



False Pretenses: The Anti-Comprehensive Sexuality Education Agenda Weaponizing Human Rights

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. Misinformation on CSE and intersecting forms of stigma around adolescents' sexuality create challenges for children and young people to access age-appropriate information and services. Evidence shows that parents and teachers are willing to implement CSE programs, but lack of resources and training support create additional barriers. When these key stakeholders are involved in the curriculum development and programming, they understand the need and value of CSE in protecting children.

CSE is not only a human right and key to gender equality, but it is intentionally designed to keep children safe and to build inclusive societies. Children and youth need the opportunity to build self-confidence and healthy decision-making skills around reproductive choices — information that is available through CSE programs. Additionally, CSE increases parents' ability to engage in vital conversations with their children and make sure that both their children and their communities receive life-saving SRHR information, education, and services from experts.

Despite CSE's proven positive impact on the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), there is a growing movement opposed to the curricula based on moral or religious grounds. Over the last decade, as governments mainstream CSE programming, international anti-rights stakeholders, based mostly in the United States, have been mobilizing activists from the Global South to advocate in United Nations spaces against women's and youth rights to SRHR information and services. They are also engaging with national and regional movements to shut down CSE programs.

Denying children and young people the necessary information and skills to develop safely and healthily should not be a political strategy. Yet, opposition to CSE plays on fears and assumptions about abortion, contraception, gender equality, and sexual orientation and gender identity. The false narratives advanced by opposition groups, conservative and far-right governments, and their networks have a secondary impact — delegitimizing the United Nations and human rights norms and frameworks.

Understanding opposition to CSE is particularly pressing as 2023 presents many opportunities to advance educational initiatives at the global level. It is imperative to spotlight empirical and scientific evidence proving the effectiveness of CSE, as well as recognizing that governments around the world are making sexuality education programs a national priority. Ipas's report, *False Pretenses: The Anti-Comprehensive Sexuality Education Agenda Weaponizing Human Rights*,

outlines the main actors in the anti-CSE movement and how they link to each other, UN member states, and other global, regional, and national anti-rights trends. This detail informs the debate on CSE by showing how the anti-CSE movement does not reflect lived experiences but rather is a funded movement with a specific agenda: a neocolonialist effort to destabilize a pedagogical tool that was developed in partnership with families, teachers, and government officials.

Key Recommendations

Understanding the strategy, tactics, and narratives of anti-rights actors allows advocates, UN representatives, and key decision-makers to continue standing strong for CSE and access to comprehensive SRHR that includes safe and legal abortion, and bodily autonomy for all. To effectively counter disinformation on CSE and the false arguments promoted by these groups and certain member states, advocates should consider:

- **Reminding key stakeholders and decision-makers that the family, in all its diversity and traditional values, is not counter to CSE or indeed SRHR in general.** Mutual respect, dignity, bodily autonomy, and shared humanity are essential values and the core of all CSE programs.
- **Reminding country representatives, ministries of health and education, and other key stakeholders that anti-rights groups active at the UN and other international fora have no technical experience with education or health, much less CSE.**
- **Highlighting that many anti-rights groups are not grassroots, local movements.** While some do exist at the sub-national level, many organizations or movements that appear to be “local” are supported by groups from other countries.
- **Linking how the efforts of anti-rights organizations are part of a wider anti-rights, patriarchal movement.** Their attacks are not just about CSE, but rather are part of larger anti-rights trends against gender equality and democracy. Their policies and actions do not attend to the needs of children and teens but instead contribute to worsening public health crises, including unintended pregnancies and HIV.

It is critical we continued advancing principles of democracy, plurality, and use an intersectional, rights-based approach to development to advance gender equality and the rights and wellbeing of everyone. Fostering inclusive societies where children and young people are healthy and educated allows them to reach their full potential and take informed decisions that in turn allow countries to socially and economically develop.

For the full Ipas report and more resources on the anti-rights and anti-gender movements, please visit the monitoring gender and human rights work of Ipas at www.ipas.org.