



Using intergenerational dialogue in Uganda to involve youth in decision making for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

In Uganda,

One in four teenage girls age 15-19 have a child or are pregnant – 42% of all pregnancies among adolescents are unintended.¹

One in three young women cannot access modern contraceptives, but wants to.²

Background

Uganda's has one the highest rates of maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancy and total fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa due to lack of access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information, education and services. SRH initiatives in Uganda are showing success with

modern contraceptive prevalence rates rising from 21.3% in 2012 to 27.5% in 2018³. However, involving youth in decision making on programs that can meet their specific rights and needs is essential to ensuring that young people are not left behind as SRH continues to improve in Uganda.

Through over 60 years of community-based programming to strengthen health systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, Amref Health Africa witnessed how change starts at the community level. Only if communities, and particularly youth, are informed about their rights and able to demand these rights from policymakers, will there be improvements in health indicators. By investing in social accountability processes, citizens are engaged to hold politicians and policy makers accountable for the services that they provide.

¹ UNFPA factsheet, 2018

² State of Uganda Population Report, 2018, numbers only reported for married girls

³ FP2020, 2018

The power of partnership in accelerating youth-inclusive health advocacy

In Uganda's western Kabale district, Amref Health Africa is partnering with Kabale Women in Development (KWID) to empower communities as advocates for increasing human resources for health and strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Established in 1996, KWID is a community-based organization that helps women and other vulnerable groups engage in socio-economic development processes. It was notably recognised for its work in education in 2011 with a Tumaini Award, which honours the best of those working to improve the lives of children in Uganda.



Brenda Mwesigye, a specialized health counselor with Amref, gives sexual and reproductive health education to youth

Amref's collaboration with Kabale Women in Development

Amref mentors KWID by providing its members with tools for mobilizing communities and has supported the organisation's overall capacity by delivering training on programming methods, documentation, and financial management skills aimed particularly at helping KWID achieve self-reliance. In 2017, the Amref-led trainings focused on advocacy and social accountability, covering topics such as how to involve communities in defining health service delivery gaps, organising community dialogues, drafting petitions, and collecting evidence to inform advocacy.

KWID's development in health advocacy

Following the capacity trainings by Amref, KWID has gained skills in workplan development, report writing, documentation, and events planning (e.g. intergenerational dialogue) in line with the health advocacy agenda. Amref continues to work closely with KWID by giving them support and supervision as needed. This includes delivering additional training on gender mainstreaming, providing mentorship on advocacy skills, and assisting in developing advocacy materials for evidence-based engagement with stakeholders.



Youth from the East African region take a group photo after the Fire activation intergenerational dialogue on Youth4UHC in Kabale District

From dialogue to action: securing a budget for youth-centred family planning activities

Creating opportunities for youth to engage with leadership is a must in Uganda. Youth and young people are the unheard voices in decision making. Until 2018, there was only one youth representative at district level. Yet youth are the majority in any district in Uganda.

Intergenerational dialogue: connecting youth to decision makers



In November 2018, KWID and Amref organized an intergenerational dialogue to enable a group of youths in Kabale to engage with local religious leaders, district leaders, media representatives, and health workers. The objective was to raise awareness about the problems they face and seek solutions. The youth took lead in agenda setting and dialogue moderation. Through this, youth are able to hold discussions, understand policies that affect them, and exchange ideas with key stakeholders and those in leadership positions.

"They feel like we're actually helping them. It has taken some time, but now the higher officials are listening to what we have to say."

Liberty Christopher Namara – KWID researcher

Outcomes of the intergenerational dialogue included recommendations, proposals and commitments from cross-generational players to allow for youth participation in supporting Kabale district's development. Although the dialogue was largely successful in gaining consensus on commitments, KWID noticed during the proceedings that youth participants lacked long-term empowerment because they were not regularly involved in local decision making and had a limited knowledge base for advocacy and action. KWID subsequently sought ways to meet both of these needs.

Formalizing the role of youth: involving youth leaders in district reviews

With the support of KWID, Kabale's District Youth Chairperson, Youth Focal Person and District Youth Female Councillor were integrated into district review meetings beginning in December 2018. The three youth representatives used the opportunity of their first district review meeting to follow-up on the commitments that were made at the intergenerational dialogue.

"Advocacy is not about confronting, but about raising awareness."

Florence Tumuheirwe Namara – Executive Director, KWID



“Most of us didn’t know anything about sexual reproductive health rights. They have raised awareness.”

John Bosco Namara – Youth Chairperson, Kabale district

Building capacity before action: orienting youth leaders on sexual and reproductive health

To build youth leaders’ knowledge base for conducting SRHR advocacy, KWID organized orientation sessions in seven Kabale sub-counties in January 2019. KWID used a participatory approach in which youth leaders discussed key issues that hinder the effective delivery of quality SRH services to young people in the district.



The meeting resulted in an action plan for youth leaders to raise awareness and advocate for the creation of a first-time youth family planning budget in Kabale. As an important step in following-up the action plan and all future plans, the Youth Chairperson formed a Youth Council to help establish a permanent working relationship between young people and district leaders.

Advocacy leads to results: youth leaders secure a first-time budget for youth family planning

The Kabale Youth Council held its first annual meeting that same month, setting immediate goals and deciding on strategies for achieving them. Its first priority was approaching Kabale’s Youth Focal Person, Chief Administrative Officer, and Local Council Chairperson with a detailed proposal to fund youth-centred family planning promotional activities in the

district. This budget would specifically fund meetings with District Health Team members and health facility representatives to advocate for expanding youth-friendly SRH services, as well as community sensitisation events to promote access to these services and contraceptive availability for young people. By August 2019, district leaders not only approved the requested budget, but added an additional budget for mentoring Youth Council members on their roles and responsibilities, resulting in a total of 1.5 million UGX.

“Now the information has also reached the communities. The leaders will even contribute a small portion of money to promote SRHR.”

John Bosco Namara – Youth Chairperson, Kabale district



Continued advocacy

The Youth Council has received separate funds from the District Local Revenue to continue discussions on SRH in different counties of Kabale district. Amref plans to continue partnering with community based organizations to make sure that sexual and reproductive health—especially for youth—is given a space in every district budget in Uganda.



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Contact
Abenet Leykun Berhanu
Country Director Amref Health Africa Uganda
abenet.Berhanu@amref.org



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