SRHR and ICTs: A Policy Review and Case Study from South Africa

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Introduction:

- South Africa has impressive legal provisions for SRHR

- Yet there are very high levels of adolescent pregnancy;

- They experience unequal gender relations, poor access to health services, and lack knowledge on SRHRs

- Poverty and place of residence also severely affect women's experiences of SRHRs

- There is massive excitement about the potential for ICTs to provide solutions

Core Questions:

- Who are the core actors advocating for ICT inclusion, and what are the key framings around SRH; ICTs and the peri-urban?

- How aware are South African policy makers and other stakeholders of the peri-urban as a place which shapes the SRH of women and girls?

- What processes of policy change are occurring?

Methods:

- Literature review

- Policy review: 8 policies pertaining to SRHRs/MCH and ICTs

- 20 key stakeholder interviews

- Ethical approval from the African Gender Institute, UCT

- Engaging with policy makers through social media

Policy Review

- SA has a highly progressive policy and legislative environment

- Significant policy reform in both health and ICTs

- Challenges include fragmented systems, 'interoperability', and poor implementation

- Rapid technology change and innovation has led to technological convergence

Health Policies:

- National Strategic Plan on HIV, STIs & TB 2012-2016

- Integrated School Health Policy 2012

- National Contraceptive & Fertility Planning Policy & Service Delivery Guidelines 2013

- National Contraception Clinical Guidelines

ICT Policies:

- National e-Health Strategy 2012-2017

- South African Connect Broadband Strategy

- National Integrated ICT Policy Green Paper 2014

- mHealth Strategy and Implementation Plan

SRH Policies

- Identify the complex challenges confronting South Africa

- Focus on SRHRs in relation to HIV prevention activities

- Offer a mechanistic approach to SRHRs, with little sex positive work

- Avoid contentious SRHRs issues, through emphasising MCH or devolved responsibility

- On occasion, use ICTs, on occasion, for extending participation

- But, little recognition of adolescents' vulnerability and no reference to m-Health or the use of ICTs.

ICT-Related Policies

- Identify generic categories of vulnerable or marginalised people

- Address MCH, but not gender relations in relation to health, or women's and girls' differential access to health or SRHRs.

- Recognise disparities between rural and urban contexts, but do not identify peri-urban contexts as needing attention

- See technology as offering new means to overcome the challenges of rural health system delivery.

ICTs and SRHR in Practice in South Africa

- 'Hot new area'

- Online spaces promote SRHRs, offer women protection from sexual violence and become spaces of sexual predation.

- policy is made 'on the hoof'

MomConnect: bold new national government initiative

- 'One million women get messaging services'

- Emphasises women's roles in motherhood

- Address MCH, improve mothers' knowledge and update of health services, identify risk factors and electronic pregnancy register

ICTs and SRHR in Practice in South Africa

Youth Africa Live: online social networking through mobile phones

- 'Sex, love and relationships in the time of HIV'

- Explicitly addresses adolescents' SRH knowledge requirements

- Safe space to ask questions anonymously

- Extremely popular with young people

- But: the site needs to be constantly monitored

New Synergies

- Cell-life: online support for contraception and abortion using SMS messaging

- Soul City: television drama with radio and social media links MCH to SRHRs

- On-line engagement has encouraged policy makers to ask about contraception and abortion and think about how to develop content

- Closer collaboration between the Depts of Health and Social Development.

Challenges and Contestations:

- Framing the content of ICT initiatives: technical expertise vs medical expertise; political and funding conflicts

- Strong involvement of the private sector: corporate social responsibility vs value-chain?

- Technical vs political solutions: health system reform and place

- Unanswered ethical questions

- Avoidance of politicised topics in favour of mothers and Apple-I.