sexuality is lifelong, and CSE helps children and adolescents prepare to have a healthy and positive sexual life when they are ready.</li> </ul>



You can find more evidence to support your CSE advocacy in the ITGSE, the resources listed at the end of this tool, or at [www.advocates4cse.com](http://www.advocates4cse.com).



## FROM POLICY TO GLOBAL MOVEMENTS

While agreed language continues to be a priority, there is a whole new and emerging world of global policy that you can influence outside of UN negotiations. More and more, global policy is taking the form of commitments: commitments to a strategy, to a set of priorities, to funding, or to accountability. The use of commitments provides opportunities in three areas: 1) the language you can use, 2) the decision-makers you can influence, and 3) what you advocate for (whether it be for policies, programs, or funding).

**What is a commitment?** At their most basic level, commitments are promises that express political will. In global policy, commitments are emerging as a way for governments, funders, civil society, and private sector organizations to participate in a shared community of global interest. Groups make commitments to participate in a global movement and contribute to a shared goal, like with the [Every Woman Every Child](#) movement of commitments to support the UN Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health.

There are three major commitment platforms operating in the area of SRHR: the [Every Woman Every Child](#) movement, [Family Planning 2020](#), and the commitment structure built around the future of the International Conference on Population and Development or [ICPD](#) (see green box on page 21). These platforms not only aggregate the commitments made to them into a searchable

form but also ask commitment-makers to regularly report on their progress.

A commitment is meant to include a clear, time-bound, and actionable statement about how the commitment-maker plans to contribute to the overall goals of the community. What is included in the commitment may be different based on who is making it: funders commit money, implementers commit to program outcomes, and governments commit to changes in policy, funding, and programming. This means the language of commitments is closer to the language you use to set your own objectives and goals. Language for commitments is not bound by the same restrictions as negotiated global policy; you can move beyond agreed language and towards more concrete, measurable policy promises that are grounded in the UN language you have learned. For CSE, commitments are a clear path for translating policy to implementation; you can use them to push national governments, funders, and implementers to spell out in clear and measurable terms what they are promising to do.

**Who makes commitments?** As you will see in the ICPD commitment platforms (see green box on page 21), commitments come not only from governments, funders, and civil society but also from youth networks, academic and research institutions, private sector companies, and multilateral agencies.

While making a commitment yourself can open up access to information and new networks, it is important to pay particular attention to the commitments made by your

## ICPD AND COMMITMENTS TO A WAY FORWARD

A great example of this new commitment-based global advocacy comes from the evolution of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In the 25 years since ICPD, governments have used the annual Commission on Population and Development at the UN headquarters and review conferences every five years to redefine, renegotiate, and advance policy on sexual and reproductive health and the empowerment of girls and women. The 25th anniversary of the ICPD in Nairobi in 2019 marked a shift away from negotiations on a new document to a high-level summit where governments, funders, civil society, and advocates made commitments to the ICPD agenda under a negotiated set of themes related to the original Programme of Action. The non-binding statement from the Nairobi Summit in particular highlighted the need for:

**Access for all adolescents and youth, especially girls, to comprehensive and age-responsive information, education and adolescent-friendly comprehensive, quality and timely services to be able to make free and informed decisions and choices about their sexuality and reproductive lives, to adequately protect themselves from unintended pregnancies, all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, to facilitate a safe transition to adulthood.**

The 200 commitments made under this theme are available and searchable by country, region, keyword, or mode of engagement at [www.naibsummiticpd.org](http://www.naibsummiticpd.org) for young advocates at all levels who want to hold their governments accountable to the promises they have made. Follow the Youth Corner on the Nairobi Summit website or additional resources included at the end of this tool for guidance on how you can hold decision-makers accountable.

government and the funders working in your country. Governments are traditionally the duty bearers (the actors who hold the responsibility of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling rights), and are therefore more accountable when it comes to acting on the commitments they make towards their citizens. You can use these commitments to make sure the work they are doing is aligned to the global policies to which they have committed or to push them to take global policies back to national levels.

**What commitments do we want to see when it comes to CSE?** You can work with governments, funders, and international and national civil society organizations to ensure that commitments:

- **Include CSE as a vital strategy for better adolescent health (including SRHR), and link with global efforts to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health as part of universal health coverage (UHC);**

- **Include funding for education sector improvements such as teacher training and support;**
- **Invest in CSE to address harmful gender norms and improve gender equality;**
- **Invest in CSE as a strategy for preventing and reducing sexual and gender-based violence;**
- **Fund youth-led CSE advocacy and meaningful youth engagement in CSE implementation;**
- **Promote policies requiring investment in CSE outside of schools, in crisis settings, and in non-formal education as a strategy for empowerment; and**
- **Connect to funding for implementation.**

Commitments offer you a new opportunity to get into the details of how global players plan to get things done in the community—and to hold them accountable when they do not.



Women Deliver Young Leaders convene to discuss their advocacy at a workshop in 2019.

## PRIORITY 2:

# CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP, OR CSE BEYOND HEALTH

You may have noticed that most of the policy resources referenced this far in the guide have come from health sector mechanisms and processes. CSE has its roots firmly in movements to address SRHR. The vast majority of the evidence that we have for the effectiveness of CSE also comes from health. A lot more is known about CSE's role in preventing unintended pregnancy, in reducing risk for STIs including HIV, in promoting sexual health behaviors, and tackling gender-based violence than about its long-term impacts on gender equality, access to education, and educational improvements.

What is known is promising: evidence is beginning to show that CSE can support self-efficacy and confidence in students and can contribute to promoting gender-equitable norms. The skills-based approach promoted by CSE can improve communication and critical thinking skills, leading to improved academic outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Facing the facts: the case for comprehensive sexuality education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2019.



It is at this nexus between health, education, youth, and gender that there is the most support for CSE at the global level. As the development landscape is shifting away from sector-specific siloes and towards more holistic and integrated approaches, there is more attention being paid to the value and importance of meaningful and authentic youth engagement than ever before.

Young advocates like you are leading global progress not only on CSE and SRHR but also on gender justice, climate justice, economic resilience, peace and security, social inclusion, and improved educational quality. You have an unprecedented opportunity to reach out across sectors and look for areas where CSE intersects with other issues. These entry points can support collaboration with new actors and more powerful collective action.



Delegates taking a selfie in the Youth Zone at the Women Deliver 2019 Conference.

## CSE AND THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Like ICPD did for SRHR, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, defined a global agenda for gender equality. Also, like ICPD, progress made on Beijing’s 12 areas of focus has been reported annually at the UN Commission on the Status of Women and at review conferences and events every five years. Twenty-five years beyond Beijing, we expect this landmark agenda will continue to evolve. There are multiple opportunities for you to engage with the Beijing+25 process, through Action Coalitions: the Beijing+25 Youth Task Force convened by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), government and NGO reports on progress, and at global Generation Equality Fora. Originally scheduled for 2020, these opportunities have been largely postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19.


For the Generation Equality Fora, six Action Coalitions have been launched to address the most pressing large-scale gender equality issues:

- Gender-based violence
- Economic justice and rights
- Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Feminist action for climate justice

- Technology and innovation for gender equality
- Feminist movements and leadership

UN Women is viewing adolescent health and well-being as a cross-cutting theme across all of the six action coalitions, so there is certainly space for you and other advocates to influence the agenda within each action coalition.

Since Beijing, the understanding of the social drivers of gender inequalities, in particular the role of harmful gender norms in propping up systems of inequality and violence, has only deepened. Further learning about structural drivers of gender inequality, the interactions of gender and power, and the impact of gender inequality on all aspects of girls’, women’s, and gender nonconforming people’s lives has deepened understanding of how to address and change those norms.<sup>18</sup> CSE remains a primary strategy for reaching children, adolescents, and young people with vital information and skills to question harmful gender norms, prevent SGBV, and promote gender equality. The importance of CSE programs, which include discussion on gender, power, and diversity (as a proven and effective investment to address gender-based violence and promote bodily autonomy and gender equality), should not be lost from the Beijing platform moving forward.

 For more on the Beijing+25 process and how to engage, see OutRight International’s [Guide to Beijing+25](#) and the [Generation Equality Forum](#).

<sup>18</sup> Levy, JK, et al. “Characteristics of successful programmes targeting gender inequality and restrictive gender norms for health and wellbeing of children, adolescents, and young adults: a systematic review.” *The Lancet Global Health* (2020) Vol. 8 Issue 2, e225–236.



## CSE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Beyond the long-standing policy documents of ICPD and Beijing, which provide grounding for CSE, you can look to where CSE finds support in the SDGs and some of the priorities and messages you may want to use to reach out to in those sectors. In particular, you can use the SDG's focus on leaving no one behind to:

- draw attention to the vital intersections of CSE with gender and other forms of equality;
- the need to reach all children, adolescents, and young people without discrimination or stigma; and,
- the role of high-quality, gender-transformative education in building more just and equitable societies.

This is not a comprehensive list; for example, while some key allies to reach out to are included under each topic, there are many more people working on each issue. For more information about health, education, or gender equality (as well as connections to other young advocates), please refer to the additional resources at the end of this guide.

There are three SDGs with targets related to CSE: Goal 3 on Good Health and Well-Being, Goal 4 on Quality Education, and Goal 5 on Gender Equality.



## THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The set of 17 goals adopted by all UN member states in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development make up the SDGs. The SDGs are both an urgent call to action and a blueprint for peace and prosperity. The SDGs were agreed to with a theme of leaving no one behind, which has been interpreted to mean that development must be equitable and accessible to all people in order to be effective or sustainable. Each goal includes key targets and indicators for states to measure their progress. Follow up and review of the SDGs is coordinated through the High Level Political Forum in the form of voluntary national reviews and thematic reviews. For more information about the goals, the review process, and access to previous voluntary national reviews, see [sustainabledevelopment.un.org](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org).





# GLOBAL HEALTH

## Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

**Target 3.1:** By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.

**Target 3.2:** By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births.

**Target 3.3:** By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases.

**Target 3.7:** By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.

*Note: Goal 5, on gender equality, also includes explicit reference to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.*

## ADVOCACY PRIORITIES AND ISSUES IN GLOBAL HEALTH:

### 1) UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

**What is it?** The ability of all people and communities to access health services, supplies, and information to achieve an equitable standard of basic health without discrimination or financial risk. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “UHC means that all individuals and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. It includes the full spectrum of essential, quality health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care.”<sup>19</sup> For more on UHC, see the [UHC Political Declaration](#) and the [UHC2030 Advocacy Guide](#).

**Some key allies:** The WHO and the [UHC2030](#) platform, along with many health-focused UN agencies and civil society organizations.

#### How does CSE fit in?

- CSE is not only a key element of health education both in- and out-of-schools, but it offers experience and lessons learned in integrating health education and services.
- Childhood and adolescence are when health habits and gender norms are solidified for many. CSE offers opportunities to build healthy habits for the entire life course.

- CSE is part of the essential package of SRHR to achieve UHC.<sup>20</sup>

### 2) SEXUAL, REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, NEWBORN, CHILD, AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH (SRMNCAH)

**What is it?** A bundled group of related health priorities focused on reducing maternal and child mortality and improving health outcomes for women and their children. SRMNCAH is central to the [Global Strategy on Women’s, Children’s and Adolescent’s Health](#) and the Every Woman Every Child movement.

**Some key allies:** United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Every Woman Every Child (which is funded through the [Global Financing Facility](#) and coordinated through the WHO and the [Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health \(PMNCH\)](#)).

#### How does CSE fit in?

- Denying girls and women control over their own fertility is a key driver of unintended pregnancy and maternal and child mortality.<sup>21</sup> Adolescent girls are at greater risk of mortality related to unintended pregnancy, including from unsafe abortion.<sup>22</sup> CSE builds the knowledge and skills needed to determine when, if, how, and with whom to have children in a way that protects their own and their family’s health.

<sup>19</sup> WHO. *Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Fact Sheet*. [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)). Published 2019. Accessed August 8, 2020.


<sup>20</sup> For more on the role of SRHR in the UHC Agenda, see: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SRHR\\_an\\_essential\\_element\\_of\\_UHC\\_2020\\_online.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SRHR_an_essential_element_of_UHC_2020_online.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World Population 2013 Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy*. New York: UNFPA, 2013.

- CSE is included in the Global Strategy as a priority action for community engagement and an evidence-based intervention for adolescent health and development, noting that: “women, children and adolescents are the most powerful agents for improving their own health and achieving prosperous and sustainable societies.”<sup>23</sup>

### 3) ENDING THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

**What is it?** Political priorities for ending the AIDS epidemic are found in the 2016 UN [Political Declaration on Ending AIDS](#) and the global strategy of The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The UNAIDS [global strategy](#) is now aligned with the SDGs, maintaining a global focus on reducing HIV transmission, scaling up HIV treatment, and ending deaths from AIDS-related illness. Young advocates have had an immense impact on the HIV agenda, from calls to action from the International AIDS Conferences to mandated youth participation in country-level HIV/AIDS policy decision making through The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund) Country Coordinating Mechanisms.

 For more on young people’s participation in HIV/AIDS funding and policy, see the UNAIDS participation tool [Making the money work for young people](#).

**Some key allies:** [UNAIDS](#), [The Global Fund](#), [The PACT](#) coalition of youth organizations, [ACT!2030](#), [International AIDS Society](#), other health-related UN agencies, and many other health-focused civil society organizations.

#### How does CSE fit in?

- In the 2016 UN [Political Declaration on Ending AIDS](#), governments committed to ensuring that 90 percent of young people have the skills, knowledge, and capacity to protect themselves against HIV. This and other commitments will not be met without scaling up investments in CSE in all settings.
- HIV transmission is still far too common among adolescents, particularly girls and young women who are disproportionately affected by the epidemic.<sup>24</sup> CSE is proven to improve knowledge about HIV risk, reduce risk, and protect adolescents from HIV transmission.<sup>25</sup>

- HIV rates are highest in communities that experience stigma and discrimination.<sup>26</sup> CSE programs grounded in human rights, empathy, dignity, and social awareness decrease stigma and contribute to improved health.<sup>27</sup>
- Out-of-school and non-formal CSE is a vital outreach intervention for young people living with HIV to help connect them to services and support them with information concerning their rights.
- In addition to targets under the health and gender equality goals, the UNAIDS global strategy directly connects CSE to SDG 10 on Reduced Inequality.



A flash mob of sexual and reproductive health and rights advocates performs during the Women Deliver 2019 Conference.

22 Neal, S. et al. “The impact of young maternal age at birth on neonatal mortality: Evidence from 45 low and middle income countries.” *PloS One* (2018). 13, no.5 e0195731. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0195731>.

23 Every Woman Every Child. *The Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescent Health (2016-2030): Survive, Thrive, Transform*. Geneva: EWEC, 2016.

24 The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. *Women and HIV: A spotlight on adolescent girls and young women*. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2019.

25 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach*. Paris: UNESCO, 2018.

26 The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. *Confronting discrimination: Overcoming HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health-care settings and beyond*. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2017.

27 United Nations Population Fund. *UNFPA Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. New York: UNFPA, 2014.





# EDUCATION

## Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

**Target 4.5:** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

**Target 4.7:** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

**Target 4.A:** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.

## ADVOCACY PRIORITIES AND ISSUES IN EDUCATION:

### 1) SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SRGBV)

**What is it?** There is growing recognition of the prevalence of gender-based violence in and related to schools, and its impacts on girls' education. SRGBV is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in or around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics. It can include bullying, violence from teachers or other school staff, threats or coercion, sexual harassment, and more.<sup>28</sup> It is important to remember that while there is much more evidence of the impacts of SRGBV on girls' education, children and adolescents of all genders can experience SRGBV.

*For more on gender-based violence outside of school settings, see the next section on gender equality.*

**Some key allies:** [UNESCO](#), [UN Women](#), and the [UN Girls' Education Initiative](#) (UNGEI), UNFPA along with UNICEF, and many civil society organizations.

#### How does CSE fit in?

- CSE disrupts harmful gender norms that reinforce power inequalities and gender-based violence and supports the formation of new positive norms. It teaches skills for students of all

genders to stand up against gender-based violence.

- Incorporating CSE into teacher training creates opportunities for teachers to critically interrogate gender norms and gender-based violence in a supported environment, increasing their ability to respond appropriately to gender-based violence in the school setting.
- Curriculum-based approaches to address SRGBV in schools are firmly grounded in the learning topics covered by CSE, including bodily autonomy, consent and communication, shifting gender norms and promoting positive relationships, and information on SRGBV and bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- CSE provides foundational evidence-based guidance for curriculum and implementation development. When combined with key efforts to meet the needs of girls and adolescents, CSE could lead to enhancing programming for the most marginalized by addressing gender and power relations.



*For more information on approaches to address SRGBV, see [UNESCO and UN Women's Global Guidance](#).*



2) GENDER-RESPONSIVE EDUCATION  
SECTOR PLANNING (GRESP)


**What is it?** National-level work to integrate gender into education policies, plans, and learning environments through training, financing, and implementation support. [The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of SDG4](#) committed partners to “supporting gender-sensitive policies, planning and learning environments; mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula; and eliminating gender-based discrimination in schools,”<sup>29</sup> laying the framework for GRESP efforts.

**Some key allies:** National Ministries of Education, supported by the [Global Partnership for Education](#) (GPE), [UNGEI](#), [UNFPA](#), and [UNICEF](#).

How does CSE fit in?

- Incorporating CSE into teacher training offers supported and tested techniques to open dialogue on gender norms, the gender in the curriculum, and how educators can support reductions in gender-based violence and gender inequality among their students.

- The process around GRESP offers a chance to think critically about where CSE fits into the curriculum, how teachers are trained and supported to deliver gender lessons, and how education policies can be more supportive of girls.
- Much of the discrimination that girls face at school is related to their sexuality and risk of early pregnancy; CSE works to reduce these impacts on their education.

 For more information about GRESP at the national level, see the [Guidance](#) from GPE, UNGEI, and UNICEF.

3) QUALITY EDUCATION AND  
TEACHER SUPPORT

**What is it?** Much of the conversation in global policy has shifted from not just whether children are in school but to the quality of education that all children receive and the resources and support teachers need. In the context of COVID-19, the impact of virtual learning and interrupted schooling has become an additional component of this discussion.

**Some key allies:** [UNICEF](#), [GPE](#), [UNESCO](#), [UNFPA](#), [Education International](#), and teachers’ unions, along with civil society partners.

How does CSE fit in?

- CSE benefits from the same education system reforms that teachers do: smaller class sizes, more opportunities for ongoing teacher training, and support for participatory and inclusive learning. CSE programs have pilot tested new educational techniques, technologies, and modes of delivery that can be used by teachers across the curriculum.
- CSE is a skills-based curriculum grounded in social and emotional learning crossing sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, human rights, and critical thinking, which can improve academic, social, and labor market outcomes for education.<sup>30</sup>



29 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. Paris: UNESCO, 2015.

30 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Facing the facts: the case for comprehensive sexuality education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2019.





# GENDER EQUALITY

## Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

**Target 5.1:** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

**Target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

**Target 5.3:** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

**Target 5.6:** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

**Target 5.C:** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

**What is it?** Goal 5 is among the most ambitious of the SDGs. It also cuts across the other goals: gender inequality curtails our ability to address any and all other development issues. Without gender equality, goals on health, social inclusion, food security, education, poverty reduction, reducing inequalities, and peace and safety cannot be achieved. The targets under Goal 5 reflect this reality, highlighting the need to promote gender equality through the elimination of discrimination and violence, and the promotion of new, equal structures for women's economic, political, and social participation in all elements of society. At every level, efforts to promote gender equality start from shifting the norms and systems of power that discriminate and promote violence.

**Some key allies:** In response to SDG 5, the UN and the European Union launched the [Spotlight Initiative](#), a multi-year partnership focused on ending gender-based violence and empowering women. Every UN agency works on gender equality, in particular [UN Women](#), [UNFPA](#), [UNAIDS](#), and [UNICEF](#), as well as non-UN funders and civil society organizations.

### How does CSE fit in?

- CSE is most effective when addressing gender and power, which are foundational for transformational change towards gender equality.
- CSE is a proven strategy for addressing and shifting harmful practices and

gender norms and promoting better communication about gender and inequality.

- CSE reduces the risk of unintended pregnancy by promoting bodily autonomy, consent, and the use of sexual and reproductive health information and services, keeping girls in schools and contributing to reductions in child, early, and forced marriage.
- CSE contributes “to gender equality by building awareness of the centrality and diversity of gender in people’s lives; examining gender norms shaped by cultural, social and biological differences and similarities; and by encouraging the creation of respectful and equitable relationships based on empathy and understanding.”<sup>31</sup>
- CSE builds confidence, self-efficacy, and empowerment, contributing to the next generation of gender equality advocates.

### 1) GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**What is it?** Like SRGBV, gender-based violence can encompass all forms of emotional, physical, sexual, and economic violence that is committed as a way of controlling, reacting to, or punishing someone for their gender, gender identity, or gender expression. Gender-based violence, while part of a system of gender inequality that keeps women and people with feminine gender expressions in a position of less power than men and people with masculine expressions, can be both

perpetrated and experienced by people of all genders. Gender-based violence can also be committed by the state in the form of legalized discrimination against or control over people's bodies, sexuality, and reproduction. Data shows that the COVID-19 crisis is worsening domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence as quarantines, limited mobility, and cramped living conditions isolate individuals with their abusers. Health, money, and security concerns that raise household tensions, and the lack of access to support and social services, are also contributing to this trend during the pandemic.<sup>32</sup>

**Some key allies:** [UN Women](#), [UNFPA](#), the [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [Prevention Collaborative](#), the [Center for Women's Global Leadership](#), and any multilateral, funder, or civil society organization working on gender equality, girls and/or women's rights, human rights, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people.



*While some partners choose to focus on violence experienced by girls and women, most use a broad definition that includes gender-based violence against boys, men, and gender nonconforming people as well. For more on the violence faced by people due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, see the [report of](#)*

*[the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.](#)*

### How does CSE fit in?

- CSE that is grounded in human rights equips children and adolescents to stand up to and break cycles of gender-based violence.
- CSE promotes critical thinking about discriminatory norms, contributing to reductions in stigma and discrimination based on gender, as well as reductions in homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- CSE and other educational approaches that focus on human rights and gender relations have been found to contribute to reductions in the practice of female genital cutting/mutilation.<sup>33</sup>

## 2) CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNION

**What is it?** A collection of practices that contribute to children and adolescents being forced or coerced into marriage or other forms of relationships without their consent or before they reach the legal age of marriage. Each year, 12 million adolescents under the age of 18 are married, frequently in circumstances of force, coercion, and violence.<sup>34</sup> Child, early, and forced marriage is a human rights violation that happens in all cultures and all

regions of the world, and is deeply rooted in gender inequality and control over and fear of adolescent sexuality.<sup>35</sup> It has lasting impacts on adolescent health, access to education, and control of their sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>36</sup>

**Some key allies:** [UNFPA](#), [UNICEF](#), [UN Women](#), [Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage](#), the [With and For Girls Collective](#), the [Girls First Fund](#), and many civil society organizations working with adolescents, girls and young women, and young people.

### How does CSE fit in?

- CSE is a vital investment for improving children's and adolescents' understanding and ownership of their

sexual and reproductive health, leading to reductions in unintended pregnancy, which is correlated with reduced risk for child, early, and forced marriage.<sup>37</sup>

- CSE promotes healthy relationships and positive discussions about sexuality, marriage, and consent, empowering adolescents to make their own decisions about if, when, and who to marry and to communicate more effectively with their partners and families.
- Child, early, and forced marriage is rooted in unequal systems of control and fear of adolescent sexuality. CSE, which includes discussion of gender norms, rights, relationships, and power dynamics, is crucial to ending and mitigating the effects of child, early, and forced marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, CSE's role in shifting the conversation around gender and gender equality cannot be overstated. CSE offers a crucial opportunity to build children and adolescents' skills and competencies to understand and challenge harmful gender norms, stand up to gender-based violence, and build new positive standards for empathy and compassion. CSE teaches children of all ages to understand, respect, and cherish their bodies and to know their rights and responsibilities.

Gender norms and discrimination are pervasive and universal; failure to include gender-responsive CSE in education at all levels leaves children, adolescents, and young people to navigate social inequalities without the benefit of a teacher, classroom, peer group, or community where they can ask questions and learn from each other. You should be absolutely clear on this point: the ambitious gender equality goal and targets in the SDG agenda cannot and will not be met without large-scale investments in gender-responsive, rights-based, and high-quality CSE.

<sup>32</sup> UN Women. *COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls*. New York: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Williams-Breault, B. "Eradicating Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Human Rights-Based Approaches of Legislation, Education, and Community Empowerment." *Health and human rights* 20, no. 2 (2018): 223–233.

<sup>34</sup> Girls Not Brides. *About Child Marriage*. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>. Accessed August 8, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> CEFM and Sexuality Working Group. *Tackling the Taboo: Sexuality and Gender-transformative programmes to end child, early and forced marriages and unions*. New York: American Jewish World Service, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> UNFPA. *Marrying too Young: End Child Marriage*. New York: UNFPA, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Facing the facts: the case for comprehensive sexuality education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Greenworks, International Women's Health Coalition, CARE International, Nirantar Trust, and American Jewish World Service. *Child, Early and Forced Marriage and the Control of Sexuality and Reproduction*. Washington DC: Greenworks LLC, 2019.



## PRIORITY 3:

# CONNECTING GLOBAL TO LOCAL—ADVOCACY FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

While some progress in global and regional commitments has been seen, there is still a gap between commitment and follow-through. You must therefore also focus on what happens after a policy is made. When it comes to implementation of CSE, you must work to:

- 1) Ensure support for CSE within sector-specific global funding mechanisms; and,
- 2) Hold governments, funders, and global partnerships accountable for the commitments they make.

## FUNDING FOR CSE

Gaps appear between global policy and local implementation for two key reasons: political will and funding availability. While many advocates are used to working on political will, you must pay as much attention to ensuring that the policies translate into the budgets for CSE implementation. Unfortunately, money conversations do not always happen at the same time or in the same places as the policy debates.


For example, in addition to the High-Level Political Forum for the SDGs, there are separate [Financing For Development](#) Forums happening to follow up on the means of implementation for the SDGs. Development financing is a complicated and political process, with many implications for how SRHR, gender equality, and education are funded and implemented, with CSE at the center of all three. Funding for specific development sectors is increasingly dependent on larger global funds, where donor governments and foundations pool their money, set shared priorities, and work at a high level with national governments on policy and implementation plans.

Some examples of the sector-specific funds that can or should be interested in CSE include:

- Gender: UN Women’s [Fund for Gender Equality](#) (Note: *The Fund for Gender Equality focuses on women’s civil society organizations. There is no specific global funding mechanism for national governments’ work on gender equality, although each of the funds listed below has specific goals and strategies for incorporating gender equality into their work.*)

- SGBV: [The Spotlight Initiative](#)
- Education: [The Global Partnership for Education](#)
- Health: [The Global Financing Facility](#), in support of Every Woman Every Child
- HIV/AIDS: [The Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria](#)

Recognizing that these mechanisms primarily fund governments directly, they can be influential in setting national priorities about how the money is spent. Nevertheless, these groups can also be difficult to access and move. For this reason, partnership will be key—most CSE advocates will not be able to gain access on their own. CSE advocates should therefore seek to join or build national-level coalitions of allies or look for working groups where they can access civil society representatives. Many of the boards and advisory groups are public; in particular, the civil society and youth representatives (and many of the members are the same people advocates may already know from policy forums). Use those connections to build coalitions with clear advocacy demands for CSE.

 Note: To learn more about how to engage global mechanisms as a member of civil society, please see the following resources:


- [Civil Society Guide to the Global Financing Facility](#) and [Addendum](#) (PAI, 2017)
- [Making the money work for young people: a participation tool for the Global Fund](#) (UNAIDS 2014)
- [Youth Guide to the Global Fund](#) (Global Fund Advocates Network, 2014)

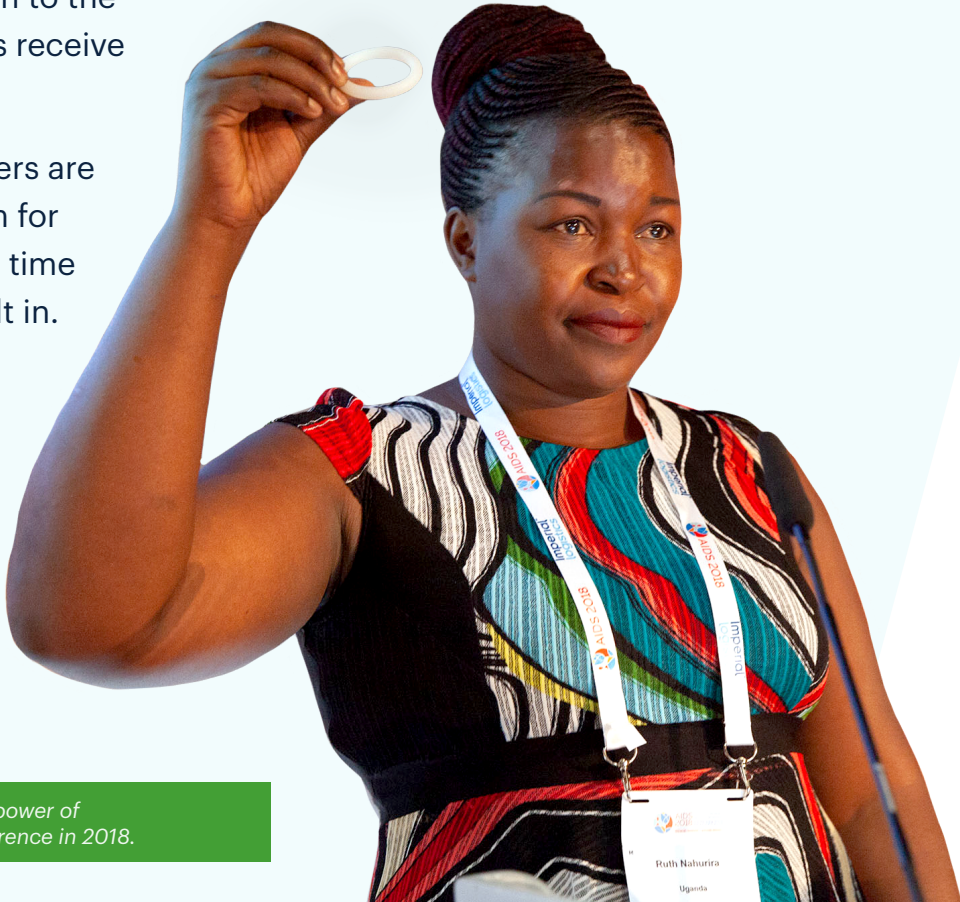
# RESOURCING TRAINING FOR TEACHERS, FACILITATORS, & OTHER CSE IMPLEMENTERS

One key area where CSE implementation frequently remains underfunded is teacher and facilitator training and support. Guidance documents promote participatory, critical thinking-based education techniques, and the evidence base shows that CSE is more effective when it is interactive, complements learning with skills-building activities, and offers opportunities to reflect on and clarify individual values. Young people themselves define a good CSE teacher as someone who is professional and specifically trained in sex and relationship education, confident and unembarrassed in the material, treats young people as equals, and provides balanced and nonjudgmental views. These traits require specific skills and training. Program effectiveness frequently comes down to the quality of the training that educators receive and the support that they have.<sup>39</sup>

Advocates, implementers, and funders are beginning to push a stronger system for CSE implementation, one with more time and support for teacher training built in.

UNESCO and Advocates for Youth, for example, have developed and are rolling out a [teacher training module](#) for CSE in East and Southern Africa. This is a clear area for you to build partnerships with advocates on the education side working in education quality, GRESP, and SRGBV, in order to align your asks with their work.

 For those advocates interested in going in-depth into national- or community-level advocacy around CSE delivery, one key informational resource could be [UNFPA's Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Information](#), which outlines the steps required to build and implement a national-level CSE program. This resource is geared towards policymakers, not advocates, but is full of good information about the steps advocates will need to consider—and make sure governments are following—to implement CSE.



# ADVOCATING FOR INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY AROUND CSE

Increasing access to CSE for more young people around the world does not only rely on policies and implementation; it is also about holding governments accountable to the commitments they make to each other and to the public. How and where governments report on their CSE commitments, whether there are any consequences for not following

through, and whether there is room for civil society organizations or advocates who are not connected to the government to validate or shadow report on a country's progress will all impact the ultimate availability of CSE. When it comes to advocacy for accountability around CSE, advocates must work to:

- Demand the collection and incorporation of data and measurements on CSE into global accountability processes tracking commitments to health, education, and gender equality.
- Define and follow up on commitments to CSE delivery.
- Advocate for more frequent and better-quality measures and indicators.
- Integrate CSE into the broader human rights accountability regime.

Relevant global accountability processes for CSE advocates include:

- [Monitoring and advocacy of relevant commitments](#) and collaborative actions made at the [Nairobi Summit on ICPD25](#) to deliver on the promise of the ICPD Programme of Action, the Key Actions for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD, and the outcomes of its reviews.
- Participation in the [Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum](#). This civil society gathering will be convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France in 2021 to generate action and momentum for gender equality.
- The [SDGs and their review](#) through the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and

39 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach*. Paris: UNESCO, 2018.



Voluntary National Reviews. The HLPF meets annually to review progress towards achieving the SDGs and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

- [Shadow or alternative reporting](#) to the monitoring bodies of human rights treaties, such as the Commission on the Status of Women or the Commission on the Rights of the Child.
- The UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent Health (or [Every Woman Every Child](#)) initiative has mobilized financial and policy commitments from a broad group of actors. Key stakeholders implementing the strategy are the Global Financing Facility for EWECA, the H6 (Health 6 multilaterals include: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UN Women, and the World Bank), governments, and civil society who work together and are held accountable through [PMNCH](#).
- [Family Planning 2020](#), which collects and tracks commitments to increasing access to contraceptive services and has youth representation at national and global levels, and releases new data and reporting by commitment-making countries every year.
- The UN Human Rights Commission and its [Universal Periodic Review](#), which reviews the human rights records of all 193 UN member states on a rotating schedule of 42 countries per year; and

- Other UN annual commissions such as the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) and the [Commission on Population and Development](#), which collect and create reports on progress implementing Beijing and ICPD.

Unfortunately, there is no current global measurement for CSE implementation or commitments. There are, however, regional or country-specific voluntary reporting:

- The countries who are part of the Eastern and Southern Africa commitment track their progress on three targets, including CSE delivery and teacher training.
- UNAIDS' National Commitment and Policy Index includes self-reporting from over 100 countries on whether they have created policies supportive of CSE in primary and secondary schools and whether there is a policy supportive of teacher training.

Both of these models offer some accountability for commitments to CSE, and both should be applied more globally.

Each of the resources and mechanisms provided here has particular relevance for CSE, whether to improve adolescent health outcomes, increase contraceptive use, or support young people's human right to education and information on sexuality. So why are they not reporting on CSE commitments? Advocates can push UNFPA, Family Planning 2020, Every Woman Every Child, and other global accountability mechanisms to include more deliberate reporting on commitments to CSE and provide public analysis on progress. In this way, CSE advocates can keep better track of progress and the status of governments meeting their own stated goals around CSE.

We need clear ways of understanding what is happening with CSE implementation, and we need those to be built into the ways in which governments are already reporting on their progress on development commitments. Pushing for incorporation of these same

measurements (policy, implementation, and teacher training) into the other global accountability mechanisms can help us insist that governments do more with their commitments to CSE.

Beyond tracking, it is important to pursue accountability around whether what is being implemented *is actually* CSE. How can you ensure that when governments report to the global community that they are delivering CSE, that the programs are comprehensive? UNESCO's [Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool](#) (SERAT) is designed for advocates and programmers to review curriculum content and easily identify gaps, and is based on the key concepts included in the UNESCO Guidance. The SERAT and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)'s complementary tool for civil society organizations, [Inside and Out](#), are both being used by partners in select countries.<sup>40</sup> These tools require time, resources, and

<sup>40</sup> For information about whether there has been a recent SERAT assessment, check with a local UNESCO office or IPPF member association.

commitment, but have the potential to be valuable to CSE advocates at a national-level, and to improve global reporting. We will need increased investment not only from UNESCO and IPPF but from national governments in order to use the SERAT more regularly and globally to track CSE.

Finally, CSE advocates are encouraged to apply their own creativity in better holding governments and other actors accountable for their commitments to CSE. In particular, at the UN-level as processes like the [UN Commission on Population and Development](#) and the [UN Commission on the Status of Women](#) become more contentious, advocates are looking towards the [Universal Periodic Review](#) and national human rights processes

for the next phase of implementing human rights. The Universal Periodic Review, in particular, has an existing structure where governments report on a regular schedule, as well as a functioning reporting system for civil society to present their own findings about how their government is doing via a shadow report.



*For advocates interested in engaging more at the Universal Periodic Review, the Sexual Rights Initiative and IPPF have released a [guide](#) to the process, and the Sexual Rights Initiative and the Center for Reproductive Rights regularly support national advocates to create and present shadow reports.*

# CONCLUSION

## STRONGER TOGETHER

CSE, as part of a holistic child and adolescent development framework, is about so much more than preventing disease and sexual risk: it is about access, equality, social justice, and the realization of human rights.

While there is a lot to do when it comes to CSE advocacy, **the good news is that no advocate has to do it alone.** There are many people, networks, and institutions that support CSE and CSE advocates at all levels, many of which have already been mentioned in this guide. The Women Deliver Young Leaders Program is one example of a large and thriving community of young advocates who are engaged on these and other issues. There is also a whole community of CSE advocates online, on social media, and at the UNFPA CSE advocacy hub at [www.advocates4cse.com](http://www.advocates4cse.com). There are national and local youth groups advancing CSE efforts in many communities worldwide.

Although there is still much to be accomplished, it is important to remember how far the issue has come. Interest in adolescent health and meaningful and authentic youth engagement has never been higher, and young advocates like you have more access to and impact on decision making every year. More young people are receiving CSE than ever before, and the CSE they are receiving is better: more accurate, more comprehensive, and more grounded in rights and equality. Much credit is due to the work of brave advocates like you who have insisted on making their voices heard at every level from the local council to national ministries to the halls of the African Union, the UN, and beyond. Advances have already been made, but the momentum must be continued and cannot be sidelined or defeated. Together on this path, with collective power, you will continue to make change.



## ADDENDUM

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ADVOCATES

There are many resources available for advocates, educators, and programmers interested in CSE. In addition to the newly revised International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (see below), many of these tools are aimed at supporting teachers, trainers, and program designers with lesson plans, activities, and learning tools for delivering CSE programs both in- and out-of-school. Many countries have developed their own standards for CSE, which are being rolled out by schools and NGO partners across the world. In addition to local programs and curricula, some global tools are available for use and adaptation by interested programmers.

There are several toolkits and training guides that can help you with CSE advocacy; some of the most recent are listed below. The majority of these tools have a strong advocacy component and are designed for adolescents and young people. Which tool you reach for depends on what you want to do.



[International technical guidance on sexuality education](#) (UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, and WHO, 2018)

#### I WANT TO BUILD MY KNOWLEDGE ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS:

[Briefing Cards: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (Universal Access Project, 2015)

[Respect My Rights, Respect My Dignity: Module 3 Sexual and Reproductive Rights are Human Rights](#) (Amnesty International, 2015)

[Respect, Protect, and Fulfill Sexual Health and Rights](#) (Deliver for Good, 2019)

[Sexuality and Life-Skills Toolkit](#) (Frontline AIDS, 2019)

#### I WANT TO IMPLEMENT OR ADVOCATE FOR CSE IN MY COMMUNITY:

[Deliver + Enable Toolkit: Scaling up Comprehensive Sexuality Education](#) (IPPF, 2017)

[From evidence to action: Advocating for comprehensive sexuality education](#) (IPPF, 2009)

[Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Information](#) (UNFPA, 2014)

[We Demand More! A Sexuality Education Advocacy Handbook for Young People](#) (UNESCO, IPPF, and the PACT, 2017)

#### I WANT TO BUILD MY ADVOCACY SKILLS:

[Advance Family Planning Advocacy Portfolio](#) (Advance Family Planning, 2015)

[Advocating for Change for Adolescents! A Practical Toolkit for Young People to Advocate for Improved Adolescent Health and Well-being](#) (Women Deliver and PMNCH, 2018)

[An Advocacy Toolkit: The Education We Want](#) (Plan International, A World at School, and the Global Education First Initiative, 2014)

[Make it Work: Six steps to effective LGBT human rights advocacy](#) (ILGA Europe, 2010)

[Want to Change the World? Here's How... Young people as advocates](#) (IPPF, 2011)

[Youth Activist's Toolkit](#) (Advocates for Youth, 2013)

[Youth Advocates, Act!](#) (UNESCO, IPPF, and the PACT, 2018)

I WANT TO CONDUCT  
ADVOCACY WITH THE UN AND  
OTHER GLOBAL MECHANISMS:

[Youth-Led Accountability for the SDGs: A Guide to National Action](#) (Restless Development, 2016)

[The Advocate’s Guide to UN Language](#) (Choice for Youth and Sexuality, 2017)

[Beijing+25: 25 Years After the Global Platform for Action on Gender Equality](#) (OutRight Action International, 2020)

[Civil Society Guide to the Global Financing Facility and Addendum](#) (PAI, 2017)

[Making the money work for young people: a participation tool for the Global Fund](#) (UNAIDS, 2014)

[Sexual Rights and the Universal Periodic Review: A toolkit for advocates](#) (The Sexual Rights Initiative and IPPF, 2012)

[Youth Guide to the Global Fund](#) (Global Fund Advocates Network, 2014)

In addition to these publicly available resources on CSE, there are additional training and education opportunities available, including on how to advocate for and implement CSE through global and regional youth networks such as independent youth networks like [Choice for Youth and Sexuality](#), the [Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights](#), local youth organizations, or through international NGO-supported networks like the [Women Deliver Young Leaders Program](#), UNFPA’s [Y-PEER](#), or the regional youth networks supported by IPPF.

ABOUT US

Women Deliver is a leading global advocate that champions gender equality and the health and rights of girls and women.

Our advocacy drives investment—political and financial—in the lives of girls and women worldwide. We harness evidence and unite diverse voices to spark commitment to gender equality. And we get results.

Anchored in sexual and reproductive health, we advocate for the rights of girls and women across every aspect of their lives.

We know that investing in girls and women will deliver progress for all.

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