

P2.1. Sustaining Positive Behavioral Change among Young People through Community Structures
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Background/Significance: The traditional approach of engaging only youths in addressing health and reproductive issues including HIV/AIDS among young people and making them sustain positive behavior has not made the desired impact as records of new infections among youth population and statistics on crime and illegal substance use keep increasing. Empirical researches show also that infiltration of foreign culture through media is rapidly eroding our values and good practices.

Methodology: Entry was initiated into the communities through a series of advocacy visits to stakeholders at the respective sites to inform them about the project, and solicit their support. Initial Competence assessments of the communities were carried out using a structured questionnaire. Orientation sessions were given to school and community leaders on abstinence and impact of parenting in sustaining positive behavior among youths.

In consultation with the ministry of Education and Community/Religious leaders, key leaders were selected and trained as Master Trainers (MT) on the use of abstinence-based curriculum and culturally appropriate manual for parenting developed under the program. The first aspect is that the Master Trainers stepped down the training on abstinence to selected students and youths as peer educators (PE). These PEs were constituted into autonomous health clubs named Community Action Teams (CAT) that would develop local strategies to reinforce behavior change among the youth and they meet at least once a month under the guidance of trained teachers or community leaders as the case may be. The second aspect involves the stepping down of training on parenting to selected parents who in turn reach out to other parents on positive parenting to enhance communication with their children. These trained teachers, through Parent-Teachers Association meetings utilize the opportunities to address parents on skills they need to positively and effectively influence their children. The project strategically focuses on encouragement of a responsible and bold leadership at the family and community levels and is a paradigm shift from the traditional approach of focusing on youths without addressing the secondary audiences whose behaviors make youth susceptible to sexual exploitation and negative influences which include crime and illegal substance use. Active collaboration was made with community structures for recognition and mobilization of local resources to support these CATs.

Findings: To date, over a thousand adult community members including parents and teachers have been trained. This has bridged the communication gap between adults and young people as it relates to health, reproductive issues and HIV/AIDS. FBO Parents establishing Community-Based youth-friendly resource center as a means of encouraging youths to properly utilize their idle time. Schools are mandating sexuality and reproductive health sessions to be taken at the early morning assembly ground at least once a week. Communities are supporting CAT activities in form of free space provision for events and financial supports. Key community leaders' presence at events organized by the CATs is also happening. These outcomes have enhanced the creativity of youths and marketing of Abstinence messages to their peers.

Some challenges encountered were the sustenance of PEs motivation, relocation of some trained PEs to other sites that are not part of targeted areas. Another was politicizing of CAT activities by local politicians through financial enticement. These challenges were surpassed by sensitizing the communities on the role and aim of the CATs and also by working with leaders, parents and other key members within the communities in the selection of would-be PEs.

Lessons Learned: For a safer and peaceful society, there is a need for building young people's self esteem hence; enhancing parent-child communication should not be overlooked. Involvement of families and the communities is instrumental in sustaining behavior change among youth.