



The SRHR Bulletin

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Inside this Issue

Editor's Note	1
CYDT inspires youth urgency to improve SRHR access	2
Expand spaces for SRHR strategy consultations—Youth demand	3
Increase youth participation in SRHR decision making	4
Engaging health professionals on SRHR, youth share their concerns	5
We now know our rights, youth commend SRHR project	6
Esibomvu Clinic nurses reach out to the youth	7

Editor's Note

In this third edition of the SRHR Bulletin, we focus on the impact of the SRHR project since its initiation this year; its role in increasing SRHR awareness among youths and duty bearers as well as helping change community leaders' behaviour towards sexual health education.

This edition also touches on the need for the creation of spaces that will enhance the participation of youths in the drafting of SRHR strategies; strategies that will promote behaviour change as well as safeguard young people's sexual health rights.

After growing complaints from youths accusing health practitioners of discriminating youths seeking SRHR services, the organisation conducted a SRHR meeting

with health practitioners that provided an opportunity for youths to share their concerns to healthcare givers.

An article that details these concerns is included in this edition. In the previous edition, we published youth testimonies on the impact of the SRHR project; in this latest edition, we continue sharing youths' evaluation of the project.

Happy readings folks!

Bongie



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CYDT inspires youth urgency to improve SRHR access



Goals and the Constitution of Zimbabwe,” Zibusiso Ndlovu from Umzingwane said.

Another young person, Blessed Dube from Umzingwane said: “Holding meetings with stakeholders has proved fruitful. For instance, the social accountability forums on gender budgeting provide youth with opportunities to share their concerns and hold leaders to account. As youth, we must continue pressuring these leaders for action.”

Over the years, there have been limited arrests of people violating young girls' sexual health rights, and as such, CYDT's SRHR champions have promised to fight tooth and nail, to help end impunity.

“Those youth who are able to speak out must also encourage their peers to speak out against any form of SRHR violation. If we continue bringing our cases to the duty bearers, surely our problems will be heard. Let us not tire but rather keep the fire burning; continue demanding the availability of SRHR services in our communities,” said Dube.

While the outbreak of the deadly pandemic affected the normal ways of programing, it is clear that the organisation has managed to adapt to the prevailing conditions, spreading SRHR awareness to youth as well as to lobby duty bearers for improved SRHR services.

While the journey for improved SRHR is not yet complete; surely the organisation has made significant strides in tackling gender-based stereotypes that often exacerbates gender-based violence; helped raise awareness on the need for localised SRHR policies that will help curb the ongoing child marriages; brought to awareness the need for more health centres that will help prevent young expecting mothers from walking long distances to access a nearby clinic or hospital.

The organisation has also demanded the development of gender sensitive budgets that will enhance the availability of basic sexual health care items like contraceptives, condoms and sanitary pads.

The organisation has helped raise awareness on the need to eliminate sexual abuse and exploitation of the girl child being concealed at community level through cultural and traditional norms and beliefs.

CYDT has also managed to encourage victims of sexual abuse to speak out, and alert local authorities to help end impunity for child sexual abuse crimes.

The organisation remains committed to continue pushing for improved SRHR services in Matabeleland South to help protect the lives of youth who are the future of this resource rich province.

THE Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT)'s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) sensitisation drive has laid a strong foundation for improved access to SRHR services in communities that have been deprived of these services for a longtime.

Some of these SRHR services include information on and access to modern contraception, emergency contraception, menstruation, HIV and STI (sexually transmitted infection) testing and treatment, gynecology, pregnancy testing and services, safe abortion, counselling, gender-based violence and harmful practices counselling and referral among others.

Despite the prevailing COVID-19 conditions, the organisation managed to cascade SRHR information to youth who have so far become active SRHR champions.

After being trained on SRHR advocacy, these champions have so far embarked on sexual reproductive health campaigns while others have held SRHR duty bearers to account for failing to deliver needed services.

For instance, in Matobo and Gwanda districts, young people spearheaded donate pad campaigns in a bid to help vulnerable girls facing sanitary pads challenges during menstruation.

Other youth helped spread awareness on gender-based violence which has become a serious crisis during COVID-19-induced national lockdowns.

“If we sit down and do nothing thinking our leaders will deliver change, then we are yet to suffer. Time to act is now. We need to constantly engage nurses, the police, Ministry of Health and other SRHR duty bearers and remind them that our SRHR are non-negotiable. They are guaranteed by the Sustainable Development

Expand spaces for SRHR strategy consultations—Youth demand



Young people in Matabeleland South are advocating for the government to make wide consultations when crafting the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) strategy.

Speaking in a SRHR Social Accountability Forum conducted in Gwanda recently, youth said wide consultations would, among other things, enhance their involvement in SRHR policies.

“Youth are vibrant and creative; hence, it is imperative to involve them in the creation of such important policies that speak to their health and wellbeing. In this era of technology, young people’s ideas can be collected online using social media spaces. Hence, it is important that SRHR duty bearers embrace technology for wide spread consultations when drafting the SRHR strategy,” Langelihle Tshuma said.

Tshuma said making decisions without consulting youth has dire consequences on their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

“Authorities should not use the COVID-19-induced national lockdowns to dictate what must constitute SRHR policies and laws. For instance, there are ongoing discussions with regards to the Marriage Bill. These are processes that youth must extremely be consulted on. As it stands, there are already questions surrounding this proposed Bill yet few youth know about it.”

Sharon Ncube said duty bearers from both local and national level were slow in adopting technology in covering the gap caused by the outbreak of the pandemic.

“Our government and local leaders are failing to utilise things such as social media to increase their community outreach activities. We remain in the dark on many issues, hence at the end

of the day certain SRHR policies are passed without our inputs. Duty bearers must normalise sitting down with young people to formulate strategies that will enhance the participation and involvement of youth,” she said.

While the existing policies that cover SRHR issues such as the 2016-2020 National Adolescent and Youth Sexual Health Strategy II and the National Policy on HIV and AIDS help clarify the misconception that youth under the age of 18 must seek parental consent to receive contraceptives as well as enhance the use of youth centres offering SRHR services, youth said the policies need reviewing on the matter of traditional and religious practices that have been used to violate young people’s SRHR rights.

However, comprehensive reviewing of these policies was only possible if duty bearers increase spaces for youth consultations and engagements. They said it was high time strategies and policies that impact community behavioral change were formulated.

“We need a SRHR strategy that will remind and guide duty bearers on the things they must do to increase access to sexual health services. A strategy that reminds parents and traditional leaders that speaking about SRHR is not a crime or a myth. A strategy that enhances the involvement of youths in the making of SRHR decisions,” Ncube said.

She added that lack of youth inclusion in the drafting of SRHR strategies that directly affect them was the reason behind the existing gaps and inconsistencies in SRHR policies.

Increase youth participation in SRHR decision making



“Nothing for us without us”

This is a notion shared by the youth during the widely conducted SRHR awareness roadshows held in collaboration with different stakeholders including youth organisations, government departments and non-governmental organisations such as World Vision and Matobo Youth Development Initiative (MYDI) in Gwanda and Matobo districts.

This comes after growing calls for youth involvement in the development of sustainable SRHR strategies, policies and structures particularly in the context of COVID-19.

Youth told stakeholders that meaningful youth participation in SRHR decision-making, policies and strategies has positive effects on the creation and attainment of SRHR goals which include increasing access to sanitary pads, contraceptives, and the development of gender sensitive budgets.

They said that youth-engaged policies and strategies will fully lookout for the SRHR needs of young people and prevent confusion in the formulation of SRHR laws that for a long time have left youth vulnerable.

Youth that spoke with the organisation said duty bearers that include the government, must invest in youth and financially support SRHR youth-led groups that are fighting for improved access to SRHR.

One youth said: “The availability of and access to contraceptives, sanitary pads and condoms has become difficult during the COVID 19-induced national lockdowns. These challenges can only be solved when the government and other stakeholders believe in the leadership of youth. As long as the SRHR initiatives are being spearheaded by older people, improvement will be limited.”

She also said youth were supposed to be on the forefront of SRHR services; hence, it was imperative that the Ministry of Health and other strategic stakeholders sit down with youth to develop approaches that will help improve access to SRHR services amidst COVID 19.

"Youth have all the skills needed to deal with the different sexual reproductive health challenges faced. Hence, local leaders must work side by side with youths to comprehensively deal with the SRHR challenges faced," the youth said.

She said SRHR decisions made without consulting youth have serious gaps and inconsistencies that directly expose their access to sexual health services.

A Matobo youth who also spoke to the Community Youth Development Trust said a strong relationship between SRHR champions and local stakeholders like the Zimbabwe Republic Police, community-based organisations and other local authorities will be key in tackling the various prevalent SRHR challenges such as child marriages and sexual abuse.

“When local authorities and the community start realising the role of youth in solving sexual reproductive health issues things such sexual abuse, child marriages and traditional practices that violates youth access to sexual reproductive health services will be a thing of the past. For a long time, youth have proven that they have what it takes to lead and bring about positive change and peace in Matabeleland South communities,” she said.

Youth promised to keep lobbying duty bearers for improved youth participation in the making of SRHR decisions and commended the non-governmental organisations that continue to invest in projects that seek to improve their sexual health.

Engaging health professionals on SRHR, youth share their concerns



Amidst growing complaints of youth people being mistreated and discriminated by health professionals in local healthcare centres, the Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT) conducted a sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) meeting together with health professionals and youth from Gwanda to address the issue.

A number of young people have previously brought to the organisation's attention the mistreatment of youth seeking sexual health care services like contraceptives, condoms and treatment on sexual transmitted diseases (STIs), hence this meeting gave young people a chance to share their concerns with the health care givers.

Youth alleged that SRHR access is limited by unfriendly treatment from health professionals, hence the need to engage them at their work spaces and influence their conduct.

They claimed that health professionals preferred serving married women and old people while having a negative attitude towards the youth, especially young women who have fallen pregnant.

The youths said some health care providers scold and shout at them while seeking sexual reproductive health care services. Msizi Mloyi, a youth from Gwanda said:

"When you go to the local hospital with an STI, there is no privacy. The nurses there begin to scold you instead of being discreet and of help. They call you, mentioning your illness for everyone to hear which is very embarrassing for us."

Young people also said sometimes they are asked uncomfortable and degrading questions especially when one is seeking STI services. For instance "who did you sleep with and why did you not use condoms".

They said these questions end up making them feel guilty or regret visiting a hospital. The youth also claimed health professionals seem preoccupied listening to their concerns especially in the context of COVID 19.

Young people said due to constant discrimination experienced in

local hospitals, a number of them end up using unsafe herbs to cure STIs.

"Confidentiality is important especially among boys. A few boys suspected to have an STI do not visit local clinics in fear of being ridiculed by health practitioners. The whole community might end up knowing that you have an STI. Many of us end up seeking help from our grandfathers and traditional healers to give us herbs to treat STIs," Nqobile Mzizi said.

Mzizi added: "I once saw a female youth being scolded by a senior nurse; asked where the father of her baby she was carrying is and was he working so he can provide for the child when it is born.

You could see the girl was torn apart. I felt sorry for her but some of these treatments can cause one to commit suicide. Health care givers must be careful and be friendly to the youth."

Sthembinkosi Gumbo said friendly treatment from health professionals will see more youth seeking medical attention in hospitals instead of opting for traditional methods of taking care of their health.

However, when responding to the concerns that were raised by young people, the health care providers said following the SRHR training and meetings with CYDT, treatment of youth have been improving in local hospitals and clinics.

They said healthcare givers are committed towards increasing access to SRHR services as they understand the importance of these services. The healthcare givers added that more SRHR awareness was needed for the youth to visit health facilities as some of them are victims of misinformation and disinformation which makes them think bad about health professionals.

We now know our rights, youth commend SRHR project

“The SRHR project has raised youth awareness on how they can access SRH services. This has led to a decrease of unwanted pregnancies and reduced the spread of HIV and STIs. Also the youth are now treated better at local clinics. Lastly but not least, it benefited marginalised youth in our communities as we started a pad drive after our training on SRHR.”

Ayanda Dube

“SRHR project has helped young people especially young girls to make informed decisions about their bodies such as engaging in protected and safe sexual activities. The numbers of teenage pregnancies or unplanned pregnancies will decrease as a result of this project. We are surely grateful!”

Yvonne Moyo

“The sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) workshops helped a lot in exposing the dangers of some social norms and cultures in our health. For example, customs such as early marriages and unprotected sex. It also made me aware of my health rights. Now I know I have the right to protect myself from unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Above all, it gave me the responsibility to spread awareness.”

Nobuhle Moyo

“The SRHR project has taught SRHR champions to stand up and advocate for their sexual rights and health rights. Now clinics are aware of the importance of not judging or discriminating against young people seeking sexual health care services. Now the local clinics, nurses, the community and other stakeholders are working together to formulate strategies that will help young people access SRHR with ease during the Coronavirus pandemic. There are plans to select youth representatives who will be linking young people and duty bearers.”

Rebecca Dube

“Through the SRHR project, I have learnt that as young people we must be united in fighting the challenges we are faced with. We need to help each other stand up, and support each other in areas that need supporting. For instance, some of our friends have started donate a pad campaigns; it is through such initiatives that as young people, we must stand up and support each other. Thanks to the SRHR, we now know our rights!!”

Sidalubuhle Donga

“The SRHR has brought awareness to our sexual health rights. We are now fully equipped with SRHR information. For instance, we now understand what is right and wrong. Our health matters. As it stands, young people are taking it upon themselves to embark on donation campaigns to help increase access to sanitary pads as well as bring to awareness that there are sanitary pads challenges. It also taught boys to be responsible. For instance, many boys now understand what women need which help them understand when they marry one. The project has also instilled confidence among young people who are now able to visit local hospitals in search of SRHR services.”

Charlotte Dube

“The SRHR project enlightened me on various issues that we as young people face regarding our sexual reproductive health rights. The SRHR meetings gave me better knowledge on how to deal with harmful practices that we are “forced” to do on our bodies in the name of culture. I gained a lot of knowledge through the meetings as I now know how and where to access SRHR services, something that I had never thought about. Just as we discussed many issues, we also discussed how to deal with them and how to address them which was very essential for my better understanding.”

Takudzwa Sibanda

Esibomvu Clinic nurses reach out to the youth



To squash the allegations that health practitioners in local hospitals and clinics abuse youth seeking access to sexual and reproductive health items like condoms and contraceptives, Esibomvu Clinic nurses in Umzingwane District have stepped up their efforts of reaching out to the youth living a distance away from the clinic, and those not comfortable visiting the health center for confidentiality reasons.

The health practitioners have partnered parents, village health workers, and other stakeholders who will help deliver sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services to youth in the community.

Some of the stakeholders, including local SRHR champions trained by the Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT), will be responsible for providing youth with information on the access to modern contraception, emergency contraception, menstruation, HIV and STI (sexually transmitted infection) testing and treatment, gynecology, pregnancy testing and services, counseling, gender-based violence and harmful practices.

They will also provide youth with counselling sections especially those who have been victims of sexual abuse, gender-based violence or unplanned pregnancies during the COVID 19-induced national lockdowns.

Esibomvu Clinic sister-in charge Pretty Zulu said SRHR service provision has been made easier for youth as they can now go to village health workers and SRHR champions who are stationed at their local villages.

“The clinic is encouraging the use of village health workers for SRHR services as a way of minimizing movements and the spread of COVID-19 in clinics. Village health workers will ensure that youth can get help from close by rather than walking kilometres to the clinic,” she said.

Zulu added: “Working during a pandemic and where there are lockdown restrictions is challenging. However, access to SRHR services and information at the clinic remains a priority and is always smooth running. We are encouraging youth to visit the clinic as all our practitioners are friendly to youth. We understand the need for privacy and confidentiality that has been a major concern raised by young people.”

A village health worker working for the Esibomvu Clinic, who only identified herself as MaMathe, said: “It was their duty to encourage youth to use long-term family planning methods such as Depo Provera implants and loops so that they avoid frequenting the clinics. The health clinic also takes care of the referrals in which village health workers send through which require further assistance.”

Umzingwane youth commended the clinic’s actions, noting that it was heartwarming to see nurses partnering with youth and the community to help increase access to sexual reproductive health care services.

They said such actions lay strong foundations for challenging traditions and cultural practices that for a long time have been used to suppress young girls’ access to SRHR.