**M5-T7-CS1**

**Case Study: Strengthening HIV Prevention and Mitigation Efforts, Zimbabwe**

**About the project**

**The Matabeleland South Province suffers one of the highest poverty levels in Zimbabwe and is one of the areas hardest hit by HIV, with an average HIV prevalence rate of around 21%** compared to a national average of 15%. Building on our experience of implementing HIV prevention programmes targeting young people for over 10 years, we designed a unique intervention that addresses the special interests and situation of young women in this area and brings together key stakeholders to build fundamental coordination mechanisms to address the key issues affecting girls and young women which contribute to high HIV prevalence. The main stakeholders involved ar:

* Children, Young women and girls, Sexual abuse survivors in 3 age groups, (10-17), (18-24) and (25-30) years
* Health personnel
* Social services department
* Women’s affairs department

**How it works**

Annual review feedback on young people’s needs revealed that cases of abuse were more rampant in the two districts. The design of our intervention is based on the support needs identified through observation as well as feedback gathered from youth and relevant stakeholders including victim friendly centres run by the police, health centres workers and CBOs present within the target communities. Through our **Volunteer Peer Educator** **(VPE)** model young Zimbabweans are fully trained and supported by our programme staff to directly deliver our programme’s activities, building core skills, knowledge and project management experience, enabling them to become leaders of the development in their own communities throughout and beyond the life of our programme. The program:

* Provides **SRHR sessions** to young women and men to provide them with skills and knowledge to make safer choices and reduce risk of contracting HIV.
* Strengthens the capacity of victim-friendly centres through staff training to ensure adequate support for victims of gender based violence.
* Training CBOs and nurses to respond to needs of victims of gender-based violence
* Conducted multi-stakeholder seminars with young people and public authorities the private sector and communities on the key issues affecting young women and girls. Participants will be trained to use community scorecards to identify challenges and solutions to address issues as well as develop action plans through participatory techniques to inform the way forward.
* Community sensitisation meetings to raise awareness of the issues facing young women and girls among the local communities, and explore community-based solutions.

**How young people are engaged**

Ex Volunteer Peer Educators from the Restless Development’s alumni network were engaged as research assistants and conducted interviews and focus group discussions with their fellow youth. They also were part of the data entry and preliminary analysis of baseline data with support from the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator. The young people are also engaged as part of the anti-gender based violence committees in their respective communities, in dialogue meetings and awareness campaigns

In the design phase, young people also participated in the scorecard training and exercise where stakeholders gatheredviews and prioritiesregarding the key issues affecting young women and girls in their communities.

**The Impact**

Through the SRH sessions and awareness campaigns, young women and girls have gained a deeper understanding of the correlation between gender inequalities and the inability to negotiate for safer sexual practices, which leads to a higher risk of HIV transmission and SGBV. They have also increased their knowledge on the importance of addressing all the factors perpetuating abuse holistically, in order to generate an effective response to the issue. The awareness raising activities are leading to the trickling in of cases that would have gone unreported for quite some time. “Many sexual abuse cases are now being reported and action is being taken to bring perpetrators to book” ZRP Victim friendly Unit. 45 young women and girls from the communities have so far been referred to the Social Services Department and the Victim Friendly Unit. These have been assisted to access medical, (HTS, STI screening, Pregnancy test, Counselling) and legal services and others for further case management.

**Lessons Learned**

This model enables us to work at grassroots level through the young people we support grounding our activities to the local priorities, languages and concepts allowing the communities we work with to truly own the programme. Peer education is one of the most effective approaches to provide youth friendly SRH information and achieve behavioural change towards safer sexual reproductive practises. Young people feel safer and are more inclined to discuss issues such as sexual reproductive health with their peers without feeling judged or constrained by social and cultural norms. This provides an enabling environment for youth to actively participate and contribute in the discussion, share their concerns and learn how to preserve and improve their health and wellbeing. This highly-accredited model is proven, cost-effective and has a sustainable impact and has received awards from the World Bank, UNAIDS, UNICEF, Stars Foundation and Bond.

Targeting different age groups provided room to meet the different needs of young people. For instance volunteers knew that there are some topics they can discuss with the 25 -30 age group but which may not be suitable for the 10-17 youth. Involvement of young people in the score card exercise raised awareness of young people’s views and recommendations on dealing with abuse issues in the referral pathway. This also enables young people to hold the service providers to account on the implementation of recommendations from the score card exercise. Non formal education techniques, (song, drama, poems and role plays) employed by young people raised awareness on the different forms of abuse and its effects on the girl child among community members . Involvement of young people in community development issues has made stakeholders realize that young people can contribute to development if they are given the chance