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Speak OUT PROJECT



STORIES OF CHANGE



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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Speak Out Project is a four-year project which started in 2018 and is expected to close in 2022. It focuses on Addressing Sexual Reproductive Health Rights and Gender Based Violence in Rwanda.

The project is funded by UK aid Direct through DFID and is implemented by Action Aid Rwanda in partnership with Faith Victory Association and Association des Guides du Rwanda. The project is being implemented in four districts in nine sectors including: Karongi (Murundi and Gitesi sectors), Nyanza (Mukingo, Busasamana and Rwabicuma sectors) Gisagara (Muganza, Kibirizi and Gishubi sectors) and Nyaruguru (Ruheru sector).

PROJECT AIM

Speak Out! aims at empowering girls with knowledge, support and the ability to demand their rights, take control over their bodies, and hold decisionmakers to account using a holistic, youth-led approach, working at individual and community level.

TARGET BENEFICIARIES

Direct beneficiaries: 6,560 including 5600 School girls including 4% girls with disabilities between 9-18 years, 480 Survivors of violence, 280 mentors and 200 women from Women Rights Organisations :200

Indirect beneficiaries: 48,600 including 2600 schoolboys between 9-18 years and 46,000 community members.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The project's Theory of Change asserts that VAWG and the acceptability of violence will reduce in the project districts if we provide girls with a voice, choice and control through improved knowledge, skills, confidence and leadership opportunities, and support to mobilize themselves to demand for an environment where they can live free from violence. An enabling environment will be created through challenging boys and men to shift social attitudes and practices alongside influencing duty bearers at all levels to achieve change in policy and practice and provide VAWG prevention and response services. Improved data collection, coordination and training of WROs will advance advocacy, SRHR and VAWG programming throughout Rwanda. This will lead to girls, communities and WROs having increased willingness, confidence and ability to report and respond to cases of violence in in Karongi, Nyanza, Gisagara and Nyaruguru districts in Rwanda.

Speak Out has school based and community engagement activities. Among the school-based activities there are safe spaces where girls meet weekly during weekends and sessions are delivered by mentors. Mentors are young girls between 18-25 years who completed senior six. They were trained on curriculums used in the project and methodologies to use in delivering the sessions. School clubs also meet weekly and sessions are delivered by teachers and are referred to as club facilitators. Community engagement activities include quarterly community awareness raising on GBV and SRHR through parents evening forums and community gatherings and Violence Against Women and Girls quarterly coordination meetings, psychosocial support of teen mothers, linking SGBV survivors with Isange One Stop Centres, police and RIB and trainings of Male Change Agents.

SAFE SPACES IMPROVING TEEN GIRLS' KNOWLEDGE ON GBV PREVENTION AND SRHR



ANGELIQUE

Angelique is one of the schoolgirls supported through safe spaces. ActionAid through Speak Out Project funded by UKaid is supporting girls in safe spaces and school clubs on different issues like preventing Gender Based Violence and addressing Sexual, Reproductive Health and Rights. A safe space is a secure environment where girls share their issues and get advice from mentors.

Angelique lives in, Nyanza District. She is thirteen years old and she is in primary six. She lives with her mother who is a farmer and her elder sister who is a teen mother. Her dad deserted the home, but he visits them once in a while. Angelique is the second born in her family. Before joining safe spaces of Speak Out Project, Angelique did not know that rape exists. She used to hear people talking about it, but they could not call it rape, instead they used to say that someone was violated.

"In the safe space we call issues their real names. That is when I understood what rape is, through explanations by the mentor."

Through Speak Out, Angelique learned four forms of Gender Based Violence including economical, sexual, emotional and physical violence. She also learnt about where to report GBV cases. I was taught that even teachers can support in reporting GBV cases. Other reporting channels include the National police, Rwanda Investigation Bureau, mentors, Isange One Stop center, national women council and other local leaders" Angelique added.

Angelique revealed that her school club facilitator is her friend and her role model. She confessed that she tells the club facilitator about her secrets, then the facilitator advises her on different issues. The club facilitator is a teacher who voluntarily delivers sessions on GBV and SRHR in school clubs. School clubs are made of girls and boys. I then realized that changing names of things makes them lose their gravity. The club facilitator also explained to us what we can do when raped. I now understand the referral pathways because of Speak Out Project Training sessions," Angelique said.

"My mother told me about menstruation periods. She told me that when I see blood from my genital, I would know that those are menstruation periods. She also advised me that when I get menstrual periods at school I should reach out to my teacher for help. However, I have not yet had my menstruation periods, but I am very confident that when I get them, I will not be ashamed of picking sanitary pads from the girls' room," Angelique added.

Angelique further said that in the safe spaces, girls share discussions on the signs of menstruation periods which include; stomachache, headache, which makes them be well prepared for it. In the safe space, they get a lot of trainings which are boosting their confidence, and this is going to reduce school dropouts.

"My advice is that there should be capacity building for men and boys on GBV and SRHR since they are largely the perpetrators of GBV. Men and boys should be encouraged to be active actors in GBV prevention and response," Angelique suggested.

"Awareness raising for parents through trainings and strong punishments for GBV perpetrators can minimize the rate of GBV cases in homes," Angelique concluded.

HOW SPEAK OUT PROJECT TRAININGS IMPROVED BRIGITTE'S SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM



Brigitte is student and she is fifteen years old. She lives in Nyanza District with her mother and her niece. Her father divorced her mother when Brigitte was young. She is her father's fourth born and her mother's third born. Her mother provides her school materials. When Brigitte is at home, she helps her mother with household chores.

In Brigitte's community, girls in both school and out of school fear to share discussion regarding menstruation periods although they do have to undergo the experience as a stage in development. It is also considered as a taboo for most parents to hold discussions regarding sexual reproductive health with their children. Even though Brigitte's mum tried her best to train her on using sanitary pads, she was still too shy to get involved in such discussions with other girls.

"My mother always advised me to keep away from boys when I started menstruating and she told me that when I have sex at this stage, I can easily get pregnant," Brigitte revealed.

"We learnt different forms of violence which I did not know about before. The way we share discussions in school clubs is quite amazing. We are all given a chance to share our views and speak in our national language," Brigitte further said. "My mentor advises me a lot and keeps what I share with her as a secret. She is a nice person and helps me a lot. From the sessions on violence, we were taught to say a strong No and report all

incidences of violence that may happen to us or to other people. We were taught that even touching on our body parts is violence, so no body just touches me anyhow. I have learnt to avoid situations that can lead me to sexual violence," Brigitte said.

Brigitte affirms that in the safe space, they were also trained on making friends by making cycles of friendship and now she has got a friend whom she trusts, and her name is Seraphina. Seraphina is Brigitte's classmate in P6. Through Speak Out Project funded by UK Aid, ActionAid Rwanda established safe spaces where girls meet with peer mentors and share freely their experiences and trainings on violence and building self-confidence. Brigitte is among the girls who are trained in the safe space and discussions shared are so many, but she appreciates improving in self-confidence and self-esteem in sharing her mind in her safe space.

"I feel comfortable telling my mentor or facilitator that I am in menstruation periods. Changing pads has become so easily because I go to the girls' room and get the sanitary pad to change when I am still at school," Brigitte added.

ActionAid Rwanda constructed a girls' room at Brigitte's school and through Speak Out project, this room was equipped with sanitary pads, soap and water. There is also a bed and when a girl feels pain during menstruation, she goes there to rest. The safe space initiative has a set of life skills on leadership, building confidence and financial literacy and this has brought about lots of transformation of schoolgirls.

Brigitte shared a story about a man who burned his son's fingers when he had stolen food. People in the household sought help from police and the father was imprisoned although he was released after asking for forgiveness. She therefore requests parents not to give severe punishments when a child has made a mistake or when children are indisciplined.

12-YEAR-OLD DENISE EXPLAINS BENEFITS OF SPEAK OUT PROJECT



Denise is a 12-year-old who is a second born of her family. She has three siblings and is a student in primary six and her father is a teacher whereas her mother is a nurse.

Although both Denise's parents are professional workers, none of them had ever talked to her about reproductive health and menstruation periods.

She said that she learnt about menstruation periods in safe space and school clubs established by Speak Out project in her school. Safe Space is a room where girls aged nine to eighteen meet, talking about their bodily changes and how to conduct themselves in the society and to their parents and about violence.

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"School club facilitator trained us the menstruation cycle using beads," Denise said, adding that:

"Mentors also taught us that menstruation is a normal bodily change that girls should be happy about it but must be very clean."

From the safe space, students are taught other life skills which include planting a kitchen garden where they grow vegetables to improve nutrition in their families. In addition to growing vegetables, Denise mentioned that they were coached on how to be self-reliant by saving and being able to buy some things for themselves.

From her savings, she is planning to buy rabbits which will not only provide manure to her parents' plantations but also sell them and get some money. Denise also explained that she was happy to learn about the different forms of violence and the reporting channels.

"I will never keep silent if I see people violating women and girls' rights," She said.

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Currently, the Project benefits 5,600 school girls aged between 9-18 years old. Of these, 97 girls that are equivalent to 4 percent of the tally are girls living with disabilities.

The four-year Project also targets to help 480 survivors of violence. Additionally, there are 2,600 boys and 46,000 community members who indirectly benefit from the Project.

SAFE SPACES IMPROVING SCHOOLGIRLS' UNDERSTANDING ON THE GIRLS' ROOM



DEVOTHA

Devotha is 17 years old and is studying in senior three. She affirms that although she is in secondary school, she has never heard her mother talking about issues of reproductive health.

According to Devotha, her mother does not even have time for discussions with her children. "The little information I had on sexual reproductive health, I got it from my peers at school. When in our school club we learnt about changes that happen to teenagers during their teenage, I understood them better than what I had learnt from class. The sessions in school clubs are mainly discussions held in Kinyarwanda, so participation is very easy

and we understand sessions delivered in school clubs better than in normal classes," Devotha said.

"I used to feel shy about going to the girls' room to get a sanitary pad, because I thought that nobody should know that I was having menstruation periods," she added. I did not know that children can also report GBV cases. I got this knowledge from the school clubs where we learnt about reporting channels and who should report. I learnt that everyone could report GBV cases but with evidence. I learnt that among the GBV reporting channels include Isange One Stop Center, RIB, Rwanda Police and local authorities, but teachers, mentors and parents can support in reporting," Devotha said.

"Through Safe Spaces, we were taught how girls can start a business by rearing chickens and rabbits. These small livestock can help girls get some money and start saving so that they are not too dependent to other people," Devotha added.

Devotha, recommends that, there should be campaigns to raise parents' awareness on violence against women and girls as well as sexual, reproductive health and rights.

HOW SAFE SPACES ARE EQUIPPING GIRLS WITH REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION



ELIZABETH

Elizabeth is 15 year-old teenager who is in senior three. She lives with both parents who are farmers and is the second born in her family.

Elizabeth says that girls in primary and secondary schools in rural areas tend to miss classes during their menstruation periods which affect their performances in class due to absenteeism. This, according to her, is because menstruation periods is not a topic that parents in rural areas discuss with their daughters and therefore girls get most of the information from peers at school.

Elizabeth added that peers have lots of myths about menstruation, like the one stating that having sex prevents cramps during ovulation and avoids skin rushes among others. She noted that if I had not been Speak Out Project's safe spaces, her and many other girls would not have learnt about menstruation periods and right practices to adhere to while in periods.

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She said: "In safe spaces established by Speak Out Project, we discuss about menstruation periods and the hygiene associated with this period and how to use sanitary pads."

Safe Space is a room where girls aged nine to eighteen meet, talking about their bodily changes and how to conduct themselves in the society and to their parents and about violence.

"We also learnt about how childbearing and child upbringing. We learnt that children are very expensive, and we should make plans of having babies when we are grown up and can manage raising them," she added.

Elizabeth also among others noted that she used to fear reporting GBV (gender-based violence) cases but with the knowledge she gained from both safe spaces and school clubs, she once reported a man who had raped a girl of 11years to local authorities.

According to her, the man was imprisoned and the girl was taken to hospital, and she is happy that she applied the skills I gained to support others. Under Speak Out Project, students have been empowered with knowledge on GBV and the reporting channels. They were also given booklets with a summary of GBV law and toll-free numbers

which are used in reporting GBV cases.

These booklets not only used by children but also parents read them. As a way of guiding students for self-reliance, the Project initiated the students' group savings. This aims at promoting a culture of saving and also investing in buying domestic animals which they can sell when they need money.

Saving and being able to buy something for themselves prevent girls from being persuaded into premature sexual relations which most girls say it is due to poverty.

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HOW SPEAK OUT PROJECT IS ENCOURAGING REPORTING GBV CASES



EMMANUEL MURWANASHYAKA

Emmanuel Murwanashyaka was born in 1983 and is a Science and Sports teacher. He is also a club facilitator in Speak Out project at Karuganda Primary school.

He said that violence against women and girls existed in the communities but very few perpetrators were punished because they were not reported.

He added that: “Fearing to report GBV (gender-based violence) cases has roots in the cultural norms of not exposing ones’ problems. If a girl was raped, she would not report the perpetrator because of fear of not getting married in future. For the parents, they would keep silent so as to not shame the family.”

Murwanashyaka mentioned that through Speak Out Project, he got a platform through which he teaches girls and boys about violence and where they can report GBV cases. Speak Out is a UK aid Direct project implemented by Action Aid Rwanda in partnership with the Association des Guides du Rwanda and Faith Victory Association.

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Murwanashyaka mentioned that he taught children that they should not only report violence done to them but also speak out on violence done to others such as neighbors.

As a result, he noted that: *“Boys nowadays tell me that they learnt that it’s their responsibility to prevent GBV done to girls. They have also made up their minds and never laugh at girls when they stain their uniforms during periods.”*

The facilitator also reiterated that they are lucky to have a safe house near their health center because community members who are violated go there and they are referred to relevant authorities for legal and health support.

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SPEAK OUT PROJECT EQUIPS 17 YEAR-OLD ERIC TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST VIOLENCE



Eric who is a 17 year-old primary student is the second born of his father and his mother's first born. His father went away from the home and left him with his mother.

The adolescent had dropped out of school as a result of violence at his home and the fact that none of his parents was taking care of him. Eric says that he was not aware of what violence was, not until he joined Speak Out project.

He said: "I used to hear about violence on radio but couldn't even recognize the violence in my community because I thought it was normal for a husband to punish his wife. I grew up seeing my parents breaking up and reuniting several times but did not know it was because of violence."

He added that: "After learning about violence from Speak Out project, I started witnessing the violence in my community and one day I saw a man burning his son's fingers and toes because he had taken food out of the pot. I felt so bad and I reported him to the local authorities. He was punished and ordered to take the boy for treatment."

If I find a man beating a wife, I would report him to local authorities or call the police. We were given booklets which contain toll free numbers which we call to report gender-based violence cases, Eric reiterated.

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Under the project there are also community engagement activities like advocacy and campaigning aiming at addressing existing patriarchal attitudes and behaviors.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AWARENESS

Eric said he had no enough information on violence; its forms, who does it, the victim, and the consequences among others because no one ever talked to him about it.

"I used to ignorantly yell at girls when they could stain their school uniforms during menstruation period," he said.

However, he reiterated that he is now aware of relevant information on reproductive health, thanks to Speak Out project.

"The project helped me to learn a lot including the bodily changes during adolescence for both girls and boys. I have learnt that menstruation is a normal bodily change and girls have to undergo it and I therefore stopped laughing at them," he said.

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SPEAK OUT PROJECT BREAKING COMMUNITIES' SILENCE ON VIOLENCE



NZAMUKOSHA ESPERANCE

Nzamukosha Esperance is a facilitator in club Speak Out and a teacher at GS Nyagahuru II. She teaches Math in primary five and six and she is a mother of two children.

Nzamukosha is also a businesswoman. She explained that people in her community do not know much about violence due to patriarchy system, whereby for instance a man misuses household property and a wife just keeps quite because she thinks it is the man's right.

Other men, she added, sell household property and when women talk about it, they are beaten. However, according to Nzamukosha, through community awareness meetings conducted by Faith Victory Association in Speak Out Project, there are some changes.

"People have been trained on violence and referral pathways through community awareness meetings," she said.

Esperance added that at school, sessions on violence have been delivered in school clubs and toll-free numbers were given to students to facilitate them in reporting Gender Based Violence (GBV) in their communities and that she hopes that GBV will reduce if people report perpetrators. Speak Out is a UK aid Direct project implemented by Action Aid Rwanda in partnership with the Association des Guides du Rwanda and Faith Victory Association.

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14-YEAR-OLD ESPERANCE ON HOW SPEAK OUT ALLAYED HER MISCONCEPTIONS ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



ESPERANCE

Esperance is a 14-year-old resident of Nyaruguru district, Southern Province and is student in senior one. She lives with both parents. Her father is a public official and her mother is a community health worker. When at home, she feeds her chickens and grows cabbages.

Esperance explained that in her community, parents do not discuss sexual reproductive issues with their children and so children do not have enough information about bodily change during adolescence. She also mentioned that the little information which sometimes is not true children get it from their peers.

“When we were taught about bodily changes during adolescent in the school club initiated by Speak Out Project, I realized that what the information I had was wrong. For example, I was told by my friends that having big bums and preventing rushes in the face is a result of having sex. I later realized that this was far from the truth,” she explained.

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Esperance noted that at school they have a girls’ room known as safe space which is very well equipped with pads, soap, water, towel and a bed where any girl with pain during menstruation periods can go and rest. However, Esperance mentioned that she feared going there because she did not want anyone to notice she was having menstruation periods.

To her, menstruation was a secret and nobody else had to know. Good enough, she said, during sessions in the safe spaces when we were learning about menstruation, our mentor emphasized that it’s a normal bodily change and girls should not feel shy about it.

“We also learnt how to make homemade sanitary pads which we can use to keep clean during this time of the month,” she added.

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SAFE HOUSES - KEY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST GBV



NYIRAMBONIMA Marguerite is a counselor at the safe house in Gishubi sector, Gisagara district. A safe house are houses established near health centers or near sector premises where GBV survivors are received, take rest and share their cases with the counsellor who records the violence cases and refer the survivors of violence to relevant authorities for legal aid and health care. Counsellors are females who are either community health workers or National Women Council representatives. They are trained on GBV survivors' approaches and case management.

Marguerite says that before Speak Out project established safe houses, GBV survivors had nowhere to go for rescue. People reporting physical violence and rape used to report to local authorities but in most cases they were not helped. Some women would separate from their husbands but could come back when nothing was done to resolve their problems.

Through the safe house established by Speak Out Project with funding from the UK Aid, there is a significant improvement on reporting GBV cases. Women come to the safe house to report their violence cases and/ or violence committed against their children.

“When a child is raped, parents bring her to the safe house, and I take her to Isange One Stop Center for both health care and legal support. Survivors of violence are supported depending on their cases. Some are referred to local authorities, others we refer them to Isange One Stop center and Rwanda

Investigation Bureau,” said Marguerite.

“Apart from providing psychosocial support and referring survivors of violence to relevant service providers, I also provide psychosocial support to teen mothers. I formed self-help groups for the teen mothers where they meet and share their experiences and advise each other. They meet twice a month and save some little money to support themselves. When they meet, I also invite guest speakers to train them on GBV and reporting channels,” Marguerite added.

Most conflicts in families are due to the patriarchal system where a man marries the number of women he wants although the Rwandan family laws recognizes one woman. Women could not report such violence done to them and decided to keep silent. Although there are decentralized structures established by the government to resolve GBV issues, many of them have limited capacity to handle cases of Gender based Violence.

Community health workers usually support in taking survivors to the hospital for treatment and family friends for temporary stay while the case is being handled by relevant institutions, then the National Women Council representatives are in charge of managing the cases and report them to the Rwanda Investigation Bureau who does the investigations on the cases and Isange One Stop Centre for psychosocial support, but these National Women Council representatives do not have enough equipment to support this work.

She further said “I am so happy that I am seeing significant changes in the lives of teen mothers. Before being enrolled in the Speak Out project they were stigmatized and had no one to listen to them, but now they talked to me anytime they encounter a challenge. Their parents mistreat them, but I am advocating for them at the Sector Office to organize a meeting of teen mothers' parents on parenthood, so that we change their parents' mindset”.

SPEAK OUT PROJECT TAUGHT ME VARIOUS FORMS OF VIOLENCE, SAYS 16 YEAR-OLD OLIVIER



OLIVIER

Olivier who is 16 years old and studies in senior two in Gisagara district and has four siblings and lives with his mother. His father is currently in prison. Nonetheless, his mother is a farmer and buys scholastic materials for him. Oliver explained that after joining Speak Out project, he became aware of different kinds of violence that he had no clue on before.

He said: *“I used to think that parents have the right of beating their children and no one could stop them. But in school clubs of Speak Out project, I learnt that beating is physical violence regardless of who is doing it.”*

He added that: *“I did not know other forms of violence, but I learnt about them in school club. Among things I learnt include that bullying is a form of violence and I thereafter stopped it.”*

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Under the project there are also community engagement activities like advocacy and campaigning aiming at addressing existing

patriarchal attitudes and behaviors. According to Olivier, Speak Out project also helped him to meet someone else whom he can trust in addition to his mother and share with him life issues.

“The only person I used to trust was my mother but now I have another one who is my club facilitator. He is so good to me and I easily approach him when I have a problem. He teaches me things and I also teach others what I learn from school clubs,” he added.

In bid to address sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and violence against women and girls (VAWG), under the project, in school clubs, boys are mixed with girls to learn sexual reproductive health rights and GBV and sessions are facilitated by their teachers who voluntarily act as club facilitators. Also, boys are mixed with girls to promote gender equality and also to engage them as partners in combating GBV. In this regard, students meet once a week and there are several activities conducted in school clubs that aim at enabling children to understand GBV and SRHR such as debates and sports among others.

Speak out is a four- year project implemented in four districts including; Nyanza district (Busasamana, Rwabicuma and Mukingo sectors), Gisagara district (Gishubi, Kibilizi and Muganza sectors), Nyaruguru district (Ruheru sector) and Karongi district (Gitesi and Murundi sectors). School based activities are implemented in 45 schools in Gisagara district (11 schools), Nyanza district (13 schools), Nyaruguru district (6) and Karongi district (15 schools).

Currently, the Project benefits 5,600 school girls aged between 9-18 years old. Of these, 97 girls that are equivalent to 4 percent of the tally are girls living with disabilities. The four-year Project also targets to help 480 survivors of violence. Additionally, there are 2,600 boys and 46,000 community members who indirectly benefit from the Project.

11-YEAR-OLD PACIFIC COMMENDS SPEAK OUT'S LESSONS ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



Pacific, 11, applauds Speak Out project for enlightening him about reproductive health information. Speak Out is a UK aid Direct project implemented by Action Aid Rwanda in partnership with the Association des Guides du Rwanda and Faith Victory Association.

The Project aims at empowering girls with knowledge, support and the ability to take control over their bodies, and make their own decisions using a holistic, youth-led approach, working at individual and community level.

Pacific currently studies in primary five and lives with parents. His father is a teacher. He narrated that he did not know the changes boys undergo during adolescence. However, he later became aware that girls have periods during that stage, thanks to Speak Out project.

He explained that he was too shy to talk about genital parts in the local language Kinyarwanda because it is considered as a taboo to talk about such parts that even parents fear to talk about with their children.

“I was surprised when I heard the facilitator teach us in Kinyarwanda and mentioning the private parts. At first, I thought it was abnormal but later he explained that we have be bold and talk about them because it is our body and we have the right to know these parts,” he said.

He added: “I also did not know when exactly I can impregnate a girl, but I’m grateful to Speak Out’s school clubs because that’s where I later learnt all of that.”

In bid to address sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and violence against women and girls (VAWG), under the project, in school clubs, boys are mixed with girls to learn sexual reproductive health rights and gender-based violence (GBV) and sessions are facilitated by their teachers who voluntarily act as club facilitators.

Also, boys are mixed with girls to promote gender equality and also to engage them as partners in combating GBV. In this regard, students meet once a week and there are several activities conducted in school clubs that aim at enabling children to understand GBV and SRHR such as debates and sports among others. Another thing I learnt in school clubs, Pacific said, is that when a girl is raped, she can be given treatment to prevent her from getting pregnant and contaminating sexually transmitted diseases.

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SPEAK OUT MENTORSHIP PROGRAM EMPOWERING GIRLS WITH KNOWLEDGE ON GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE



UMUGWANEZA RUTH

Umugwaneza Ruth is 22 years old and is still single. She completed secondary school in the combination of Mathematics, Economics and Geography (MEG). She lives in Gishubi Sector, Gisagara District.

She is a mentor who delivers sessions about SRHR, GBV prevention and response, etc in the safe space at Gishubi Secondary School. She also supports girls in her safe space to enhance their talents. She has advanced entrepreneurship skills and she is a retailer of clothes.

Although she is in charge of mentoring girls, Ruth testifies that she has also learnt a lot from Speak Out project and from the girls she takes care of. She explained that when she was recruited as a mentor, she was given trainings on how to deliver sessions in the safe space and how to associate with girls.

Ruth trains girls every Saturday, twice a month. Sessions are conducted in a neat room and secure environment which is referred to as a Safe Space. Girls sit in a circle and use a tennis ball as a means of sharing views. Using the tennis ball teaches girls how to listen to one person and respecting others' ideas. If a girl wants to complement, she waits to receive the tennis ball, then get the floor to speak. Through Speak Out Project, girls have been able to

access comprehensive sexuality education and the rights associated with sexuality.

Ruth explained that at the beginning, girls were shy to talk about their sexual reproductive health, had no enough information and had a lot of myths around sexuality.

Parents whose girls attend sessions in safe spaces applauds the initiative, because they have seen tremendous positive changes in girls' behaviors. Girls are bold enough to initiate discussions with their parents and invite their parents to attend sessions planned to bring together parents and children in the safe space. Recently, parents were invited for a session entitled "Raising children is expensive", to improve parents' knowledge on preparations required before giving birth to a child, saving for children and better parenthood.

Ruth added that, in the safe space, girls were trained on "EARNING AND SPENDING MONEY" which aims at guiding them for self-reliance through promoting the culture of saving. Girls have created saving groups which support them to practice financial skills like saving and entrepreneurship.

She added that she was trained on Gender Based Violence prevention and response as well as sexual reproductive health and rights. Ruth said that she knew some forms of Gender Based Violence like physical violence and rape but did not know much about emotional violence and economic violence. She testifies that Speak Out project helped her to gain a lot of knowledge, and with the training materials given to her by Rwanda Girl Guides Association implementing the Speak Out Project's mentorship program, she can deliver sessions very well.

Speak Out project funded by UKAid aims at supporting girls with knowledge and skills to take control over their bodies, make their own

decisions and take leaders to account using youth led approach. Through the project, girls have been trained on different forms of violence and reporting channels. They are encouraged to report GBV cases on time, avoid losing evidences and make sure that GBV survivors get timely treatment. The trainings are boosting their confidence in

addressing GBV issues.

The project aims to support girls in realizing their aspirations by fostering an enabling environment by providing responses to social challenges girls face when they are at school and in their communities.

SAFE SPACES IMPROVING TEEN GIRLS' KNOWLEDGE ON GBV PREVENTION AND SRHR



SUMAYA

Sumaya lives in Nyanza District. she is 14 years old and studies in primary six. She is the first born in her family. She has four siblings and lives with both her parents.

Sumaya's mother is a subsistence farmer who grows food for home consumption and her father works with trucks owners to load and unload goods.

"I used to think that violence was about beating someone to death and that rape was having forced sexual intercourses with someone. My mother is hot tempered and always slaps us when we do mistakes, but I did not know that it was violence! I was ignorant about the other forms of violence but from school clubs, I learnt the four forms of violence, how they are done and their consequences," Sumaya said.

"In safe spaces, we learnt techniques of talking to parents especially when showing them their

mistakes and make them listen to us. I am practicing this with my hot-tempered mother. About rape, I learnt that the survivor of this form of violence should be rushed to hospital for protection against pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections. On this form of violence, we were also taught to keep the evidences by not bathing before going to hospital," she added.

Sumaya kept on saying that, through safe spaces, she have learnt that self-respect and respecting others is very important in society. She also learnt how to listen to others when they are sharing their views and not stopping someone in the mid of the point.

"My mother is so tough and hot tempered that I was always afraid to ask her anything about reproductive health. She does not have any discussion with me at all. So, I was very happy when I saw my mentor. My mentor is so good, approachable and advises me. She trained me on how to use a sanitary pad and how to maintain hygiene during this period," Sumaya said.

According to Sumaya, bringing men and women together for a conversation on violence and SRHR would be the best way to prevent GBV.

HOW SPEAK OUT PROJECT IS TACKLING GIRLS SCHOOL DROPOUTS



JEAN DE DIEU

Jean de Dieu, 41, is the school head teacher of Kavumu Catholic Primary school in Busasamana sector and oversees sports in primary schools at the sector level. He lives together with his spouse and their two children in Nyanza district, Southern Province. The primary school he works for has 1,238 students of whom boys are 628 and girls are 610. Of the students tally, 131 girls and 33 boys were enrolled in Speak Out Project.

Jean De Dieu mentioned that in the past five year, the school had a challenge of girls dropping out due to teenage pregnancies. He explained that teen pregnancy was a big challenge not only to the school but to the whole community.

“Teenage pregnancy was a challenge because girls who were violated could not report their cases and even their parents would keep silent. It was always the responsibility of the school to find out what happened to girls when they would not attend school and that’s when we would know they were impregnated,” he mentioned.

However, according to Jean De Dieu, all this became history due to Speak Out Project.

“Speak Out project is a good project through which girls are empowered with skills and knowledge about GBV (gender-based violence) prevention and Sexual reproductive health rights. Jean de

Dieu before the project started, girls were dropping out of school due to teen pregnancy but ever since when the Project started, no girl has dropped out of school,” he explained.

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Jean De Dieu also went on to say: “We appreciate Action Aid for all their support to Kavumu Catholique School through constructing 6 classrooms and constructing and equipping the girls’ room in 2015. The girls’ room supported the school in reducing the number of absenteeism during menstruation periods.”

The girls’ room is equipped with a bed, water, soap and towel for girls to clean themselves and continue with classes.

“I noticed in the safe spaces sessions are held smoothly with the support of peer mentors. The way they sit is so much engaging and everyone is encouraged active participation. Girls are open to share what they know and are later given the right information. They have learnt their body parts and bodily changes during adolescence. They are not shy when discussing reproductive health and I think this will help them take control over their bodies,” he added.

Under Speak Out Project, students have been empowered with knowledge on GBV and the reporting channels. They were also given booklets with a summary of GBV law and toll-free numbers which are used in reporting GBV cases. These booklets not only used by children but also parents read them.

As a way of guiding students for self-reliance, the Project initiated the students' group savings. This aims at promoting a culture of saving and also investing in buying domestic animals which they can sell when they need money.

Saving and being able to buy something for themselves prevent girls from being persuaded into premature sexual relations which most girls say it is due to poverty.

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15-YEAR-OLD JEANNETTE ON WHAT SHE BENEFITED FROM SPEAK OUT PROJECT



JEANNETTE

Jeanette is 15 years old and is a student in senior two. She is the first born in a family and has five siblings and her parents are farmers.

Jeannette's mother used to tell her about periods, but she could not take much time listening because she has not had her period. Although her mother used to talk about periods, she had never told her about genital parts and sexually transmitted infections.

However, she used to tell her that she should keep

away from boys because she can get pregnant but Jeannette could not understand how. Jeannette is grateful to Speak Out Project, because, she said, I learnt about all her reproductive system and in the school club they have learning materials with clear pictures that helped me to understand the subject better.

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Jeannette went further to say that before joining the project she had different myths about menstruation periods which she got from peers including the misconception that having sex reduces pain during menstruation periods and skin rushes among others.

"Since not all students in my school are in Speak

Out project, I try my best to share what I learn from safe space and school club with other girls at school and those in my community,” she noted.

Safe Space is a room where girls aged nine to eighteen meet, talking about their bodily changes and how to conduct themselves in the society and to their parents and about violence.

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12 YEAR-OLD JULIENNE HAIL SPEAK OUT'S TEACHING METHOD



JULIENNE

Julienne, 12, is in primary school and lives with her parents who depend on subsistence farming. Julienne explained that her mother was so good to her by advising her to be self-reliant and coached her on rearing rabbits and growing vegetables like cabbages but never taught her anything concerning sexual reproductive health.

She added that she had never studied about bodily changes not even in class and therefore had no information about sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR). Thanks to Speak Out Project whose school clubs later taught Julienne about SRHR,

with the help of improved teaching methodology.

“We have learning materials with diagrams illustrating genital parts and the facilitator teaches us in Kinyarwanda and shows us diagrams. The illustrations helped us understand better the genital parts and bodily changes for both girls and boys during adolescence,” she explained.

She added that: “I saw beads used while counting menstruation cycle and hopes to use them when she starts menstruating.”

It would be very good if every girl would be enrolled in Speak Out project because we learn a lot, she recommended. Speak Out Project is a four year project implemented in four districts including; Nyanza district (Busasamana, Rwabicuma and Mukingo sectors), Gisagara district (Gishubi, Kibilizi and Muganza sectors), Nyaruguru district (Ruheru sector) and Karongi district (Gitesi and Murundi sectors).

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SPEAK OUT PROJECT: COUNSELLOR MUKANTABANA SHARES TIPS SHE USES WHILE HELPING VIOLENCE VICTIMS



THERESE MUKANTAGARA

Therese Mukantagara, 58, is a genocide survivor and a mother of two children. She lives in Karongi district and works as a counselor at safe house where I give psychosocial support to survivors of violence.

Before joining Speak Out Project, she was a National Women Council representative at sector level and was trained on violence against women and girls. She says that violence has always happened whereby women are harassed, beaten, but kept silent, a reason for punishment of very few gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrators.

In Speak Out Project, she said, “I was also trained on survivor-based approach and case management which facilitate me to provide psychosocial support to survivors of violence.”

“At the safe house,” she added, “I receive different survivors of violence including women and men who are beaten severely, cases of rape and emotional and psychological violence cases.”

Highlighting on treatment methods she uses, Mukantabana said: “The first thing I do is to listen to the survivor of violence, record her or him in the register and then from our discussions I get to know where the survivor can be referred for legal and medical support if necessary.”

She went on to say that: “At the safe house we have a chair, a bed, water and tissues for the victim to take rest and be able to explain about his/her case. When she is crying so much, I give her time and talk to her later. We also have registers where we record GBV survivors and a referral form we fill and give the survivor a copy to take to the referred service center.”

When the survivor of rape is a young girl, her parents escort her to Isange One Stop Center and Mukantabana give them transport or escort them sometimes.

For mature girls, she only give them transport and they bring back the referral form with the stamp of the service center where they got the service.

When women are beaten, Mukantabana

encourages them to report their husbands to local authorities and when they are fearing to report, she escorts them to local authorities and file the case on their behalf.

“Cases like these are solved during parents evening forums and community gatherings. Women are very happy about the support they get from us. I also conduct home visits to families in conflicts and hold discussions on GBV causes, consequences to parents but also to their children,” she explained.

Action Aid Rwanda in partnership with Faith Victory Association conducts community She argues that one important thing to do is to continue training women and girls on their rights and multiplying saving groups at village, cell and sector level.

I recommend that raising awareness in communities should continue to support women and girls fight for their rights, she reiterated.

MORE ABOUT SPEAK OUT PROJECT

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ACTIONAID RWANDA SAFEGUARDING POLICY FRAMEWORK

We commit to uphold human rights and promote social Justice while we safeguard and protect the dignity of ALL by ensuring confidentiality in Response, Prevention, Reporting and Access to adequate support

Safeguarding Policies, Standards and Guideline Statements.

1. Honor & Respect

We will honor and respect the unique status of children, women, girls & vulnerable adults as valued individuals.

2. Integrity & Transparency

We will uphold integrity in all relationships with children, women, girls and vulnerable adults to ensure that we operate with transparency and avoid any form of exploitation real or perceived.

3. Commitment to highest standards

We commit to apply the highest standards of safeguarding when dealing with children, girls, women and vulnerable adults.

4. Zero Tolerance & Compliance

We will commit to ensure zero Tolerance to all forms of sexual, gender and other exploitation and abuse while ensuring compliance to Child protection policy, Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy, Anti-GBV Policy, Whistle Blowing Policy, Health-Safety and Security Policy

5. Our Approach

We endorse Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), aware that an unequal balance of power is often the pre-condition from which abuse begins.

6. Collaboration with statutory agencies

We will take any allegation seriously and we will collaborate fully with the statutory and voluntary agencies concerned with abuse of children and the vulnerable.

7. Collaboration & support Communities

We will work in partnership with other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, to avail the best possible support in the community to ensure every child is protected from harm.

8. Awareness Raising

We will train Board, staff, volunteers and partners and ensure awareness to communities and children, in principles of safeguarding and child protection.

9. Linkage

We will appropriately oversee all our work with communities in accordance with assessment of potential risks, ability to interrogate, offering further training and supportive counselling.

10. Referral Assessment

We will assess every referral according to pre-defined risk thresholds.

11. Stringest Recruitment Process

We will recruit safely according to stringent recruitment processes, requiring all Staff categories to provide evidence that their behaviour has never caused harm to anyone.

12. Share information

We will share information with other agencies according to well-established principles and best practice both internal and external.

13. Timely & Effective Reporting

We believe in timely and effective reporting as a prerequisite of efficient safeguarding.

Rwanda National Police

Emergency: 112
Child help line: 116
Fire Brigade: 111
Anti - GBV: 3512
Isange One Stop Centre: 3029

Gender Monitoring Office: 5798
MIGEPROF Toll Free line: 2560
Office of the Ombudsman: 199

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