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Editorial

Welcome to the final edition of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Umbrella newsletter!

It's time for the programme to close after seven years. We are proud to have reached an impressive **1.5 million people** with integrated, quality SRHR and HIV services. But the work to ensure access to services and better sexual and reproductive health outcomes for marginalised communities in Uganda is not over, and partners have put mechanisms in place so that programme gains are sustained and built upon.

In this newsletter, we celebrate the programme's amazing achievements and look to the future with some of the young people and colleagues who have been integral to its success. We'd like to thank everyone who has supported and been part of the programme over the last seven years.

The SRHR Umbrella team

School clubs enhance young people's wellbeing

Saaka Roberts, inspector of schools in the Mubende district, first heard about the SRHR Umbrella programme in 2018 when the Youth Alive Uganda (YAU) team was active in various communities. He has seen the positive impact the programme has had on young people's wellbeing. "We've been able to support the pupils in improving their self-esteem through the meetings with YAU and the clubs formed within the school. With YAU under the SRHR Umbrella programme collaborating with other civil society organisations, we have been able to train the pupils to make sanitary pads to improve girls' hygiene during menstruation."

"This has greatly supported the schools and we hope to extend the programme to other schools in the sub-counties YAU could not reach so that the entire district benefits. We plan to adopt the referral system and link between the health facilities and schools to continue the activities YAU has been doing within schools. This includes health education, screening for gender-based violence, STI [sexually transmitted infection] testing and many other services so that young people in school can get healthcare just like out of school because they've been missing out."

Mr Roberts has personally seen a change in pupils' attitudes: "Now they are able to open up to the teachers and seek services whenever they need."

He believes the programme will be sustainable because the school clubs will keep educating young people about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This, in turn, will continue to increase adolescents' uptake of sexual and reproductive healthcare, particularly those who can be reached in school.

"We will forever be grateful to YAU for the support they have rendered to the district to ensure [...] better health decisions will be made by the young generation."

Mr Roberts addresses teachers at a workshop on sexual and reproductive health



Peer educators increase awareness and uptake of services

Asobora Joel, SRHR Umbrella project coordinator at Child Rights Empowerment and Development Organization (CEDO), joined the programme in 2016 when it first began. Since then, he has seen many young people benefit from the mentorship and support they have received from trained peer educators who are knowledgeable about SRHR and HIV.

“Our trained peer educators have reached most of the community of young people with information,” he said.

“And we have seen an increase in awareness and demand among young people for HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health services like PrEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis], condoms and different family planning methods, which is helping them make informed decisions about their health. We’ve reached over 141,200 young people with different services, including information through dialogues, community outreaches and referrals.”

The programme has had a huge impact on people’s lives. For example, CEDO’s innovative, toll-free hotline helps survivors of gender-based violence. Since it was introduced, an average of 35 cases a month have been recorded. The CEDO team provides immediate confidential care and support, including psychosocial support, as well as referrals to services.

The SRHR Umbrella programme has mentored peer educators, who have gained skills that they can apply in other aspects of their life and careers. For instance, Faida Annet started as a peer educator and then moved on to politics, campaigning for and winning an election in 2021 as a councillor in Buseruka sub-county in Hoima district. This position will enable her to amplify young people’s concerns and demands at the sub-county level, which in the long term will expand their access to services.

To promote sustainability, the CEDO team has taken steps to ensure that young people in the communities are still reached, regardless of funding. They have engaged stakeholders, including school administrators, police officers

and religious leaders, who are committed to integrating their services with sexual and reproductive healthcare so that support is maintained.

“Overall, the SRHR Umbrella programme has contributed immensely towards increasing access and utilisation of sexual and reproductive health and HIV services by the young people in the communities of Hoima and Kikuube districts. It has empowered and mentored peer educators to become advocates and community leaders. We are grateful to the seven incredible years of service in which the young generation has been equipped with knowledge.”

Asobora Joel, SRHR Umbrella project coordinator at CEDO



Helping vulnerable young people with disabilities reach their potential

Adolescent girls with disabilities are among the vulnerable people supported by the SRHR Umbrella to improve their access to opportunities and resources and enable them to claim their rights. The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) has ensured that no young person, regardless of HIV status or disability, was left behind during the programme.

Many myths and stereotypes surround disability and sexuality. People with disabilities may be infantilised and seen as asexual or hypersexual, incapable of reproduction and unfit to be a sexual partner, husband/wife, or parent.

TASO's innovative work has enabled 18-year-old Bilaba Cida, who lives in Budoola in Bugaya sub-county, to reach her potential. Born with a disability and one of seven children, Cida's parents did not consider it a priority to educate her, so she spent just two years at primary school.

In November 2021, Cida was enrolled in a project, implemented by TASO, aimed at preventing unintended teenage pregnancies through economic empowerment in communities. This helped her overcome the additional barriers she faces to care, services, education and information about SRHR, gender-based violence, and other violence and abuse. The project offered training in vocational skills and Cida chose to learn baking. She has become a skilled baker, managing to earn a decent living for herself and provide her own basic needs.

"As a person with a disability, through this programme I am now recognised as someone who can make a difference compared to the situation while I was growing up."

"The programme has restored hope for me and changed the community's mindset on people with disabilities. Now, I am aware of my rights as a girl. Sometimes young men take advantage of my situation, but I am able to defend myself because I know what I want and I know what I can do."

Although the project is over, to foster sustainability, TASO is currently recruiting adolescents and young women who will start earning their own income after training by the young people who were previously involved with the project. TASO believes that this will increase access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and referrals as well as reduce unintended teenage pregnancies in the community after SRHR Umbrella funding ends.



SRHR Umbrella



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Peer educators spark open discussion and combat stigma

Twenty-four-year-old Ssenyange Muhammed – known as Aksam – from Wakiso district, joined the SRHR Umbrella programme in 2018 as a peer educator. After training and mentorships provided by Alive Medical Services (AMS), Aksam has developed extensive knowledge of the SRHR issues that affect young people, such as contraception, prevention of HIV and other STIs, and the stigma faced by people living with HIV.

“The SRHR Umbrella programme has had a significant impact in that societal support from family, friends, leaders and other stakeholders has opened up discussion,” he said. “And it’s eradicated the stigma and discrimination that hinders young people from accessing sexual and reproductive health services like HIV testing and family planning.”

Promoting young people’s sexual and reproductive rights has greatly benefited the community. For instance, more young people are now using sexual and reproductive health and HIV services and engaging in safer sex. Aksam has provided accurate information, created safe spaces and campaigned to widen access to services by engaging a range of stakeholders. This has helped increase the visibility of SRHR, reduce stigma and discrimination, and improve young people’s access to services in the community.

Thanks to training and mentorships provided by AMS, peer educators have gained useful skills and most are now continuing their roles with other implementing partners.

Throughout the programme, the SRHR Umbrella has invested in meaningful youth engagement. “We believe that young people’s innovativeness and resourcefulness have frequently been underestimated,” Aksam said. “We want to begin with the notion that young people have the capacity to contribute to the creation, implementation and evaluation of programmes as well as the right to take part in all decision-making processes that have an impact on them. All of this is made possible by the [SRHR Umbrella] programme. And this will be sustained as they support one another, irrespective of funding, especially through the different youth corners where they have their spaces to discuss most of these issues by themselves.”

Aksam addresses young people at a health facility



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

Frontline AIDS would like to thank the current SRHR Umbrella implementing partners: **Alive Medical Services (AMS), Child Rights Empowerment and Development Organization (CEDO), The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) and Youth Alive Uganda (YAU).**

We would also like to thank the **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency** for their support.



Find out more:

frontlineaids.org/our-work-includes/srhr-umbrella-grant/

Quotes have been edited for clarity and length.