

# Engaging Youth in Antimicrobial Resistance at the Country and Regional Level: A Policy Brief



*“Empowering young people through knowledge, skills and right networks form the foundation for a vibrant and thriving set of youth champions in the AMR space.”*  
Prof Mirfin Mpundu

Community Engagement by University of Nairobi students in Kenya





Task Force Inaugural launch

## Executive Summary

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of the critical challenges that will affect the future of humanity. Having been considered as a silent pandemic, it is crucial that proactive policy decisions are put in place for its successful mitigation and control. Including both young men and women as key stakeholders is vital, as gender roles and expectations significantly impact how different genders engage with and are affected by AMR. To provide guidance in this regard, ReAct Africa with its vast expertise in youth engagement in the sub-Saharan African region, has developed a policy brief detailing strategies and support. The brief offers key recommendations under antimicrobial stewardship, governance and policy, research, advocacy and awareness, mentorship, education and training, and competitions and awards. It also cites two major initiatives that highlight ReAct Africa's experiences with youth engagement as examples. Overall the policy brief provides meaningful insights into the ways by which the voices of young men and women can be amplified to tackle AMR effectively.

## Background

Antimicrobial resistance is a growing global threat and silent pandemic that threatens the existence of future generations. It occurs when bacteria, fungi and viruses evolve to resist the effects of medications, thereby making the available standard treatments ineffective. This threat does not recognise country borders and has a significant impact on the economies of the affected countries. The low-middle income countries (LMICs) are particularly vulnerable to this due to contributing factors such as challenges in access to clean Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for both humans and animals as well as misuse or overuse of antimicrobials in human, agriculture and animal health among others.

Young women and men might experience and contribute to AMR differently due to varying access to education, healthcare, and resources, which are influenced by gender norms and socio-cultural practices in LMICs. Therefore it is important to engage them meaningfully to address this global menace. The potential influence of youth are often under recognised and unexplored despite the effect their consumption patterns, behaviour and attitude can have on AMR outcome. Currently there appears to be a global thought gap regarding how youth can be engaged meaningfully in AMR mitigation, with a lack of substantive guidance documents. To address this gap ReAct Africa with its vast experience in engaging and initiating various AMR youth movements is bringing out a policy brief focusing on strategies and supporting systems, along with examples.

## Challenges in engaging youth



Photo from My Turn Uganda

Youth can play many roles in combating AMR, including as educators, innovators, leaders and change agents that can affect their peers and communities. However, despite their potential there are many barriers that prevent them from contributing towards AMR solutions. Following are the common challenges that we have encountered in our practice.

### 1. **Lack of awareness and knowledge:**

Despite the severity of the problem, the majority of youth in many countries are unaware about what AMR is and how it affects them. This is primarily because AMR is not adequately addressed in any school or college curricula. Even for those who are pursuing courses related to medical or animal health and agriculture, AMR is not addressed in a manner that highlights its interconnectedness across fields. Gender can influence awareness and knowledge levels about AMR, with young women potentially having less access to information compared to men due to gender disparities in education.

### 2. **Limited representation in governance:**

Youth are often under-represented in governance structures and decision making bodies

which essentially suggests that their perspective on AMR and approach towards its mitigation is not considered in policy making.

### 3. **Insufficient resources and support:**

Many youth movements are often deprived of adequate financial and technical resources, mentorship and platforms that would enable them to scale up their activities.

### 4. **Socio-cultural barriers:**

In many societies, gender inclusivity by youth is hindered by cultural and social barriers that limit women from participating in public health initiatives. Some of these barriers include restricted mobility and exclusion from decision-making processes. Young men may face different challenges, such as societal pressures to conform to certain behaviours that could contribute to AMR.

### 5. **Reverse Ageism:**

Youth-led efforts are sometimes undermined owing to their age leading to challenges in securing partnerships and support.



## Strategies to engage youth in AMR

To engage with a dynamic and energetic group such as youth, targeted strategy, effective communication methods and appropriate use of technology are required. The following table summarises how youth can be engaged in various areas of AMR and the possible support that needs to be provided.

Areas in AMR	Strategy	Possible support that can be provided
 <p><b>Antimicrobial Stewardship</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Peer support programs:</b> Train youth to educate their peers in Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Infection prevention and control (IPC) tailoring programs to different settings such as schools, colleges, health facilities and communities. Ensure that peer support programs are designed to address the specific needs and challenges of both young men and women. For example, training materials could be customised to address gender-specific behaviors related to antibiotic use and hygiene practices.</li> <li>• <b>Youth champions:</b> Identifying male and female youth champions from multidisciplinary settings who will advocate for the appropriate use and disposal of antibiotics and monitor compliance with guidelines in their respective settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for developing training programs and co-creating educational materials for youth and to support them in implementing the antimicrobial stewardship interventions.</li> <li>• Collaboration and partnership with tertiary level institutions.</li> <li>• Capacity building of both young women and men in multi-sectoral AMR stewardship activities</li> <li>• Performance based incentives for youth champions</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Governance and Policy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Youth representation in AMR decision-making and policy-formulation structures:</b> Advocate for the inclusion of young men and women in national and sub-national AMR Coordination Committees and technical working groups as well as regional AMR governing bodies. By incorporating both male and female perspectives, these bodies can better address the diverse needs and challenges faced by different genders, leading to more equitable and sustainable solutions in the fight against AMR.</li> <li>• <b>Policy training program :</b> Implement training programs that equip young men and women with knowledge and skills required for policy-advocacy at the global, regional and national spheres</li> <li>• <b>Networking and cross-learning platforms:</b> Organize platforms such as conferences and mentorship programs for young men and women to connect with experts and policy makers. These platforms can be used to identify young men and women who can take on the role of AMR leaders and champions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building and mentorship from policy leaders and organisations.</li> <li>• Getting stakeholders to buy-in the importance of meaningful youth engagement in the policy landscape.</li> </ul>



## Research

- **Research grants and scholarships:** Provide funding and research opportunities for young scholars on AMR related topics which will generate local data to inform the development of locally feasible technologies, policies, and evidence-based interventions. Encourage the provision of gender-sensitive research grants that support studies exploring the gendered impacts of AMR., including how gender influences antibiotic use or access to healthcare.
- **University led research:** Encourage educational (both health and social science) institutions to invest in AMR related research, establish partnerships with reputed international universities and provide opportunities for publications.
- **Cross-learning opportunities:** Encourage student exchange programs among universities in the African region and with universities in other regions for knowledge sharing, cross-cultural learning and dissemination
- Tertiary students and early career research fellowships and grants
- Bilateral agreement between countries that help in streamlining exchange programs such as smoother visa services, cultural orientation/mentorship programs that support easier integration, establishing research data sharing guidelines etc.



## Advocacy and Awareness

- **Digital campaigns & tools:** Encourage youth to run gender inclusive infographics and social media campaigns that address how AMR affects young men and women differently, generating awareness on AMR in the society. The campaign should account for existing gender disparity in access to technology and the influence of social roles
- **AMR communication and framing:** Establish an accelerator centre/creativity lab for youth to ideate and develop innovative communication mechanisms that promote public awareness and understanding of AMR on mass scale. Co-creating toolkits with young men and women to help them plan, execute and evaluate successful AMR campaigns that address challenges faced by both genders
- Support youth with resources such as communication tool kits, principles of behavioural change communication that will help in meaning engagement with different stakeholders.
- Dedicated funding that can support youth led initiatives



## Community engagement

- **Youth involvement in AMR mitigation interventions for diverse contexts:** Include young men and women in AMR awareness drive in local markets and schools, incorporating gender dynamics into planning interventions. Train them as ambassadors to advocate within their communities, taking into account the special encouragement women may need based on local cultural norms. Encourage them in community research and data collection ensuring equitable participation.
- Capacity building on crowd sourcing interventions to leverage on the collective intelligence, creativity and understanding of a diverse group of people



**Education & Training**

- **To enhance sustainability, institutionalizing AMR Learning:** Integrate AMR and related concepts into the curriculum at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.
- **Capacity building workshops:** Offer workshops and training programs for educators to enhance their understanding of AMR.
- **Online learning platforms:** Develop and promote online courses on AMR for a broader audience.
- **Develop Youth coordinating Hubs:** Develop hubs for sharing of best practice and AMR resources relevant to youth
- Contextualized curriculum review to determine areas of integrating AMR.
- Grants for curriculum development and educational resources.
- Workshops and training programs for educators.
- Support for creating and maintaining online learning platforms.
- Collaborations with educational and e-learning organizations



**Mentorship**

- **Mentorship programs:** Develop structured mentorship programs where experienced professionals guide and support youth in AMR-related projects and career development.
- **Mentor networks:** Establish networks connecting youth with mentors from diverse sectors
- **Professional development:** Provide mentorship for skill development in the AMR field.
- Funding for mentorship program development and implementation.
- Establishment of mentor networks and platforms.
- Support for professional development workshops and training sessions.
- Partnerships with organizations and professionals willing to provide mentorship.



**Competitions & Awards**

- **AMR Innovation Competitions:** Organize competitions, convenings, hackathons, contests that encourage youth to develop innovative solutions for AMR challenges.
- **Recognition Programs:** Establish awards to recognize and celebrate outstanding contributions by youth in the AMR field.
- **Scholarships and Fellowships:** Provide awards for exceptional research and projects related to AMR.
- Funding for organizing competitions and awards.
- Partnerships with organizations to sponsor awards and provide resources.
- Promotion of competitions and awards through various media channels.
- Support for winners in terms of funding, mentorship, and further opportunities.

## Examples of successful engagement of youth in AMR



Photo from ReAfrica - South Centre Conference 2024 Youth Side Event

In the following section we cite two initiatives by ReAct Africa, one focused on creating youth leaders and champions and the other on bringing youth organisations under one umbrella to facilitate better engagement and unifying youth voices.

### Developing AMR youth leaders in African region

In the spirit of co-creation of youth-led interventions with the youth, ReAct Africa partnered with Students Against Superbugs ((now Zihi Institute) in the implementation of two successful programs:

1. AMR Leaders Program for Tertiary Students in Africa (AMRLEP).
2. My Turn AMR Symposium Program.

The two programs were implemented following a successful AMR outreach program in Kenya in 2020 that transitioned to virtual engagement after the onset of COVID-19. They were implemented from 2021 – 2023 and had an immense impact in catalyzing a proactive youth movement within the African continent. Some of the outcomes realized from these programs were:

1. Establishment of a platform for continuous exchange of best practices among students which has led to a lot of collaborative projects and concerted youth interventions within Africa.
2. Increased understanding of AMR among tertiary students in Africa.
3. Improved leadership and increased implementation of projects on AMR among the youth.
4. Increased the number of tertiary level students prioritizing AMR affiliated careers after completion of their undergraduate courses.
5. Strengthened partnerships between students, educational institutions, government agencies, NGOs, and healthcare institutions.
6. There was a notable increase in research output evidenced by the increase in AMR-related research conducted by students, resulting in published papers, presentations, and contributions to academic and policy discussions in various conferences and workshops.
7. Enhanced policy engagement by youth involved in the programs as they began to actively engage with policymakers at the national and sub-national levels in their respective countries.



These outcomes created a network of young leaders committed to mitigating AMR in Africa and beyond. Some of the AMR youth-led organizations whose emergence has been contributed by this work include:

1. AMR Intervarsity Program – Nigeria
2. Working Against Virulent Epidemics – Uganda
3. Uganda Youth Consortium for Antimicrobial Stewards – Uganda
4. Actions des Jeunes contre la Résistance aux Antimicrobiens – Burkina Faso
5. Alliance Against Antimicrobial Resistance – Nigeria
6. Vijana in Antimicrobial Resistance – Zambia
7. Snowman Artland – Kenya
8. Generational Stewards for Antimicrobials – Zimbabwe
9. Solving Resistance – Kenya
10. Consummate Health and Sanitation – Liberia

ReAct Africa acknowledges the critical role of integrating youth into the formal strategic planning and governance structures for AMR NAPs in the region. Youth brings valuable fresh perspectives, creativity, and insight. We have successfully advocated for the inclusion of youth champions in strategic planning processes in countries such as Burkina Faso, Kenya, and Rwanda.

## **The African Youth AMR Alliance Task Force; Amplifying AMR Youth Voices in the African region through Concerted Interventions**

Building on the successful AMR youth programs that have catalysed a vibrant youth movement in the African region, ReAct Africa continued to work with the various youth-led organizations, supporting them in their priority areas. One key priority areas identified was the need for cross-learning, pooling strategies, and synergizing efforts to strengthen youth voices and interventions in the African region while reducing duplications of efforts. This led to the formation of African Youth AMR Alliance Task Force in March 2024.

The Task Force is a consortium intended to bring together youth-led organizations across the African continent, strengthen their voices, advocate and implement context-specific AMR mitigation engagements. The Task Force will support in spotlighting African and youth AMR priorities at the global level. One of the initial products of the Task Force was the African Youth Position Statement on Antimicrobial Resistance that underscores the position and key priorities of the youth in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Engaging youth in the fight against AMR is essential for meaningful progress. Young people have the potential to be powerful advocates, innovators, and leaders in AMR efforts, yet they face barriers such as limited awareness, insufficient representation, and inadequate resources. Effective strategies to overcome these challenges include integrating AMR into education, enhancing youth representation in policy-making, and supporting youth-led initiatives with funding and mentorship. Successful programs led by ReAct Africa in Africa have already demonstrated the impact of empowering youth in AMR activities.

The creation of various youth -led initiatives as a result of the efforts, underscores the importance of consolidating efforts and amplifying youth voices. Furthermore for engagement to be truly effective, it must be gender-sensitive, ensuring that both young men and women are empowered to contribute to AMR mitigation efforts. Continued efforts are also needed to address gender inequalities in AMR-related education, leadership, and decision-making. To tackle AMR effectively, it is crucial for all multi-sectoral







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Address : **Plot No. 1716/M, Main Street Ibex Hill, Lusaka, Zambia**  
Website : <https://www.reactgroup.org/africa/>  
Email : [info@reactafrica.org](mailto:info@reactafrica.org)