

External Evaluation of the GOJoven Youth Leadership in Sexual and Reproductive Health Program Report Abstract

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Introduction: The GOJoven Youth Leadership in Sexual and Reproductive Health Program, funded by the Summit Foundation and implemented by the Public Health Institute in Spanish and English, supports the development of young adult leaders (Fellows) as catalysts to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR) programs, services, and policies in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Quintana Roo, Mexico. GOJoven also seeks to strengthen the organizational enabling environment through Institutional Strengthening (IS) Project grants and Workshops. In 2011, Summit commissioned an external evaluation of GOJoven to: (1) identify GOJoven's outcomes at multiple levels; (2) identify promising practices for the ASRHR and youth leadership fields; and (3) support planning for GOJoven's next phase. J. Solomon Consulting, LLC, a California-based evaluation firm, was chosen as the evaluator.

Methodology: The external evaluation was largely retrospective, focusing on the period 2004 to early 2012. It employed quantitative, qualitative, and participatory methods, including a document review (focused on internal evaluation and other documents); surveys of GOJoven alumni Fellows and GOJoven-linked organizations; interviews and focus groups with GOJoven in-country staff, alumni, IS Project grant recipients, beneficiaries of Leadership Action Plans (LAPs, i.e., country-specific projects planned and carried out by GOJoven Fellow cohorts), and ASRHR key opinion leaders in the four GOJoven countries; and collection and discussion of "Most Significant Change" stories written by Fellows. Four in-country evaluation consultants, all GOJoven alumni, assisted with the evaluation.

Primary Findings: GOJoven has implemented robust program components that have largely reached or exceeded the targeted number of participants. At the individual (Fellow) level, GOJoven has evidenced positive effects on ASRHR- and leadership-related knowledge, attitudes, and skills (KAS) and KAS application to Fellows' personal and professional lives. Most alumni are engaged in and/or looking for paid or volunteer work in ASRHR. Fellows have attained increasingly influential ASRHR-related leadership roles; many attribute these advances (at least in part) to GOJoven. At the organizational level, GOJoven has evidenced positive effects on organizations' youth and/or ASRHR focus, staff KAS concerning youth and ASRHR work, inter-organizational collaboration, and organizational visibility. At the community level, as a result of GOJoven, many new local ASRHR-related activities and services have been implemented. However, while there is some systematic evidence of positive short-term changes in beneficiary youths' KAS, there is little formal or systematic evidence of community-level behavioral and/or health status outcomes. At the national and regional (i.e., Mexico/Central America overall) levels, some GOJoven Fellows have been involved in program or policy initiatives through job and project responsibilities, advisory and advocacy groups, and conferences. However, there is little evidence that GOJoven programming has achieved change in ASRHR-related policies, services, or health outcomes at these levels.

Promising Practices: The external evaluation and recent research in related fields suggest that GOJoven's most promising practices for achieving positive outcomes include: a focus on Fellows' self-awareness and personal development; fostering a sense of community and peer support within GOJoven; use of a highly participatory, interactive training methodology; provision of ongoing opportunities for Fellows to apply new KAS; and institutional strengthening with Fellow involvement.

Principal Challenges: Per the external evaluation data, GOJoven's key challenges have pertained to: tensions between Fellows and their supervisors related to GOJoven participation; implementing and evaluating LAPs; sustaining organizational changes effected through IS Projects; limited awareness of GOJoven among ASRHR organizations (which limits opportunities for collaboration); limited systematic evaluation of GOJoven-linked community-level outcomes; and Fellows not being in positions of authority that permit national- or regional-level ASRHR-related decision-making. In addition, some Fellows have reported negative family and community reactions to their ASRHR work; however, many have also reported that these have diminished over time.

Recommendations: Programming and partnership recommendations include: (a) Continue to support Fellows' personal development, particularly during the Fellowship year. (b) Provide more in-country support to LAP teams. (c) Apply additional strategies—beyond training in fundraising and grant-writing—to help Fellows and organizations address project and organizational sustainability challenges. (d) Focus additional attention on linking alumni with local, national, and international platforms and networks addressing ASRHR. Communications recommendations include: (e) Communicate annually with new and alumni Fellows' organizations and promote increased information-sharing about GOJoven. (f) Disseminate information about GOJoven more systematically and assertively to ASRHR organizations and the public. Evaluation recommendations for GOJoven's next phase include: (g) Develop specific outcome targets, a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan, and a budget for prospective GOJoven evaluation. (h) Consider implementing brief annual online surveys to assess outcomes among Fellows, GOJoven-linked organizations, and their communities. (i) Consider devoting additional GOJoven resources to strengthening local M&E systems. Focusing resources on in-country GOJoven staff and/or consultants (which could include GOJoven alumni) would be crucial to successful implementation of most of these recommendations.

