



Zambia

Pilot Project: Traditional and Religious Actors for Comprehensive Knowledge on HIV, Family Planning, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Young people in Zambia, especially girls and women, face big challenges: HIV, teen pregnancies, and gender-based violence are widespread. With a comparatively high prevalence of HIV in women and a high rate of school dropouts as a result of teen pregnancies, young women are disproportionately affected. Traditional gender norms and social taboos hinder access to information and services.

Religious and traditional actors (RTAs) play a key role in imparting societal values and norms. The GIZ project, “Strengthening Girls’ Rights! Reproductive Health, Family Planning and HIV prevention for learners, especially girls, in Zambia” (SGR) worked with RTAs from January to September 2022 to improve access for young people to age-appropriate sex education and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.

Results

The project attempted to shift participants’ attitudes and awareness by bringing RTAs and young people into conversation. The round table discussions had 90 RTAs (38 of which were women) present, and they discussed the challenges young people face in confronting topics like HIV, teen pregnancy and GBV. Half of the RTAs who participated in the dialogues reported an improved awareness of the problems that youth are facing. After the meetings, 41% of young people reported a noticeable difference in the RTAs’ behaviour.

A central aspect of the implementation was the dialogue held between RTAs and youth. These conversations allowed taboo topics to be addressed openly, including

Duration:	01/2022 – 09/2022
Implementation:	GIZ Project “Strengthening Girls’ Rights! Reproductive Health, Family Planning and HIV prevention for learners, especially girls, in Zambia” (SGR); in cooperation with the sector programme “Population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health and rights”
Partners:	Caritas Zambia, government partners, youth organisations, as well as religious and traditional actors

discussions about the importance of education for girls, child marriage, and the rights of young people. A traditional leader reported: “Previously, we supported child marriage, as it was a part of our tradition. After the dialogues, I changed my perspective. I could prevent one child marriage and help the young girl to carry on with her studies.”

The project trained 32 multipliers (among them the wives of RTAs, female RTAs, youth, and traditional marriage counsellors) in the Join-In-Circuit method on SRHR-related topics. These multipliers reached over 4,543 people, 2,735 of whom are women, with their sensitisation training on subjects like gender roles, HIV prevention and young people’s rights.

Published by

The Problem

Young people, especially girls, are disproportionately impacted by teenage pregnancy, child marriage, and gender-based violence.

The Role of Religious Actors

RTAs are drivers of the public discourse on morals, including on questions about gender relations, sexuality, and family planning. Under the umbrella of the Department of National Guidance and Religious Affairs as well as the Department of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, they have influence over people's beliefs, attitudes, and conduct. Alongside religious actors, traditional actors also possess an overarching authority at the local level when it comes to traditional practices and taboos. Within the framework of the dual legal system, they have the authority to write and implement regulations. As such, they have a great influence over the conditions that allow young people to exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health.

The intervention led to concrete changes at congregational level. Stories of Change showed that several child marriages could be prevented and girls were able to integrate back into school. One religious actor reflected: "I didn't know anything about HIV before this. I was afraid of people who live with HIV and didn't know that they could lead a normal life. Today, I support them and educate others about the topic."

The media was also used to drive awareness. RTAs were present in TV and radio broadcasts, and interactive call-in shows allowed the public to ask them questions directly.

Published by:

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Germany
E ReligionMatters@giz.de
I www.giz.de/en/worldwide/128395.html

Project description:

Sector Project Religion for Sustainable Development

Responsible:

Timo Biank

Photo credits/Sources:

©GIZ

Challenges and Learnings

The cooperation with RTAs revealed itself as a key to success, yet it also required a sensitive approach. Some of the RTAs had themselves discriminatory perspectives at first, for example against HIV-infected people. These stereotypes could be brought into question during targeted trainings. To select appropriate RTAs, reliance on respected and locally established partners was necessary. Convincing the RTAs to join in the dialogue, it was helpful to frame the subject as one of public health and girls' safety.

A further learning area came in the inclusion of women. As many RTAs are men, women had to be given preparation in order to actively participate in dialogues. Meeting in advance allowed them to shape their ideas and beliefs in a safe space to better share them.

The GIZ project plans to continue the cooperation in a second project phase. Religious organisations and academic institutions like the Zambia International Theology University have shown interest in further developing this approach. In the long term, it makes sense to include higher hierarchical levels in RTAs.

On behalf of

German Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Division G41 Churches, political foundations, social structural programmes
Dr. Berthold Weig
Berlin

Bonn 2025

On behalf of



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development