



Kenya

Pilot Project: Working Together for Children and Young Adolescents in Kenya (T4YA)

Young people in Kenya's West Pokot region face tremendous challenges when it comes to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Traditional values and a lack of access to age-appropriate information leads to teen pregnancies, child marriages, and gender-based violence. Religious actors have a great influence on social norms and can play a key role in promoting access to SRHR services.

The T4YA pilot project implemented by Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW) in cooperation with World Vision and Faith to Action Network aims to create an environment in which children and youth (aged 10–14) gain easier access to age-appropriate information and SRHR support. From January to November 2022, activities were conducted in schools and communities in the West Pokot region to raise awareness and create practical solutions.

Results

Taking a peer learning approach, the project brought together 20 adolescents from five schools across the region to be trained as peer educators who could inform and support their fellow students. They took on special roles in the T4YA clubs and acted as multipliers of SRHR knowledge.

In total, 2,413 youth were reached through these peer learning sessions, which addressed topics including sexual health, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and life skills. The weekly meetings that took place in the five schools where these youth clubs were founded offered a space for

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open dialogue and learning. Teachers reported that the kids showed greater discipline after the project. Girls were less frequently absent due to menstruation. These positive developments were attributed to the project's impact.

In parallel, ten teachers were trained in youth friendly methodologies that integrated SRHR-related topics and counselling into the school day, leading to a more supportive environment. Ten parents were also given parent education trainings to better their ability to serve as mentors and their ability to communicate with their children. Peer learning meetings led to a total of 1,131 parents being sensitised to SRHR, breaking the silence on the subject in families.

Religious leaders played a central role in the project's implementation. Trainings on how to incorporate SRHR topics into sermons and community meets were held with 19 religious leaders. These leaders founded the Congregational Hope Action Teams (CHATs), which organised monthly meetings in their communities that informed 1,094 youth on SRHR subjects. A pastor from the Full Gospel Church explained: "I have seen so many young girls get pregnant in their tender ages. I was

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The Problem

Many young people in Kenya have little to no access to youth-friendly SRHR information and services. That's a result of parents not speaking openly about the subject, teachers receiving little training on it, and religious actors and communities not addressing it.

The Role of Religious Actors

Religious actors can play a decisive part in young people becoming positively aware of SRHR topics. Religious leaders are among some of the most influential members of the community and hold an enormous influence over culture and what behaviours and norms are required or forbidden in their communities. With the right information and perspective, they can be "Agents of change." But without this capacity, they can also disseminate wrong information, which is why it's of great importance that they are trained in SRHR and endorse it. As the most influential members of the community, they have the opportunity to shift cultural norms and practices in line with SRHR.

struggling with how to approach it using my bible. Now I am more empowered in SRHR through this training. I am now ready to use my pulpit to address and help our adolescents".

The project also promoted dialogue between different actors. Local and national interreligious dialogues allowed for the elimination of barriers and the development of cooperative strategies. A national meeting led to policy recommendations for revamping Kenya's SRHR policy and strengthening the incorporation of religious actors into government programmes.

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Challenges and Learnings

The cooperation between the three partner organisations proved especially useful, as the methods, technical capacities, and networks complemented each other well, reducing the costs for the project's implementation. Adopting a holistic approach that incorporated youth, parents, teachers, and religious actors alike was highly relevant to create a solid basis for the knowledge exchanged.

When working with religious actors, care should be taken that the teachings of all of the represented religions are considered. Dialogues amongst the theologians should be moderated in such a way that it is possible for anyone to find overlapping beliefs between the various faiths.

The youth clubs and CHATs that resulted from the T4YA project should continue to act as a platform for SRHR education. The printed handbooks and recommendations for national SRHR policy underlines the project's long-term influence.

Faith to Action and the partner organisations plan to expand the cooperation with religious actors and institutionalise the dialogue formats. The inclusion of religious leaders has shown that they can play a central role in improving young people's access to important information and services.

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