Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) represents a critical challenge for all countries, local communities and those responsible for young people. Young people, especially adolescent girls and young women, suffer disproportionately from negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes that challenge their ability to contribute to their communities’ and countries’ development. Cordaid works together with religious leaders of all denominations who have a considerable amount of influence to make sure young people have the ability and opportunity to make informed decisions when it comes to their own sexual health and family planning.

In most low-income countries, young people make up now the majority. For example, in Burundi, 66% are younger than 25 and one in three are between 10 and 24. In certain societies, notably in Africa, religious leaders are regarded as guardians of culture and social norms. Thus, they have a considerable amount of influence among members of the community, including the younger generation. For over five years, Cordaid and partners have promoted and strengthened sexual and reproductive health care services however had identified the importance of working with religious leaders to have impact.

A lack of SRH tools for religious leaders
Young people face substantial social and economic barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services, which is evidenced by persistently high levels of unmet need for methods of birth regulation, maternal mortality, and HIV incidence. For example, the second cause of death worldwide of young women aged 15 to 19 are complications during pregnancy and childbirth; and half of all new HIV infections worldwide occur in young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Many SRH programs overlook the social, cultural and economic factors that prevent young people from making healthy decisions. Adolescents often seek advice and support from adults, yet religious leaders, parents, teachers, caretakers and other adults who interact with young people are often ill-equipped to discuss these issues.

Facilitation handbook for working with religious leaders
In recognition of the strong influential role religious leaders play in the lives of young people, Cordaid developed an inter-faith tool to educate and empower them with the necessary information and skills to better understand and support young people to shape their own future regarding their SRH. The facilitation handbook was designed to fill a gap, noted by the Next Generation Programme that Cordaid led for 3 years (2013-2015) in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda: the religious leaders had no resource solely dedicated to addressing SRH for young people. Thus this facilitation handbook is an opportunity to increase the understanding of religious leaders about the realities that young people and their families face regarding their SRH and to strengthen religious leaders skills to help young people make informed decisions on matters related to their health and well-being.

“Youths have to be educated and informed in an unbiased way. The Holy Spirit does not replace intelligence, just as intelligence does not replace the Holy Spirit.”
A representative of the Bible Lecture League in Burundi.

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1 World Health Organization: Adolescent Pregnancy Fact Sheet; September 2014
2 UN AIDS: Young People And HIV/AIDS Opportunity In Crisis, 2002
Description sheet of the Facilitation handbook for working with religious leaders

Target
Mid-level religious leaders with official responsibilities in their communities. The handbook has been designed so that they have the space to internalise, consider and understand the dilemmas young people are dealing with, no matter their religious standpoint, in relation to SRH.

Objectives
- Develop an understanding on the needs and realities of young people;
- Become more knowledgeable about SRH service provision and good practice;
- Support accurate, informed, evidence-based information on SRH;
- Support access to quality youth friendly comprehensive SRH service provision;
- Ability to conduct constructive discussions on SRH in the family.

TOPICS OF HANDBOOK

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<td>Young People’s SRH needs</td>
<td>To identify young people’s SRH needs and analyse participant’s experiences</td>
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<td>To explore assumptions about the role of RLs in SRH education based on experience</td>
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<td>Guiding Young People</td>
<td>To identify common communication barriers with young people on SRH and gain resources and confidence to address these</td>
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<td>Community mobilisation: a systematic approach</td>
<td>To develop an action plan for interaction with young people</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Evaluation and closure</td>
<td>To evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process individually and as a group</td>
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Languages
Available in both English and French.

Add-on
An annex manual has been developed for religious leaders. It contains definitions, extracts of holy books, facts, figures, tips, references, questionnaires, energizers, etc to deepen their knowledge.

CORDAID role
Cordaid actively promotes dialogue and interaction between religious leaders and young people on the still sensitive and taboo topics of sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights. As a Catholic international development organization, Cordaid recognizes the strong role religious leaders play in the lives of their community members and the role of faith-based organizations in addressing the SRH of young people. This uniquely positions Cordaid to provide facilitation services in utilizing the handbook and guiding religious leaders through this process. Thanks to our strong track record on this matter, we can offer a comprehensive package in English and French to interested stakeholders who would like to utilize our services in training religious leaders on SRH for young people.