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Editorial

Welcome to the latest edition of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Umbrella newsletter! This issue focuses on gender-based violence. This is timely as the world unites to challenge violence against women and girls through the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign.

SRHR Umbrella partners have been working hard to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and its root causes of gender inequality and harmful norms. In this newsletter, you'll hear from some of the people leading efforts to change attitudes and beliefs in the community. Read on to find out how a helpline has proved crucial in supporting young women. We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

The SRHR Umbrella team

Challenging gender bias among health workers

In our February newsletter, Madhina Nakasi from The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) told us about a recent training course on gender-transformative approaches. Since then, TASO and other implementing partners have mentored health workers to challenge their gender bias. As a result, Madhina reports that the stigma faced by sex workers and LGBTI people has decreased in the health facilities, and their uptake of services has risen. TASO also noted positive changes in the way LGBTI people were treated by their peers in some community dialogue meetings.

Toll-free helpline for survivors of gender-based violence

Child Rights Empowerment and Development Organization (CEDO) runs a toll-free helpline to respond to gender-based violence in the districts of Hoima and Kikuube. The helpline, initially piloted through the SRHR Umbrella Innovation Fund, has played an important role since November 2020. It also provides an entry point for sexual and reproductive healthcare: for some young people, it's their first encounter with SRHR issues.

Elizabeth, a young woman from Kikuube district, called the helpline after her husband was violent towards her when she disclosed her HIV status. He blamed her and stopped her from visiting the health facility for HIV medication. Elizabeth's health deteriorated and her husband kept subjecting her to physical and emotional violence.

CEDO reached out and met with her to provide psychosocial support. The team then referred her to a health facility for treatment and mental healthcare. The couple received information and advice about HIV, which gave them hope of raising a healthy family. Elizabeth received appropriate care during her pregnancy, and the good news is that they now have a healthy one-year-old who is HIV negative.

If you need help or advice on gender-based violence in Hoima and Kikuube, call the helpline on **0800211015**.

Elizabeth and Justus from CEDO's helpline response team



Working with the police to tackle gender-based violence

Josephine speaking to community members, Kampala district



Through the SRHR Umbrella, implementing partners such as Alive Medical Services (AMS) have been working with gatekeepers to raise awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the community. They teamed up with the police family protection unit to address gender-based violence, with the goal of improving prevention and response.

AMS provided training and sensitisation to police officers like Josephine Asio. “As police officers, we needed to be trained on gender-based violence – the causes, forms and effects – so that we could use our authority to reduce violence, educate community members about the laws, provide victims with access to services, and respond to cases more effectively,” she said.

The police are now better able to respond to gender-based violence, which Josephine describes as “the most silent, systematic human rights abuse in our communities”.

Traditional leaders drive social change in their communities

Customs and traditions can make it difficult to talk about issues related to sexual health and gender. And yet, some deeply entrenched gender norms are harmful. To shift gender roles and expectations and encourage open discussion, it's important to engage influential traditional leaders.

Sempijja Michael, a prominent member of the Masaza (sub-county) of the Buganda leadership committee, attended a training session on smart advocacy for SRHR, organised by Youth Alive Uganda (YAU) in September 2022. Michael learned that leaders like him have a responsibility to help change attitudes to SRHR and gender.

Before the training, he said, “I don't think I ever encouraged a woman to use a family planning method, advised a man to use a condom, or even have one partner.” But now Michael is using his position in the community to challenge

traditional gender roles that impact sexual and reproductive health. He added, “Some of them don't want to hear me mentioning family planning, but I found reasons to help them understand, for instance if you have a manageable family, providing basic needs won't be a problem.”

Michael during an advocacy session



About SRHR Umbrella

The **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Umbrella** is a seven-year programme funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

It is managed by Frontline AIDS and implemented by Ugandan NGOs across 11 districts, coordinated by Alive Medical Services.

Thank you

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Find out more: frontlineaids.org/our-work-includes/srhr-umbrella-grant/