When youth can access and use contraception, they can protect themselves from harmful situations like unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. But Ethiopian youth ages 15 to 24 revealed in interviews that they have difficulty accessing contraceptive services. In 2018, only half of Ethiopia’s public facilities offered adolescent health services, and only one-third of facilities had trained staff available and guidelines for service provision to adolescents. Other access barriers include:

**Lack of Privacy**

“The reason she does not use contraceptives is ... if she goes to a health facility, the health care providers will not protect her privacy.”

YOUNG WOMAN, SEMERA

**Stigma**

“Usually, there are so many clients in the clinics, so it is embarrassing to seek family planning services in front of people you may know.”

YOUNG WOMAN, BAHIR DAR

**Lack of Available Providers**

“Service providers in kebeles may not be at work always. They leave their office at any time.”

YOUNG MAN, ADDIS ABABA

Despite these barriers, the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) has made strong policy commitments to provide sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services—including contraception—to adolescents and youth in health centers and clinics. The FMOH has also made policy commitments to support and facilitate youth engagement and ownership in health planning and programming at all levels.

...enable youth [to] have access to a range of contraceptive methods and information so that they would be able to decide on when and how they would be able to have children and get protected from unplanned pregnancy...

Standards on Youth Friendly Reproductive Health (YFRH) Services & Minimum Service Delivery Package on YFRH Services, 2006

...Support adolescent and youth participation and leadership in AYH [adolescent and youth health] planning and programming at all levels.

National Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy 2016-2020

...but many youth are unaware that these policies exist.
Youth should be actively and purposefully engaged in the development and implementation of SRH policies and programs. Their inclusion can lead to:

- Improved program quality and effectiveness.
- More efficient use of resources.
- Better understanding of youth perspectives and issues by decisionmakers.
- Greater awareness of youth rights to reproductive health services.
- Improved capacity of youth to advocate for their health now and in the future.

**HOW CAN DECISIONMAKERS ENGAGE YOUTH?**

The FMOH and Regional Health Bureaus can engage youth as equal partners in their own health by:

**Convening bi-monthly forums for youth and health bureau leaders to discuss the National Adolescent and Youth Health Strategy’s implementation.**

During these forums:

- Health bureau leaders should report progress on the Strategy’s implementation.
- Youth should provide feedback on how to more effectively offer contraceptive services that overcome current barriers to access and use.

**LET'S ENABLE YOUTH TO ACTIVELY SHAPE THE DIRECTION OF POLICIES THAT IMPACT THEIR FUTURES!**

**REFERENCES**

2. Focus group discussions with youth ages 15 to 24 conducted in Bahir Dar, Semera, and Addis Ababa in 2018.
4. Focus group discussions with youth ages 15 to 24 conducted in Bahir Dar, Semera, and Addis Ababa in 2018.