

Project reference

ASIE/2003 /058-796

EC Partners

- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- International Planned Parenthood Federation
- Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka
- Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya
- Sri Lanka Association for Voluntary Surgical Contraception
- Centre for Development Alternatives
- Vinivida NGO Coalition,
- Society for the Prevention of Cancer and Aids
- Population Services Lanka
- Lanka Mahila Samithiya
- Sama Sevaya

Facts and Figures

- Duration: **2003-2006**
- EC contribution: **€18.5 million** of which **€990 000** for Sri Lanka



Fight against HIV/AIDS

Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia (RHIYA) – Sri Lanka

“Almost a thousand people visited the two-day event. That is about one-tenth of the entire population of the tea estates in this part of Nuwara Eliya [district]!”

Ramesh, an NGO worker

**Context: Reproductive health for young people**

RHIYA is a large-scale, multi partner initiative, which spans seven South and South East Asian countries - Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. RHIYA makes use of the comparative advantage of local, national and international civil society organisations (more than 30) in reaching the most vulnerable groups and dealing with a subject area as sensitive as young people's reproductive and sexual health.

Objective: RHIYA to educate adolescents and youth

- to encourage an increase in the use of quality reproductive health information and services by adolescents and youth
- to develop responsible reproductive health behaviour and practices among adolescents and youth living in vulnerable and under served areas

The districts covered by the project include conflict affected areas and large populations of internally displaced persons; commercial factory zones and youth and adolescents affected by the tourist industry; and large populations of youth living in plantations and rural areas where there is limited access to reproductive health services.

Impact: What has been achieved?

- Apart from increasing young people's access and use of sexual and reproductive health information, counselling and services and thus encouraging responsible sexual and reproductive health behaviour, the RHIYA activities are designed to foster healthy family life and stem the HIV/AIDS pandemic
- At a macro-level, the RHIYA focuses on creating a supportive community and policy environment by engaging members of the community in activities and promoting ownership among stakeholders, in particular the young people and adolescents themselves. Particular attention is also being paid to building the capacity of local NGOs and civil society as a whole to recognise and meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents and youth, using sustainable approaches, where possible.

Fight against HIV/AIDS

Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia (RHIYA)

The famous fair of Nuwara Eliya

At the heart of Sri Lanka is the Nuwara Eliya district. Home of the famous Ceylon tea, the rolling mountains here are carpeted by acres upon acres of tea plantations, interspersed with gushing streams and tumbling waterfalls. The tea estates have minimal influence of the outside world.

Under the RHIYA project, sexual and reproductive health counselling and services was provided to young people in and around these tea estates. Then one day, the public address system started blaring around a tiny school in this district. The community, virtually starved of entertainment, sat up and listened. They were all being invited to the RHIYA Fair. No one knew what RHIYA meant, but they sure understood the meaning of fair!

The word spread like wildfire and hundreds of people came from estates all around. The never-before fair had it all! Street theatre based on Sexual and Reproductive Health themes, games, information on RHIYA, exhibitions on reproductive health, and information on life skills, contraception and the need for education.

Proudly talking about their first fair, Ramesh, an NGO worker estimated, "Almost a thousand people visited the two-day event. That is about one-tenth of the entire population of the tea estates in this part of Nuwara Eliya!" Since then, a series of such fairs have been organized at various strategic locations across the district.

The growing success of these fairs has, in turn, given rise to a new breed of young Sexual and Reproductive Health peer educators, and 75% of them are girls. Before every fair, these young volunteers set out on the mountain paths to invite people from far and wide. They use innovative means of publicity too – such as pasting hand-made posters on trucks leaving the tea leaf loading stations, and inviting religious leaders, estate management and other influential people from the area.

Considering the huge crowd of young and old these events attract; the way re-enrolment in schools soar after each fair, and the large number of condoms that are distributed; it is amply clear that even after the project is over, the show must go on!



Street drama