

INSPIRE THEORY OF CHANGE

Background

Inspire is a strategic Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) partnership in Europe. It began in the mid-1990s under the name of EuroNGOs. It is a network of NGOs working in sexual and reproductive health and rights with the aim of ensuring a strong and united European front on domestic and international SRHR issues. While the network began with an emphasis on population dynamics and family planning, the emphasis soon moved to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In 2018, the network underwent a rebranding process and it was agreed that Inspire will continue to foster virtual and physical space for SRHR actors and advocates to exchange and share information and create alliances with other members of civil society that have an interest in SRHR, but its partnership would aim to do more than connect key actors and wants to be a catalyst for action and progress. While European donors value the Inspire network, most of their budgets must go to developing countries. This means that Inspire is leanly funded, making the network need to be careful stewards of their resources.

Identity and purpose of Inspire

Main thematic issues for Inspire:

Abortion – LGBTI SRHR - Sexual violence - Contraception/family planning - Population dynamics – Pornography - Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) - Surrogacy – Infertility – STIs – HIV/AIDS - Rights violations - Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Inspire identity:

- We are European;
- We are members of civil society;
- We can cover both the international and national agendas; and
- There is a special alchemy among us when acting together.

The change Inspire wants to make: The network of European NGOs working in SRHR has been very active over the decades, their role has tended to stay on the level of collaboration and convening. This is an important role and should not be diminished. In addition to that, the Inspire Partnership members want to use the network for strategic change, while acknowledging that their goals remain modest and that they could probably only manage a few strategies annually to pursue.

Defining 'Actions Together': Inspire is critical in setting agendas, in reframing the discussion, and giving inputs into other conferences. Inspire wants to 'build the movement' and 'influence the agenda'. Looking forward, the sorts of actions Inspire wants to carry out together should be both international and national, as these agendas needed to be better connected. Inspire is uniquely placed as its members often have this national-international coverage.

Risks

If any or a combination of the below risks take place, the Theory of Change is less likely to work or the risks could bring down the entire Inspire network.



External Risks

Donor risks: The shifting priorities of donors are always a risk for any voluntary organisational group as funding could move to other donor priorities. In addition, competition for donor funding among group members can be divisive and funding is finite.

Anti-movement groups: While those who work in SRHR are well used to working in the context of opposition, it doesn't seem to get any easier. This is because the anti-groups are constantly changing their tactics. These groups are can be both anti-choice and/or anti-gender.

Larger politics: This is bigger than the opposition groups, representing a larger conservative lean that encroaches on reproductive rights. The Global Gag Rule is good example of this and is something that is affecting many of the Inspire membership.

Internal Risks

Competing priorities: While this risk seems unthreatening, it is actually one of the most dangerous for the network. Inspire needs to continue to sell itself to prevent boredom among members. As a long-established network, complacency is very likely and dangerous. Others encroach on the same territory and the risk of duplication rises and the strength of Inspire wanes. Finally, time is very precious, and members may simply have none left to devote to the Inspire activities.

Governance: Inspire has long experience and many governance issues over the years have been managed well; but this can never be taken for granted. There is always a risk of lack of leadership or the risk of inefficient running of the network.

Narrow focus: The SRHR community is perpetually talking about the risk of maintaining their narrow focus and, often, doing very little about it. This may be because there is just enough funding to remain comfortably siloed. Working in closed siloes risks missing new trends and opportunities to make sensible connections that might even mean the difference between a viable future and shutting down. Overly focussed expertise has many risks and is now seen as old fashioned.

Group dynamics: There are many facets here: a) The need for consensus could mean doing nothing; b) misuse of power could frighten or disempower smaller, weaker NGOs; c) attribution is an extremely annoying problem as it can stop organisations from doing anything for fear of other organisations taking the credit and alienating others who may have worked just as hard; and d) the politics can be seen as so complicated that some groups just walk away.

IPPF dynamic: While this may seem a subset of something above, the IPPF relationship is worth putting as a separate risk. The power imbalance between MAs and smaller NGOs is already a known issue but IPPF's power overall is so major that they could imbalance the others. IPPF has and needs to continue to wield their power carefully.

Building a Theory of Change

Action Together (International and national)

Action Together is critical for the future of Inspire. The network can work together strategically with a European angle. They could work on any thematic issue and do whatever it takes, using their varying organisations to bring their strengths.



Active and reactive strategies

The group realised that action together would require strategic decisions each year on critical thematic issues and how to move them forward. These would be called ‘active’ strategies. In some cases, the world outside would force ‘reactive’ strategies—strategies that counteract something that has just happened in the SRHR field to affect its programmes, such as the Global Gag Rule.

Strategizing takes time and a forum in which to do it, with ideas included the AGM, during the conference, or among working groups. How this process will work will be further refined. Inspire will choose one to three thematic issues per year on which to build strategies.

Collaboration and convening

This collaboration and convening work was built into the agenda of Inspire from the start and is a critical part of Inspire’s role. The steady stream of information that comes out of Inspire means that the membership is up to date with the latest research, events, ideas or outrage. The convening role takes place primarily at the annual conference where members are brought together to learn and interact. The conference is an important space as these organisations are together and can have candid discussions and spark off each other. Activities would include, among other things: a) the annual conference; b) information sharing; c) carrying out membership surveys; and d) building the Inspire identity.

Building Alliances

In the past, the network had remained a comfortable group of the regular SRHR characters and didn’t initially widen. The risk there is that such groups go stale and risk missing critical opportunities. Inspire needs to widen its scope of organisations with whom to work. Strategic alliances need to be built to bring more relevant groups into the work. While IPPF MAs are critical partners in this work, the group agreed that it was equally critical to bring in other players too, especially the small organisations.

Activities would include (among other things): a) building partnerships; b) considering who was missing; c) adding and building links with the domestic players; d) building links with academia; and e) looking broadly across Europe.

Capacity Building

Inspire has always endeavoured to build the capacity of its members. In order to have a diverse and broad group of SRHR actors, the kinds of NGOs that belong to Inspire vary widely. A new or small NGO may have a critical mandate or play a very important role in a country context; and yet, not have the broader organisational skills to amplify its voice or carry out its mission.

Activities would include (among other things): a) building international and national understanding; b) determining capacity gaps; and c) supporting members with appropriate interventions.

Do nothing

When considering any intervention, it is important to consider what would happen if nothing took place. In the case of no Inspire, many competing organisations would follow their own agendas in an uncoordinated way. Each voice would be weaker on its own and each organisation would remain weaker without support. The organisations would not know what the others were doing and would operate independently. The smaller organisations’ voices, perhaps valuable, would not be heard. Distrust would grow among organisations and fewer new ideas would come to the fore.



European Partnership for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights



DO NOTHING: Many competing organisations following their own agendas in an uncoordinated way with each voice weaker on its own and each organisation less supported. The organisations do not know what the others are doing and the smaller organisations' voices, perhaps valuable, would not be heard. There would be less trust between organisations and fewer ideas would spring from organisations always acting alone.