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"Because death is not the solution"

Youth Mental Health Norway's strategy for international work

2021-2024



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Introduction

Mental health in a global perspective

Mental health problems can have a significant impact on all areas of life, such as school performance, working conditions, relationships with family and friends, and the ability to participate in society. In countries with few treatment options, people with psychosis and dementia can be locked up, tied up, caged or imprisoned. These patients do not have the capacity to plead their own case and are therefore all too often end up in the back of the line when resources are to be allocated.

Worldwide, more than 400 million people are affected by mental illness, of which 80% live in low- and middle-income countries. Up to 85% of these do not have access to treatment. Today, depression is one of the leading causes of disability and around 20% of the world's children and youth have mental health problems. Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds. People with serious mental health problems die prematurely – as much as two decades too early – due to conditions that could be prevented. Despite these figures, the global median of public health spending on mental health is less than 2%. This is a very low investment, considering that the two most common mental health problems, depression and anxiety, cost the world economy \$1 trillion every single year.

Despite progress in some countries, people with mental health problems often experience serious human rights violations, discrimination and stigma. Many mental health problems can be treated effectively at relatively low cost, but the gap between people who need care and those who have access to care is still large. Increased investment is needed on all fronts.

Norway's role

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the important role that mental health plays in achieving global development goals, as illustrated by the inclusion of mental health in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Norway has also been involved in this advancement, and most recently took a very important step by launching the world's first development strategy for non-communicable diseases (2019). The strategy «Better health – better life» aims to contribute to meeting the SDG for health in low-income countries, and to reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases by one third before 2030 (sub-goal 3.4). Over 70% of the deaths in the world are due to non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory diseases, diabetes and mental disorders.

Therefore, Norway has tripled its assistance to this objective, and allocated NOK 200 million for 2020. Former Norwegian Minister of Development, Dag-Inge Ulstein, said that this only was the beginning, and that funding would be stepped up towards 2024. If all the most cost-effective measures described in the strategy are implemented, more than eight million lives will be saved annually by 2030. In addition, the measures will provide a total saving of \$ 7 trillion in low- and middle-income countries over the next 15 years, according to data from the World Health Organization.

Youth Mental Health Norway's international work

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals are directing the Norwegian development policy towards 2030, and this is also central for Youth Mental Health Norway's (YMHN) development work. The ambitious goals and the guiding principle of "leave no one behind" form the basis of our international projects. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (often referred to as the CRPD), also plays an important role in our work. The Convention covers many areas where people with disabilities experience discrimination, such as access to rights, participation in public and political life, the right to education, the right to participate in working life, freedom from torture, exploitation and violence, and the right to freedom of movement. These are central rights that we, as an organization, seek to strengthen through our projects and collaborations.

Youth Mental Health Norway has long been part of the rights-based disability-movement in Norway, and solidarity does not recognize borders. The organization has built a solid project expertise that can benefit more people. We find that we are asking ourselves - why not create a counselling service, a chat service or a counselling on wheels project in Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi or Rwanda? And what new and innovative project ideas could we design in collaboration with partner organizations, to promote children's and young people's rights and mental health?

What will Youth Mental Health Norway focus on during the strategy period?

A main priority of YMHN's development work in the years to come will be the health and rehabilitation of children and young people with mental health problems. This involves developing projects that promote the target group's rights and increase available information and services for mentally ill children and youths. To achieve this goal, we must work on several fronts simultaneously.

Political influence

In order to promote the rights of the target group, we must hold authorities accountable for their own policies and international obligations. At the same time, we will make the need for mental health services visible through our projects, by documenting and communicating the results of our work.

Information and health services

Good and correct information about mental health problems can be difficult to access in our partner countries. This is a major barrier to inclusion and proper treatment, while at the same time being a significant accelerator for stigma, discrimination and exclusion of the target group. Therefore, YMHN will focus on providing information to authorities, stakeholders and the general population, during the strategy period. Most international projects will also seek to establish some sort of support service for our target group. In Ethiopia we have psychologists providing counselling in their local communities, while in Uganda we have a toll-free national helpline people can call. We will continue to provide these services until the responsibility have been properly assumed by the government, as their own policy usually dictates.

Participation

Finally, Youth Mental Health Norway will continue to promote target group participation in our international partnerships. This usually involves establishing representative reference groups to inform project design before, during and after the project is implemented. The group can also be useful in designing specific activities, communication messages and research designs.

What should YMHN do at home?

For the organization to attain strong international partnerships that promote the rights and health services of disabled persons in partner countries, we need some focus areas at home as well. Here, too, we must work on several fronts.

Increased capacity

To ensure the development of new international projects, the organization must ensure that the international department has sufficient capacity to apply for funding and undertake new collaborations. So far, the organization has worked reactively, taking opportunities as they have presented themselves along the way, which unfortunately often also have resulted in the projects not being well enough anchored in the organization. Increased capacity will ensure that we can work more proactively during the strategy period, thus also being able to plan the expansion of the project portfolio in line with the organization's development.

Increased communication

So far, YMHS's development work has gone under the radar for most of our members. This will be changed during the strategy period. By using social media, our development work will become better known among members and the general population. This is an important cornerstone for future project activities that involve fundraising in Norway. Awareness-raising can also facilitate several collaboration opportunities between active local chapters in YMHN and foreign youth organizations in the long term.

Increased competitiveness

As a relatively new actor within the field of development assistance, YMHN has already spiked the interest of other larger and more experienced Norwegian actors. Many of these want to cooperate and exchange knowledge due to the increased public interest and grants for mental health in the development sector. We are pleased that mental health is being raised on the development policy agenda, but as many major players are now embroidering their programs to include mental health, YMHN will have to expect facing stiff competition and ensure that we have competitive working conditions to keep competent staff.

Overall objective of the strategy for international work

Youth Mental Health Norway promotes better quality of life and fulfillment of human rights for children and young people worldwide. We do so by carrying out international projects, pursuing political influence and by building a strong network of international organizations that promote mental health.

The strategy will ensure several strong international partnerships that promote the rights and health services of disabled persons in partner countries.

		Main goal		
		Youth Mental Health Norway has several strong international partnerships that promote the rights and health services of disabled persons in partner countries.		
Target area: Organization		<- This is achieved through ->	Target area: Activities	
Goal 1: YMHN's international work is well known by the organization's employees and engages across departments and local chapters.	Goal 2: The general population in Norway knows of and supports YMHN's international work.		Goal 3: YMHN strengthens its work on rights and health through new partnerships and projects.	Goal 4: YMHN is a key development actor and coveted partner in the field of mental health.

Strategic target areas and goals

We have chosen to focus on two strategic target areas in order to achieve the main goal, namely *Organization* and *Activities*.

Strategic area 1, Organization: Ensure that the organization has sufficient competence and capacity to handle a larger international project portfolio, and the ability to communicate project results to relevant actors, as well as to the general population.

Goals to achieve this:

- **Goal 1:** YMHN's international work is well known by the organization's employees and engages across departments and local chapters.
- **Goal 2:** The general population in Norway knows of and supports YMHN's international work.

Strategic area 2, Activities: Youth Mental Health Norway is a coveted development actor within the field of mental health that promotes human rights and services for children and youth with disabilities, with special focus on mental health problems.

Goals to achieve this:

- **Goal 3:** YMHN strengthens its work on rights and health through new partnerships and projects.
- **Goal 4:** YMHN is a key development actor and coveted partner in the field of mental health.

Goals, sub-goals and measures

This section describes sub-goals and measures of the four above-mentioned goals. As the strategy and goals in the different target areas are interdependent, it is not appropriate to rank them by importance, as we need them all to align for the strategy to be as successful as possible. In other words, we must think and work holistically throughout the strategy period.

Goal 1: YMHN's international work is well known by the organization's employees and engages across departments and local chapters.

Sub-goal 1.1: Increase the knowledge of employees and local chapters about the progression in our international projects and of why the projects are important in light of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Actions:

- a) Regular updates on project progression and activities at Monday meetings.
- b) Employees and local chapters receive information about the projects by following YMHN in social media.
- c) The organizational department disseminates information about international collaboration opportunities and application schemes to local chapters.
- d) The organizational department and the international department have regular meetings on how to engage local chapters to participate in international work.

Sub-goal 1.2: Employees and local teams gain increased ownership of the international work.

Actions:

- a) All departments in YMHN shall have increased focus on the SDGs in their planning, design and budgeting of activities and projects.
- b) Investigate how employees in the organization can contribute to international projects.
- c) Employees with competence that can be of use to the international projects are given the opportunity to take part in trips to partner countries / possible partner countries.
- d) Include employees with relevant projects and professional background in the development of projects under the application scheme of the EEA-Active Citizens Fund (many project requests are similar to our own projects, so exchange of experience is appropriate).
- e) Local chapters can receive guidance from the head of the department regarding applications for study trips, summer camps, exchanges, etc.
- f) Inspira is invited to write articles about the collaborations on a regular basis.

Goal 2: The general population in Norway knows of and supports YMHN's international work.

Sub-goal 2.1: YMHN uses social media to promote our international work.

Actions:

- a) The communication group provides information in social media on 1 UN day a month, and relates the topic to global mental health. See overview of UN days in Appendix 1.
- b) The communication group regularly updates followers on social media about our international work and project progression.
- c) The results communicated in the annual report are made more visible in social media.
- d) Excerpts from the annual report are sent out in the newsletter in the form of articles.

Sub-goal 2.2: YMHN uses traditional media to support its own development assistance work.

Actions:

- a) The department produces at least 2 articles a year about development assistance work.
- b) The department makes sure to continuously update project pages on YMHN's website.
- c) All documents related to international projects that can legally be published to the public must be published. We must be transparent in our development work to build trust with our membership and donor base.

Goal 3: YMHN strengthens its work on rights and health through new partnerships and projects.

Situation description: Until now, YMHN has been reactive in its international project development work, taking opportunities as they have presented themselves. In order to work more proactively and ensure long-term and appropriate planning of future portfolio expansion, it is necessary to secure capacity in the department for the following tasks: identify potential partners and build networks in new partner countries, develop new applications for the framework agreement (2023/24), TOFI (2022), Operation Day's Work and the TV campaign, prepare and develop internal routines for program and financial follow-up, as well as strengthen anti-corruption work. Without stronger internal routines and capacity for program and financial follow-up, it is unlikely that we will be awarded large projects (NOK 3 million + per year). The current situation, where there is only one 100% position, must eventually be further developed. The international department should consist of two full time positions in order to fulfill the intentions in the program of principles. The administration will work systematically to solve this.

Sub-goal 3.1: YMHN increases its capacity and competence to strengthen its ability to perform key tasks in order to facilitate future growth in the project portfolio.

Actions:

- a) The central board invests in hiring a project coordinator to free up capacity for projects and department development.
- b) Internal routines are developed for finance and program follow-up, as well as an accompanying annual cycle with deadlines for tasks to rig the organization for further growth.

Sub-goal 3.2: The organization keeps and manages to recruit essential competence in a critical growth phase.

Actions:

- a) The salary must be competitive with other development organizations in Norway.
- b) Funds are set aside for professional development (courses/internships) in revised project budgets.
- c) Employees in the department are included in the «Norwegian network for global mental health».
- d) Weekly department meetings ensure professional development and exchange of experience across projects.

Sub-goal 3.3: YMHN increases its capacity in order to be able to identify and support several international partnerships and projects.

Actions:

- a) The department conducts outreaching activities towards relevant partner organizations in relevant partner countries.
- b) The department maps various application schemes and ranks them according to financial sustainability.

- c) The department does not take on projects that exceeds its capacity needs during the strategy period, unless there are very good reasons to do so.
- d) The department uses the support scheme of NOREC to do a partner check at the first visit.

Sub-goal 3.4: International projects are linked to the fundraising work in the organization in order to cover current and future project costs.

Actions:

- a) A working group is set to investigate the potential for fundraising in the international sector.

Goal 4: YMHN is a key development actor and coveted partner in the field of mental health.

Sub-goal 4.1: YMHN strengthens its political advocacy work aimed towards Norwegian development policy.

Actions:

- a) YMHN follows and provides input on the action plan for the NCD-strategy (strategy for non-communicable diseases, 2019).
- b) YMHN engages in social media and traditional media in the event of a possible change of government and subsequent changes in the development policy.
- c) YMHN applies to host the Global Disability Summit for Youth (2022) in connection with the real international summit.
- d) YMHN promotes political views and a youth perspective in the «Norwegian network for global mental health», which has close dialogue with Norad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Sub-goal 4.2: YMHN succeeds in communicating the results of the international work to development actors / politicians / the population.

Actions:

- a) YMHN holds one presentation a year in the «Norwegian network for global mental health» about project results and challenges.
- b) The working group for communication in YMHN creates stories/posts in social media based on the annual results-report.
- c) Employees in the department have a special responsibility for contributing to seminars and lectures hosted by the Atlas Alliance, where the Minister for Development / Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Norad participates.
- d) The contributions of youths through reference groups and/or participation are made visible in reports, lectures and other communication work.

Sub-goal 4.3: YMHN is known for youth participation in our international projects.

Actions:

- a) All projects targeting youths and young adults have reference groups to ensure that a youth perspective is reflected in the project.
- b) All partner organizations receive training in real participation and why this is important in all project development.