

USAID YouthPower2 Symposium (November 9-10, 2021)

SESSION NOTES

Youth-Led Responses to COVID-19

Tuesday, November 9, 2021 – DAY ONE
11:00 – 11:50 AM
Plenary Session (10-minute Presentation)

Session Participants

Hilda Namakula, Youth Research Advisor, Restless Development

Session Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us, especially the lives of our world's young people who have been disproportionately affected by disrupted schooling, vulnerability issues (health, gender-based violence), and access (connectivity, social supports). Youth have also demonstrated their creativity, strength, and leadership throughout the crisis as community activists, volunteers, and entrepreneurs across various sectors. They have adapted to the challenges in ways large and small. This session takes a deep dive into the impact of the pandemic on three key sectors: food systems, health, and education. Each breakout session is co-facilitated by youth who will share firsthand perspectives on the impact of the pandemic and how they have responded in their communities.

Proposed Learning

Attendees will hear personal reflections and researched-based insights on the specific impacts of COVID-19. Additionally, they will receive insights into the role of youth as leaders and innovators in their communities in response to the pandemic (as community activists, organizers, and social impact entrepreneurs). Lastly, take away recommendations from youth on where USAID and NGOs should be focused and investing to better support youth in response to the pandemic.

Session Notes

Main Topic Focus: The pandemic poses various challenges for youth, but it can also be an opportunity to further bring youth in as collaborators and innovators. The lived experience for refugees and individuals in low-income areas in Uganda during COVID-19. A summary of challenges and recommendations from youth impacted.

Youth in Uganda not only adapted but also found economically fulfilling ways as they navigated COVID-19. Hilda Namakula, a research team member at the Centre for Health and Social Economic Improvement (CHASE-i), at Makerere University, Uganda, shared the learning outcomes from the CHASE-I research project, *Adherence, Lived Experiences and Resilient Transformation among “slum-dwellers” (ALERTs) in COVID-19: A study of Ki-Mombasa and Kabalagala-Kataba slums in Kampala*.

About ALERTs

ALERTs is a mixed-methods cross-sectoral study that uses qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study aims to generate evidence on the COVID 19 pandemic among communities living in Ugandan slums. The research seeks to develop evidence – from a socio-behavioral perspective – of how Ugandan COVID-19 guidelines operate, are being perceived, experienced in practice, and potential barriers to their adherence and compliance among urban slum communities in Kampala. The study generates evidence on the experiences of Uganda’s urban poor during COVID-19, their perception of [COVID-19] risk, adherence to policy guidelines, and local innovations for survival. Study findings will inform responsive policy and guidelines to improve their health and wellbeing. Evidence from the study will inform the design of tailored and robust community-led interventions for health and wellbeing. The study team will support community members and other key stakeholders to implement these interventions sustainably. *See the resources list below to learn more.*

The ALERT study has generated a range of resources and policy briefs, including an infographic called “*The A to Z of COVID in Uganda*,” which summarizes some of the critical impacts of COVID-19 as well recommendations related to behavior change, information sharing, health, policy and community investments are needed. Hilda spoke about the research findings with a particular focus on what they can tell us about engaging and supporting young people in responding to the pandemic and its associated impacts and challenges.

Highlighting Letters B, T, W, and Y

There are specific examples of two young people who were negatively impacted by the pandemic (e.g., an increase in teenage pregnancy and engagement in transactional sex) alongside some recommendations for better engaging young people in behavior change through more effective messaging. The research revealed that young people in Uganda, despite being disproportionately impacted before the pandemic, were largely invisible in early responses to COVID-19. The ALERT study also identified a high level of willingness and ability among young people to be a part of combating COVID-19.

A to Z of COVID-19

B: Behavioral change messages directed to different age groups, distribution of targeted information rather than flooding listeners with various messages. Behavioral change - plenty of information but no clear Subject Matter Expert. Target behavior change messages to specific groups and have the messenger reflect the group.

T: Teenage pregnancy levels are rising due to increased rates of transactional sex (compounded by financial challenges brought on during the pandemic). Teenage pregnancies increased due to economic stress and families resorting to transactional sex as a means to earn income for their homes.

W: Willingness of young people to work for change, older generations, and those with more resources need to leverage this willingness and passion!

Y: Youth, despite being a high-risk group, was largely ignored in covid-19 messaging/aid/resources

Community and Local leaders were willing to support youth. Messaging around COVID-19 didn’t include the impact of losses to youth despite the disease not affecting them directly

Takeaways for USAID:

See “T” and “Y” to understand the specific ways youth can be disproportionately impacted but excluded from early responses. See “B” and “W” from the key points and findings section. Include local leadership and youth in shaping and responding to challenges posed by the pandemic – their willingness and creativity are an asset and a resource.

Takeaways for Donors, Partners, and Implementers:

See “T” and “Y” to understand the specific ways youth can be disproportionately impacted but excluded from early responses. See “B” and “W” from the key points and findings section. Engage and include youth in planning and execution as their voices/ideas can spotlight existing blindspots in plans, even the best-laid ones.

Takeaways for Youth:

Adaptability to challenges can bear fruit.

Resources

About Chase-I and ALERT: [ALERTs-Brochure-.pdf \(chasei.org\)](#)

A-Z Chart: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XfL2CbUKMeNg6dGZi_V7vXx8jvK8E6x4/view?usp=sharing