



KAKAMEGA COUNTY INCLUDES TEENAGE PREGNANCY ISSUES IN SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE POLICY

2021 Y-ACT CASE STUDY



SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE POLICY

This case study demonstrates how strengthening the advocacy capacity of youth advocates influences the ways in which they meaningfully engage in public policy making processes. It also highlights the importance of including youth advocates in the policy drafting process as a strategy for ensuring that the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Policy addresses youth issues like teenage pregnancy. Finally, it demonstrates that organisational capacity strengthening of youth organisations can lead to improved resource mobilisation.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Kakamega county remains one of the counties in Kenya with the highest burden of teen pregnancies. Out of 47 counties in Kenya, Kakamega comes second after Nairobi. Kakamega county also has high rates of sexual and gender-based violence, a contributor to teenage pregnancy. According to the Sexual Offences Act, any sexual engagement of a minor (below 18 years) is deemed to be defilement.

While teenage pregnancy in Kenya is high and needs to remain at the top of the government's political agenda, it sporadically gets into public discourse when triggered by certain events, after which it gets buried and business continues as usual. Despite several efforts made by various non state actors, there is no guideline or coordination by the County Government that would inform responses and prevention measures. The County Government of Kakamega, like many others, lacked guideline on how to respond to this challenge.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

Ten youth advocates engaged in the Y-ACT project in Kakamega county participated in an intensive Y-ACT training where they identified that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy is a key challenge for youth in Kakamega county. They developed an advocacy strategy to ensure that teenage pregnancy should be a policy priority. Instead of developing a stand-alone teen pregnancy response strategy or policy, they decided to influence the draft Sexual and Gender-based Violence Policy to include teen pregnancy language before it is finally adopted.

The Youth advocates applied a multi-faceted approach to achieve their advocacy objectives. This included:

- Youth advocates in the county shared their perspectives on how teen pregnancy can be addressed through various advocacy materials including policy briefs, meeting presentations, and position statements.
- They collaborated with other like-minded organisations operating in the field of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and youth within the county.
- The youth enhanced demand and visibility of the issue by engaging the community using broadcast media, especially local FM radio stations and social media. The beauty of this is that the youth are able to address issues of SRHR in the county using local language to reach out to other young people.
- The youth advocates had already been part of the county Technical Working Group (TWG) reviewing the SGBV draft policy, positioning them to raise issues of teenage pregnancy in the county.

The youth coalition and trained advocates utilised the knowledge gained from the various capacity building interventions done by the Y-ACT project and leveraged the cordial rapport they had established with the county government officials. The enhanced technical capacity of partners and youth advocates to effectively engage in policy formulation and implementation process played a big role in influencing the outcomes listed below.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INCLUDED YOUNG PEOPLE IN KEY GOVERNMENT PROCESSES

A key outcome has been the change in policy makers' behaviour and attitude towards working with youth. There is increased inclusion and recognition of young people in key government processes in the sexual reproductive area and SGBV. The youth are part of the SGBV working group, they are invited to county health management team meetings and their contributions are sought when policy issues touching young people are being addressed by the county and national government. The role of youth has been moved from participation to meaningful engagement within the health sector. The development of the SGBV policy has seen the contributions and submissions by youth included in the final draft document.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT HAS DEVELOPED A COMPREHENSIVE SGBV POLICY INCLUDING TEENAGE PREGNANCY

On 21 February 2021, policy makers in Kakamega county, drawn from the Department of Health, Deputy County Secretary, government policy advisor together with the County Attorney formally incorporated language on teenage pregnancy in the county draft Sexual and Gender-based Violence Policy. The draft policy has specifically indicated how the county will respond towards reducing teen pregnancies and it also articulates how the county government will play a role in coordinating efforts carried out by different actors towards addressing the challenge.

This achievement was based on the multi-faceted approach applied by youth advocates in their advocacy strategy. This is a significant outcome as it demonstrates the following:

1. Policy maker attitudes changed and they now regard teen pregnancy as a priority issue. For instance, the county government covered the financial and technical costs of the processes involved revising the SGBV policy.
2. The county government is now taking the lead role in addressing teenage pregnancy in the county (as opposed to leaving it for the CSOs) and there is improved coordination on how to address it;
3. Policy makers from the Kakamega County Department of Health adopted teen pregnancy as a form of SGBV and are committing to address it at the policy level;
4. The SGBV policy seeks to give guidance on the county response towards managing the challenges emanating from SGBV. In essence, the policy seeks to respond to victims of SGBV and also initiate preventive measures through awareness creation and local dialogues.
5. County government are currently fast tracking the finalisation of the policy and its subsequent approval.

YOUTH ADVOCATES WERE ABLE TO IMPROVE RESOURCE MOBILISATION AS A RESULT OF THEIR INCREASED CAPACITY

Y-ACT provided comprehensive organisational development (OD) strengthening with the implementing partners. A baseline capacity assessment was conducted and OD interventions were tailored based on the needs of the organisations. One of the areas of intervention was on resource mobilisation. The capacity strengthening in resource mobilization even resulted in new resources during the short timeframe of the project.

'We have been able to secure two additional funding from other sources. This is because we have developed better institutional processes as a result of our interaction with Y-ACT which gave us a competitive advantage' Victoria Zilher, Executive Director- Youth Leaders stakeholders CBO.



LESSONS LEARNT

- Policy influence processes require a multi-faceted approach.
- Getting county specific data on SRH is challenging. For future investments more resources should be allocated to generating local data.
- It is important to invest in both policy formulation and implementation.
- Successful advocacy requires having an insider.
- Organisational development of youth organisations can lead to improved resource mobilisation.



