



2021

KISUMU COUNTY  
GOVERNMENT ENGAGES  
YOUTH AS KEY PARTNERS  
IN HEALTH PROGRAMS AND  
POLICIES



## Background and Context

Youth in Kisumu County have in the past participated in county decision making processes but have hardly ever been influencing the agenda being discussed or even affecting the final decisions being made. The policy makers at some point feared meeting young people because the forums would be marred by accusations and become a confrontational affair.

Kisumu County is one of the four counties in Kenya that were earmarked for the piloting phase of universal health coverage (UHC) scheme by the national government. A key aim of Y-Act in Kisumu County was to ensure quality provision of SRHR services to young people as a key component of UHC.

## Actions taken to address the problem

A key feature of the project was on advocating for meaningful youth engagement in issues that affect them. The project sought to raise and amplify the voices of young people especially on issues of gender and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Y-ACT identified and engaged local partners who recruited and trained 10 Youth Advocates in public policy, advocacy strategy development, taking them through a process of prioritizing major barriers to their health. Access to SRHR for youth was identified as one of the major barriers.

An advocacy strategy was developed aimed at having the county government develop a strategy to enhance youth access to SRHR services. For example, youth advocates developed a communique, a policy brief and also presented petitions to the county assembly. All of this contributed to a number of outcomes described below.

## Outcomes achieved

Youth are increasingly involved and the quality of youth involvement in the decision-making processes has improved

In the last two years, Kisumu County has seen a significant increase in the level and quality of youth involvement in key public decision-making processes. This is evident in the way youth are involved and recognized by various policy makers in the county. The young people have become more strategic and tactful in their approaches and they are having more of advocacy strategic approach. \*

***'Long before the Y-ACT project, youth engagement was confrontational. Now youth engagement has increased. Their presentations are factual and based on actual data. Y-ACT partners have brought youth together to talk with one voice. Y-ACT has provided capacity building of youth on policy advocacy and how to effectively engage with government'. (County government official 1)***

The main achievement so far has been that the implementing partners and youth advocates are being recognized as key stakeholders and partners by line government ministries who have youth related programs. For example, youth representatives were involved in the development of the Kisumu County Health Bill and its subsequent regulations. Another example is the formation of the Kisumu County Youth sector working group<sup>1</sup> that saw the youth partners in Kisumu being identified and appointed as members.

***"With Y-ACT there is a lot of youth involvement. The way they do this is more organised and refined. They do not embarrass officials. If they have issues, they seek appointment with the relevant official and address issues amicably. They are using the government protocol to achieve their objectives. The youth we are engaging in this project are more evidence based (County government official 2)***

## **Inclusion of budget line and increment in Reproductive, Maternal, New born, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) budget**

Advocacy efforts by Y-ACT youth advocates, though not intended, contributed to the creation of budget line in 2020/2021 county budget and in the RMCAH<sup>2</sup> budget (which encompasses SRH) in the 2021/2022 budget estimates<sup>3</sup>. This was validated by a Kisumu County government official:

1 The Kenyan Youth Development Policy 2019 establishes the formation of the county youth sector working groups which brings on board different actors involved in youth issues within the county and it is coordinated and chaired by the youth director's/government officials.

2 Reproductive, Maternal, Child Adolescent Health <sup>3</sup>This was done using AMREF's unrestricted funding and not through the grant.



***'The duty bearers are acting on recommendations given by the youth. For example, the petition presented by youth got the assembly to increase the allocation to RMNCAH'. (County government official 1)***

## Jolting the stalled County SRHR Strategic Plan

The youth implementing partners supported the process of expediting the stalled County SRHR strategic plan. This had initially been supported by different partners but had stalled due to few technical issues within the document. The project resources supported several engagement sessions with young people, civil society organizations and ultimately with the health department. These efforts culminated into the development of a roadmap which hopefully will enable the document to be finalized, approved and implemented. These initiatives made young people to be seen as also technical people who can be involved in technical matters related to health.:

## Lessons Learnt

- Having young people effectively engaged and influencing decision making is a huge step in youth programming and empowerment. The efforts of young people are seen and recognized to be supportive and influencing of government interventions.
- From this experience, it is clear that investing in young people should be a combination of enhancing capacity and creating opportunities e.g., availing resources for the skills gained to be utilized;
- With regards to SRH, the efforts made and results achieved so far will go a long way in contributing towards increase service delivery and demand creation for SRHR targeting young people in the county. The efforts are at government level meaning that they will last past the project lifespan.
- For effective policy influencing, you need to be able strategic: engage in a manner that is respectful, deploy the appropriate tactics, be factual/evidence based—so that you can be heard and listened to.

