

## Internet consultation BHOS

RNW Media is honoured to be invited to participate in this open Government consultation. We have answered a select number of questions below that correspond to our expertise on building digital communities with young people for social change.

The youth bulge is today and tomorrow's reality. Yet young people have little ability to exercise their agency. They lack the ability to claim their rights and make their own decisions about the issues that affect their lives, from their bodies to their societies. Dutch international development policy, being pragmatic and forward-thinking, can continue to make all the difference for young people.

### **Meaningful youth inclusion (question 2)**

In a majority of the world, young people lack a say in their societies. International development policy should focus on actively and explicitly supporting young people to engage in decision-making forums from an equal position of authority and expertise. That means taking a zero-tolerance approach to tokenism, and nurturing true, meaningful engagement of young people in the contexts where development policy, actions and financing are determined.

### **Online safe spaces (questions 1, 3 and 7)**

Young people are part of an increasingly digital world. More than half of the world's population is online, and nearly 2.8 billion people use social media monthly; 91% of them doing so via mobile devices. Africa had the lowest internet penetration but is among the fastest growing internet populations, often with a stark generational divide. But while everyone seems to be getting online, access to quality information and reasoned dialogue isn't necessarily moving in the right direction, in part due to the role of large corporate digital gatekeepers.

Digital media have an immense potential to educate and to amplify young people's voices.

Unfortunately, the online space is also where young people, especially young women and those from minority groups, may encounter hate speech, abuse, or get mis- or dis-information. We all need online spaces where young people with different perspectives can exchange views constructively, and where they can access the information they need to make sound decisions for themselves about the issues that matter to them. Strong and independent online media are key for an open and constructive society. International development should amplify the importance of creating safe spaces online free of the manipulation of special political interests. To that end, it should further support innovative partnerships that bring together human rights defenders, the media, development actors and the tech sector. We also recommend international development emphasise the importance of building the capacity of independent media and of bloggers and journalists so they can contribute to creating alternative narratives that empower and create common ground.

### **Sexual reproductive health and rights (question 1)**

Worldwide, we see rising fundamentalisms shrinking peoples' ability to realise their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with a predictable negative impact on access to essential commodities and services and the ability to live out one's sexuality. The Netherlands operates from a position of strength in relation to SRHR. As a result, it has also a direct positive impact on access to education, employment opportunities, reducing violence, and other structural factors; as we know, support for SRHR translates into major development dividends across all social and economic sectors. Dutch international development policy should explicitly ensure the Dutch government's position of strength can be maintained. In this respect, we would like to refer to our letter to Minister Kaag 'Aanbevelingen SRGR-speerpunt nieuwe beleidsnota' dd 29 januari 2018.