

P4.12. Engaging Adolescents in Pastoral Communities; Straight Talk Foundation-UNICEF Radio Shows among the Karamojong in Eastern Uganda - P. Walugembe, Straight Talk Foundation; E. Namubiru, Straight Talk Foundation
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Background/Significance: The Karamoja sub region, in northwestern Uganda, now with a population that is approaching a million, faces complex problems that mainly relate to the Karamojong lifestyle, which is profoundly traditional. Cattle are not only a major source of livelihood but are a life style as it is associated with prestige and social status and is a major driver of the activities that the Karamojong engage in. The life style is predominantly nomadic characterized by violence arising out of armed raids for cattle within and neighboring communities. Consequently groups of youthful warriors armed with AK47 guns have arisen. The insecurity has perpetuated extreme poverty, famine, malnutrition and little or no knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health issues. A long history of negative attitudes towards formal education, which is perceived as contamination of cultural values compounds the situation. With unfavorable cultural practices that include forced sex at courtship, wife inheritance, forced marriages, rape and abuse of women and girls during raids, the conditions necessary for increased incidence of HIV/AIDS among youth are existent in the region. Straight Talk Foundation (STF) in partnership with UNICEF is implementing a participatory radio program in the region to address social problems in the region.

Intervention/Activity Tested: Addressing sexual and reproductive health of adolescents in a pastoral-rural community through a participatory radio show.

Methodology: STF is an adolescent health communications Non Governmental Organization operating nationally in Uganda and primarily focuses on equipping adolescents (10-24 years) through dialogue with the capacity to think critically about their lives. Its overall objective is to improve access to adequate and appropriate information on adolescence, sexuality and reproductive health through a multi media approach. STF has a history of working with remote isolated rural populations. In partnership with UNICEF, STF started participatory radio shows in the Karamoja region to engage youth in identifying and understanding the social problems affecting them and participate in deriving solutions. The radio program highlights issues related to education, HIV/AIDS, insecurity and development among the youth in the area. A Karamojong youth was recruited to moderate the radio shows. It is a 30 minutes weekly radio show through which, factors ranging from school drop out, poverty, early marriages, negative attitudes towards education, sexuality and HIV/AIDS have been addressed. The show initiates general community dialogue about the matters that affect the community. All the activities are implemented with technical support from STF and UNICEF staff.

Lessons Learned:

- In a very insecure environment, the shows have proved worthwhile in reaching the remotest youths and elders in the region.
- Involving young people in programs that address issues that affect them inspires sustainable community dialogues about social problems.
- Youth led interventions in sexuality education are highly effective in reaching out to the other youths.
- Involvement of the youth leads to results in a multiplier effect of the knowledge and skills acquired.
- These dialogues facilitate positive peer influence amongst the adolescents.

Challenges

- Insecurity, which affects mobility of the technical staff and reach of the programs.
- Poor or no infrastructures like roads, communication facilities, health service points and schools renders the information acquired "redundant".
- Referral places for ASRH services are often limited or non-existent in the community.
- The deep-rooted traditional cultural practices take a long time to break.

Recommendations

- Program should be spread out to benefit a larger population through using additional radio stations and boosting existing ones to increase their coverage.
- Organizing groups at the grass root level would ensure a sustainability of the benefits of these programs
- Separate programs to address special groups like girls and parents should be initiated.