BUILDING GIRLS' POWER LEARNING FORUM

Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund
Ending Violence, Building Power

The Young Mothers Project

Learning and Sharing Report

Our Annual Meeting

Naivasha, Kenya
|10th - 15th July 2023

CONTENTS

TEN AGREEMENTS

Recommendations for the future.

1. Expand services to provide an integrated package including mental health, life skills training, physical health and wellness, early childhood development and economic empowerment. A more holistic approach will help address the multifaceted social, psychological and economic challenges faced by young mothers.

2. Link young mothers to entrepreneurship, vocational training and internships in appropriate skills relevant to their context to improve their employability and income generation opportunities.

3. Mobilise and promote the participation of male champions (fathers, partners) in providing positive examples of support for young women to enable them return to school, create and operate successful businesses.

4. Support and promote safe re-entry of young mothers back into the formal school system.

   • Build the capacity of teachers to provide a conducive learning environment

   • Advocate for inclusion of flexible provisions in the re-entry to school policy and school routines to enable young mothers to balance their studies and childcare.

5. Sensitise and build capacity of parents on positive parenting to be able to hold meaningful and protective conversations on reproductive health with their daughters to prevent early pregnancies associated with vulnerability and limited knowledge of sexuality. It will also help to build social capital for young mothers to return to school, while navigating motherhood.

6. Advocate for amendment and alignment of laws and policies to protect girls from early marriage, particularly in Tanzania where the Marriage Act and Child Act contradict each other on the age of consent.

7. Increase access to adolescent/youth friendly sexual and reproductive health including accurate information on sexuality; pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections; maternal health information and services (pregnancy, prenatal, antenatal, and postnatal care), childcare, family planning and nutrition.

   • Train health workers in providing adolescent/ youth friendly services

   • Build the capacity of community health workers and traditional birth attendants to identify danger signs and link pregnant adolescents and young mothers to care

   • Support and advocate for improvement and availability of services in government health facilities.

8. Raise awareness among actors and community members about issues affecting young mothers in the community

   • Provide physical and online platforms for actors and community members to dialogue and challenge cultural practices that undermine the rights of women and girls and identify community-led solutions to address these problems.

9. Create safe and nurturing environments where young mothers can connect, share experiences, and empower one another to navigate the challenges of life, relationships, marriage, and motherhood. Additionally, provide opportunities for the mothers to connect with knowledgeable individuals who can offer valuable insights and expertise in their specific areas of interest including counsellors, health workers, businesspeople and mentors.

10. Conduct life skills training and mentorship sessions for young mothers to rediscover their power, appreciate themselves and build confidence to make informed decisions; to stand up against rights violations; and to participate in decision making spaces.

Introduction

1.1 About CRVPF

Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF) is a child rights and social justice regional intermediary organization based in Uganda with a mission to provide grants and capacity development support to community organizations operating in four countries in East Africa (Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Kenya). CRVPF works in partnership with community organizations in a cluster arrangement, where 2-4 community and local non-governmental organizations organize themselves in a cluster and work together using one grant to address violence against children and sexual violence in particular in homes, schools and communities in a selected geographical area.

In partnership with Hilton Foundation, CRVPF provides grants to 4 clusters (comprising 12 partner organizations) to implement the Young Mothers Project in Kenya and Tanzania.

In the first six months of the project, partners received a learning and planning grant to facilitate them to organize and to learn to work together in a cluster partnership. They also assessed the situation of young mothers and their children, by listening to the young mothers themselves and other stakeholders in their communities (parents, local leaders, formal actors) using situation and power analysis tools.

1.2 About the Convening

Organized by CRVPF, the convening took place between 10th - 15th July 2023 at Lake Naivasha Hotel in Naivasha, Kenya. It brought together 24 representatives of the 12 partner organizations implementing the young mothers project in Kenya and Tanzania and young mothers in the areas of operations who participated in the situation analyses.

The 5-day participatory convening provided the space for partners to reflect on and share their experiences and lessons of working together in clusters and listening to young mothers and stakeholders (parents, local leaders, actors) in their areas of operation. Throughout the convening, they worked in groups, shared in plenary and received feedback in the spirit of partnership and comradery. Five young mothers were also invited to participate in the discussions, share their experiences and validated the findings presented by the partners.

1.3 The Partners

Jamii Yetu Cluster

(Comprising Her Journey to School, BFA, and GPI)

The cluster operates in Arusha, Tanzania, in a closely knit Maasai community, with strong cultural norms that impact girls positively and negatively. The work of this cluster focuses on promoting girl-child education and adolescent reproductive health with a goal to prevent early/child marriage, early pregnancy, female genital mutilation, and school drop-outs, all of which are serious societal challenges affecting girls backed by strong patriarchal Maasai norms, beliefs and practices. Members of the cluster are youth-led and have built trust, language, credibility and a valuable track record of addressing these issues in the Maasai communities, having worked together and in the communities on familiar causes before forming a cluster.

Msichana Salama Cluster

(Comprising Thamani Yangu Initiative - TYI; Sauti Ya Jamii Kipunguni - SAJAKI; Binti Salha Foundation - BSF)

The cluster operates in Buza, a semi-urban slum area on the outskirts of Dar-Es-Salaam, one of the most isolated communities in Tanzania. Buza is characterized by high levels of poverty, sexual violence (incest, rape, defilement), insecurity and stealing children. The area is considered backward and residents feel mocked and isolated that they are suspicious of visitors taking advantage of them.

Partners' interventions focus on educating the girls about their rights, returning girls to schools, providing re-usable sanitary towels and facilitating legal aid clinics. The cluster members had previously worked together in coalitions or single activities on sextortion, FGM prevention awareness campaigns and GBV prevention and response activities. This made it easier for them to form a cluster, because they trusted each other. During the six months of the learning and planning grant, the partners leveraged their strength and expertise to conduct situational and power analyses; the capacities of their staff and their connections with local government. For instance, SAJAKI and BSF introduced the cluster local government officials; Thamani Yangu provided counselling to young mothers; and all the partners provided trained staff to translate and conduct situational and power analyses. They were also based in the local communities, and therebefore, were trusted and easily welcomed by the community members

Siaya Cluster

(Comprising Siaya Muungano Network - SIMUN; Siaya Young Women Alliance - SYWA; and Stawisha Africa Initiative - SAI)

The cluster operates in Siaya, Kenya. The primary focus is to provide psycho-social support services to girls and young mothers, which includes promoting nurturing child care with male partner involvement; health and nutrition; safety and security for pregnant girls; and referral linkages for services and economic empowerment opportunities. Partners within the cluster are led by youth, with a vast and good track record of working with children, adolescents and young mothers in communities and schools, on areas of children rights, sexual reproductive health and rights awareness raising and advocacy, livelihood and economic empowerment. Each of the members, works at the community level, reaching out to hard-to-reach communities. They also have strong linkages with formal and civil society actors at the national level and participate in different thematic technical working groups which is important to link the cluster to national and county level conversations and agendas.

KOCH Cluster

(comprising Footprints for Change - F4C; Women United for Social Transformation - WUSTRA; and Miss Koch Kenya - MKK)

The cluster operates in Korogocho, a nine-village mixed- ethnic/culture slum community in Nairobi City. The area is characterized by high levels of crime, including drug abuse and high levels of poverty/ deprivation (a pre-cursor to school drop-out, early pregnancy and early marriage) and a culture of partying, which provides fertile ground for sexual abuse of girls). The area is under-resourced in terms of education and Early childhood development and maternal health services, thus limited access to safe pregnancy and delivery; return to school and early childhood education for their babies. The Focus of the cluster is to empower vulnerable girls and young women with apprenticeships and internships, financial literacy mental health, parenting skills, education, and knowledge and skills on reproductive health.

Listening to Young Mothers

2

2.1 Methodology and tools

The cluster members utilised power analysis tools developed by CRVPF to engage and listen to young mothers. The tools allowed partners to engage young mothers in focus group discussions and other participatory activities such as songs, drama and debates to explore five main themes of power analysis, namely: Girls and Power (situations that make girls feel powerful or powerless); Girls and their bodies; Places where girls meet and play, girls and confidence and girls and money (how they earn and spend). Across the clusters, a total of 1558 young mothers (450 in Siaya, 350 in Buza, 300 in Arusha and 458 in Korogocho) participated in power analysis

Data obtained from this exercise was cleaned and thematically analysed and details can be found in individual cluster power analysis reports available at CRVPF

2.1 Situation of young mothers in Siaya, Kenya

Bright Lights

1. Peer Power in Safe Spaces: New mothers gained courage from observing and living with other young mothers in built communities. In these spaces, they do not feel alone.

2. Male engagement is a game changer: Since fathers are the heads of most households, their support for a young mother returning to school after having a baby is critical and inspires the community to help her succeed. One girl was supported by her father to return to school after she gave birth to her baby and is doing well. When the situation is reversed, young mothers cannot go against the decision of the male head of household.

Harsh Realities

1. Stigma and Silence: The girls experience a sense of being unheard and overlooked by adults who tend to disregard their opinions and stigmatize them because they are teen mothers.

2. Powerless: The young mothers do not decide anything about their lives because they are seen as immature. Parents, organisations, older siblings, partners, mothers-in-law, faith leaders make decisions for them.

3. Sexual Violence: Harassment and abuse by family members and strangers is common as they are labelled "bad girls who deserve it.

4. Marginalized: Young mothers are not provided key information about health including family planning, education including return to school policies and economic empowerment. As a result, they miss out on socioeconomic growth, health and wellness opportunities in their communities.

5. Discriminated by family: When a young girl gets pregnant, the family considers her a disgrace without a future. Majority stop investing in any area of their growth and wellness.

6. Ridicule and Shame: Family and community leaders use them as the example of failure and further disempower their efforts to return to school and move forward.

7. Inadequate health care: The only support they receive (from health workers) is because of the baby they are carrying. Once they give birth, they are left to navigate motherhood and childcare by themselves.

8. Exposed to HIV and intimate partner violence: The need to meet basic needs lead young mothers to have multiple sex partners for resources. The relationships often breed conflict and violence.

9. No money: They have limited opportunities to earn and even when they do, their money is controlled by their partners/parents.

10. Intersectionality: At the crossroads of poverty, exclusion, sexual abuse, young women face multiple and reinforcing problems and are often the victims of homelessness, physical and emotional violence and mental illness.

Injustice: Due to a culture of discrimination against young unmarried girls, even when they are raped, abused, girls will choose to protect the abusers to avoid shame and abandonment.

Hope Rising

1. Integrate different services (such as day care, sports, mental health, parenting and vocational skills) in one place to ease access.

2. Establish well-resourced young mothers support groups,1) for girls with other girls and 2) for girls with resource people (such as counsellors and mentors).

3. Establish mental health support systems for young mothers to support them develop coping skills and resilience to deal with the experiences of early pregnancy and marriage.

4. Offer cash support for childcare to enable young mothers return to school.

5. Provide appropriate legal support to enable girls access justice.

6. Facilitate community health young mothers/ teenage camps where qualified health practitioners can provide relevant information on sexual and reproductive health.

7. Provide a national health insurance fund to cover young mothers to access quality medical care.

8. Conduct intergenerational dialogues to break stigma and interrogate social norms associated with early pregnancy and early marriage.

9. Provide comprehensive sponsorship for girls to 1) go back to school, 2) enroll in vocational studies and 3) start lucrative businesses.

10. Support start-up of kitchen gardens / agribusiness for young mothers to feed themselves and their children safely so that they are not forced to trade sex for money.

11. Provide dignity kits for girls (school going, teen mothers and married adolescents).

12. Use social media and other platforms to create positive awareness about issues affecting the young mothers.

Girls and money

- **How girls get money** *from a boyfriend (sometimes multiple boyfriends); father of child; from prostitution; from parents and from small-scale businesses that they engage in. Some steal from boyfriends and parents; others save for a rainy from running a business or participating in an empowerment program.*

- **How girls spend money** *on necessities, (food, rent, clothing, medical care); bribing a boyfriend (usually a teen father) who allows them to have other partners to provide basic needs; drinking, drugs and leisure:*

- **Where girls save money:** *Usually if they are minors, they do not have an identity card that allows them to open a bank account; so, they hide money in curtains; under mattresses and carpets; in saving boxes/containers; parents' mobile telephone wallets; with savings and loan associations; give to parents for safe keeping; bank account (for girls over 18 years) and investment companies.*

- **Invisible:** When girls give birth, their self-esteem diminishes, causing them to withdraw from social interactions. Other girls often avoid associating with them out of fear of being labeled. Gradually, they are excluded from various spaces and activities. They are not welcome in places where other girls gather because it is believed they may have a negative influence on them.

- Early marriage: Some girls who become pregnant at a young age choose to marry early to conform to societal norms. In some cases, parents may force them into early marriages to maintain their family's reputation in the community.

- Shame and stigma: Young mothers bear the double burden of coping with physical changes in their bodies and the responsibilities of having a child. They are often subjected to derogatory names by family members, friends, and community members. These names expose their early pregnancy to the public, making it widely known within the community. The "big butt expectation" in the community drives girls to taking contraceptive pills early to grow hips and big buttocks. This is the starting point to engaging in early sexual activities.

Negative names used to refer to young mothers

- *Kiwembe (a razor)- quick at giving in to sex solicitation and that's how they got pregnant.*

- *Azam TV Burudan (for entertainment) - gives in to sex easily.*

- *Kwa wote (to all)- meaning they are available to all and anyone who wants to have sex with them.*

- *Cha wote (belonging to all) - have no belonging, so anyone can have them or do to them what they wish.*

- *Maharage ya Mbeya (beans from Mbeya that cook very fast) - they easily say yes to being sex advances.*

- *Malaya (prostitute) - they sell their bodies and can have sex with anyone willing to pay.*

- *Mali ya Umma (public utility)- meaning that anyone can have them as they don't belong to anyone.*

- *Unazeekea kwenu (you are getting old at home)- now that you have a child, no one wants to marry you.*

- *Jamvi la wageni (a carpet for visitors to walk on)- you have no boundaries, anyone can do as they wish.*

- *Alishindwa fulani utayaweza wewe (so and so didn't make it, will you?) - in comparison to other girls (e.g. older sister) who got pregnant and dropped out of school.*

- *Social norms*: The community promotes early marriage and celebrates it as an achievement. This makes girls want to get married early.

- Unsafe worship spaces: In certain religious spaces, girls are isolated and consequently at risk of sexual harassment and abuse. Furthermore, there is a practice of segregating girls based on their religious beliefs, which can result in girls of a particular faith being excluded from specific programs within religious institutions.

- *No safe space to meet and play:* Young mothers are often reluctant to leave their homes to play, or socialize with others due to the shame and stigma associated with early pregnancy.

- *Unsafe recreation:* During holidays, girls in school meet and play at beaches where they are sexually harassed and defiled by beach boys who lure them with a promise of teaching them to swim but actually take them to deep ocean waters and defile/rape them.

- *Incest:* Some girls are defiled/raped by in homes by their fathers and relatives. Many do not receive help because mothers are equally vulnerable, they fear to act against the husband for fear of being ostracized by the community or divorced by the husband.

Hope Rising

1. Establish a safe space for young mothers (including those with disability) to meet, interact and learn about issues that affect them.

2. Advocate for improvement of school re-entry guidelines for young mothers and support girls and caregivers to ensure girls return to school after delivery.

3. Support young mothers to learn economic empowerment skills (e.g. tailoring, hairdressing) and to start and manage income generating activities to earn income.

4. Provide financial literacy for the girls to grow their business and manage/save their money in safe ways.

5. Provide accurate information and quality health services, including family planning.

6. Conduct life skills sessions for young mothers to gain skills to make informed decisions, especially on matters regarding their health.

7. Implement mentorship interventions to build the self-awareness, esteem, and confidence of young mothers to make the right decisions and participate in activities/ processes in their community.

2.3 Situation of young mothers in Korogocho, Kenya

Bright lights

1. **Empowerment through Exposure:** Young mothers experience a sense of empowerment when they gain exposure, such as through training, skill-building, and participation in village meetings focusing on girls' issues.

2. **Love and Support:** Young mothers feel loved and supported when their parents offer help without judgment and abandonment, especially when facing pregnancy.

3. **Confidence through Role Models**: Girls gain confidence when they have role models to speak to and look up to. They also benefit from participating in community meetings and being given opportunities to raise issues that concern them.

4. **Safe Spaces:** Some civil society organizations provide safe spaces for girls to gather, engage in recreational activities, and participate in empowerment programs. Religious leaders, mentors, parents, and spouses also contribute to creating safe environments for girls in places like churches, schools, and homes.

Harsh Realities

1. **Teenage Pregnancy Dilemma:** Teenage pregnancy is not only normalized but expected, and girls who do not become pregnant are stigmatized and mistreated. By the age of 18, most girls in the community have already given birth. It is often assumed that those without children have had abortions.

2. **Limited Access to Reproductive Health Services:** Girls have limited access to information about sexuality, family planning, and maternal health. Contraceptive options are also limited, and they are often not consulted, receiving whatever contraceptive method is available rather than their preferred choice.

3. **Insufficient Expertise in Civil Society Organizations:** Many programs lack medical expertise, with services and information related to reproductive health being inadequate as a result.

4. **Scarce Opportunities:** Girls feel powerless when they are unable to continue their education and face judgment, insults, rejection, and blame from their families and partners for becoming pregnant. The fear of shame and responsibility can also lead to abortion.

5. **Body Shaming:** Girls are subjected to body shaming regardless of their size, shape, height, or complexion. They are often referred to based on their body type.

Body shaming

- *You are like a gutter/drainage (Unaringa na wewe ni mtaro) meaning you can take anything (sexually) that comes your way.*

- *You have hot pants (wewe una suruali moto) - meaning you have an itch to drop your pants/ easily accept sex advances.*

6. **Objectified:** Young mothers often have their bodies objectified, making them feel as though they shouldn't take pride in who they are. Some derogatory names are used to refer to those who have given birth, calling them "mothers," even though they still view themselves as girls.

7. **Less Power:** Except for mothers and grandmothers, most young mothers lack support from male figures such as fathers, brothers, or boyfriends.

8. **Unsafe Income Sources:** To earn money, young mothers often resort to risky activities such as drug peddling (usually cannabis), casual labour, transactional sex, and involvement in criminal activities like the Gaza gang. A few receive financial support from friends, boyfriends, or allowances for attending seminars.

9. **Overwhelming Responsibilities:** Young mothers typically use their meagre earnings to cover basic needs like food, rent, and healthcare, often with little or no support from parents and partners.

10. **External Influence on Spending:** Girls' decisions regarding money spending are influenced by their parents and partners. For instance, if a partner is involved in drug use, the girl is more likely to spend on drugs as well. If they live in their parents' house, they may be expected to contribute to household expenses.

11. **Limited Information:** Girls often become pregnant, typically by fellow teenagers, due to curiosity about sex and limited knowledge of reproductive health, including contraception.

12. **Poor Access to Services:** The available services in the community may be unwelcoming, which deters girls (who are already self-conscious about potential judgment) from seeking help.

13. **Trauma:** Girls face emotional trauma and stigmatization from community members and partners once they become pregnant. They are often the subject of gossip, blame, and ridicule, which takes a toll on their mental health and overall well-being. Many experience depression as a result of dropping out of school and being left to provide for their children without access to resources, skills, or income-generating opportunities.

Hope Rising

1. Support apprenticeship/vocational training and internships in various trades at institutions or at artisanal workshops. Also support internships, to allow girls practice their skills. Also, follow up with the girls to ensure they use the skills to start income generating activities.

2. Conduct financial literacy trainings to enable girls understand money and how to use it to create more money.

3. Integrate mental health in the program (directly or through referral networks) to enable young mothers cope with the pressure and experience of pregnancy and child birth.

4. Facilitate positive parenting skills to enable young mothers to responsibly bring up their children.

5. Link young mothers to reproductive health services and other social and economic empowerment resources to increase access.

6. Sensitise teachers to support and create a conducive environment for young mothers in schools.

7. Support establishment of day care centres to enable mothers concentrate on education and vocational skills training and for their children to access early childhood development services.

2.4 Situation of young mothers in Arusha, Tanzania

Bright lights

Girls experience a sense of empowerment when they can effectively care for their babies, engage with people who listen to them, have the opportunity to resume their education, and connect with peers to share ideas.

Where young mothers meet: At clinics, when they take their children for medical care; under a tree; at water points; on the way to collecting firewood; in farms/ gardens where they work; while herding cattle; at social gatherings (e.g. Mbesi); at table banking (merry-go-round) meetings.

Harsh realities

1. **Early Marriage:** Encouraged by cultural norms, girls are often promised in marriage from birth and may marry as young as 12 years old. This practice is driven by financial gain for their parents and peer pressure. It's common for girls to be forced into marriages with older men who may not be their choice, especially when the man denies responsibility for the pregnancy.

2. **Economic Dependence:** Women and girls lack ownership of property and must rely solely on male family members for financial support. Even when they earn money, they often have limited say in how it is spent.

3. **Lack of Autonomy:** The society is deeply patriarchal, requiring women to depend on men and in-laws, even after marriage, to make decisions. Married women are often treated as if they were children. Any activity, including income-generating endeavours, requires approval from husbands and other male family members. In 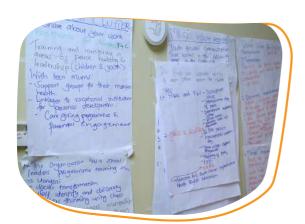cases where husbands work away from home, they send money to their mothers-in-law, who then decide how it should be allocated.

Young mothers and money

- *Girls work to get money by offering casual labour (e.g. digging in other people's gardens); rearing chicken and animals; selling tobacco and avocados and selling beaded jewellery (Ushanga).*

- *Girls spend their money on basics: (e.g. food, medical care, rent clothing, travels and ceremonies).*

4. **Limited Access to Education:** Girls are often undervalued and, consequently, not given priority when it comes to education. Some are either not sent to school or lack the necessary support to complete their education. They may drop out of school due to even the slightest family inconvenience.

5. **Restricted Freedom of Association/Movement:** Women and girls are often restricted from speaking to strangers or individuals outside their community without obtaining permission from their husbands.

6. **Body Shaming:** Young mothers are subjected to body shaming based on their physical appearance, irrespective of whether they are thin, fat, dark-skinned, or have other characteristics.

- *Una matiti kama ndoo (your breasts are as big as a bucket) - in reference to breastfeeding mothers*

- *umekonda kama sime (you are as skinny as a sword)- there is something wrong with how they look, a girl who has given birth, is expected to look rounder and not thin.*

- *Unasura mbaya (you have an ugly face)- if a girl refuses advances from men, she is called ugly.*

- *Mchafu kama bata (as dirty as a duck)- If they do not take care of the children well, mother and sisters -in law abuse insult/label young mothers/girls, as dirty. Sometimes they are beaten.*

- *Malaya kwenye jamii (prostitute in the family)- young mothers are referred to as prostitutes by their family members and in-laws.*

Hope Rising

1. **Traditional Birth Attendants and Safe Practices:** Partner with local leaders and Traditional Birth Attendants to enhance their skills in safe delivery practices and educate them about the dangers of female genital mutilation.

2. **Midwife Training and Community Outreach:** Collaborate with Maternity Africa to train midwives in safe childbirth practices and engage in community outreach to identify and support pregnant girls in local communities.

3. **Responsible Fatherhood:** Mobilize and raise awareness among partners of young mothers, encouraging them to take on responsible and active roles in the lives of the young mothers and their children. Also, advocate for their inclusion in program activities.

4. **Advocate for Education Policy:** Advocate for the development, dissemination, and enforcement of clear national policies and guidelines that facilitate the safe return of young mothers to school.

5. **Childcare in Skill Training:** Integrate day-care and Early Childhood Development services into vocational skills training programs, enabling young mothers to gain valuable skills while ensuring the education and care of their children.

6. **Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services:** Improve access and availability of healthcare services, with a focus on providing accurate and high-quality sexual and reproductive health information and services.

7. **Link to Vocational Training Centres:** Connect young mothers with vocational and technical centres to prepare them for the job market or to empower them to create their own income-generating activities.

8. **Cultural Engagement:** Engage community members, clan leaders, and opinion leaders in critical discussions about cultural practices that oppress girls and women. Seek ways to preserve culture while promoting fairness and justice for women and girls.

9. **Promoting Girls' Rights:** Engage local leaders and partners in promoting girls' rights, enabling them to actively participate in available programs and work towards building dignified lives for themselves and their children.

Stories from the girls

Girls A: "I was married at the age of 16, and now I'm 20 years old with two children. My husband was a stranger to me when we got married. I can't foresee where my life will take me from here. My son is ill, and my husband is in Nairobi. Apart from sporadic financial support, I haven't seen him since my second child was just two weeks old. Now my second child is nine months old. Taking care of my kids would be easier if I could have more cattle and engage in agriculture. This way, I would have more resources for myself and my children."

Girl B: When I was 17, in the middle of my second year in secondary school, I became pregnant. My dreams of completing secondary school were shattered, and I became a source of disappointment to my family because I didn't turn out to be the daughter they had envisioned. The guy responsible for my pregnancy refused to take any responsibility for me or our child. If I had role models or better knowledge about reproductive health, I might have made safer choices. If I had a supportive social network that could care for my son, I might consider returning to school."

Girl C: "I work tirelessly in the fields, tend to our livestock, and handle the household's finances. However, I am obligated to hand over all the money I earn to my husband. Unfortunately, my partner doesn't consistently prioritize our family's needs, and I have no one to voice my concerns to. Sadly, I endure frequent physical abuse, including beatings, when we disagree or when I return home late from my daily work."Inaumiza kwamba sina sauti wala maamuzi, wakati mwingine napigwa hata mbele ya mwanangu (it is very painful because I feel voiceless and at times my husband beasts me in front of my child).

Listening: Formal and Informal Structures

3

Partners engaged with both formal and informal structures through key informant interviews to gather their insights into the situation and challenges faced by young mothers in their communities. They also assessed the availability and effectiveness laws and policies and social services. Additionally, they proposed potential interventions/recommendations to enhance the wellbeing of young mothers.

3.1 Perspectives of formal and informal structures in Korogocho, Nairobi, Kenya

In Korogocho, KOCH Cluster engaged Senior Chief, Sub-county Children's Officer, the National Police Service, the Sub-director for Education and Sub-County Public Health Officer, resident committee, teenage fathers and parents.

Issues affecting young mothers and service delivery

- There is high dependency of young mothers on civil society organizations' projects (such as feeding programs) for sustenance.

- Some Charitable Children's Institutions (CCI's) are created for selfish reasons and there's very little gain to the community they claim to serve. The government is considering closing down CCIs that do not offer the services they purport to offer.

- There are Inadequate funds and resources to support investigations of cases of abuse of children.

- Community engagements are usually disrupted by youth/ young men who feel left out of what looks like lucrative projects that target only girls.

- There is too much bureaucracy involved in the education sector, making it difficult to engage schools.

- Community members are highly dependent on aid as a result of high levels of poverty and insecurity. In this environment, girls are at risk of violence, drug abuse and crime as they try to make ends meet.

- There are limited Government services (such as schools, health facilities, reproductive health, early childhood development) in the community leading to inaccessibility and poor-quality services as the few available are overstretched. Many young people shy away from accessing available services because of the attitudes of service providers.

- The maternity ward in Korogocho is poorly equipped and therefore does not adequately serve young mothers. Most of the services available are private which are beyond the abilities of the girls to pay.

- There is poor coordination across various government sectors mandated to address issues affecting young mothers, leading to confusion among the many different actors addressing the same issue with conflicting approaches. This results in poor resource allocation, as some issues are left unattended while others are addressed by more than one ministry.

- Young mothers and their children suffer from malnutrition due to poverty and lack of awareness about proper nutrition.

- Some parents hide their daughters or send them to stay with relatives in rural areas, once they discover that they are pregnant, only to return after delivery. This limits their access to maternal health services because they are limited in rural areas.

- Teenage boys who make the girls pregnant deny responsibility because they fear to be ashamed. Some have children with multiple girls in the same community and have no employment/income generating activities for provide for the young mothers and their children.

- Some of the young mothers come from families with a history of teenage pregnancy. The parents are also busy trying to make ends meet that they do not have time guide and support their children/ girls, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of teenage pregnancy and vulnerability. Some parents find topics on sexuality difficult to have with their girls. Some parents are aware that sexual violence against girls is happening in homes but feel powerless to address it.

Recommendations

1. Train staff at government hospitals on youth friendly services to enhance their ability to service young mothers better.

2. Train Traditional Birth Attendants and first responders in safe motherhood to be able to address minor issues that may not require hospital visits. Additionally, they can assist in monitoring pregnant adolescents and provide necessary guidance, including proper nutrition during pregnancy and after delivery.

3. Establish and raise awareness about effective

referral pathways so that girls know where to access the services they need based on individual circumstances.

4. Conduct further research to gain a better understanding of the underlying causes of teenage pregnancy and child marriage, which can then inform interventions/strategies.

5. Foster partnerships with CCIs, local leaders, village committees (Mayumba Kumi) to monitor young mothers and ensure they access services.

6. Enhance the capacity of the gender desk at the police station to provide child -friendly services.

7. For security purposes, civil society organizations should notify the police in advance of their events in the community to prevent potential risks to life associated with disruptions by young men who feel left out.

8. Support investigations into cases involving abuse of young mothers, as these cases often fail due to limited resources.

9. Implement sustainable interventions with young mothers for greater and meaningful impact.

10. Partner with government officials, support coordination of inter-ministerial activities and leverage their technical support and structures to sustain interventions for young mothers.

11. Integrate nutrition interventions for pregnant girls, young mothers and their babies to improve their nutrition status.

12. Target mother's in-laws with interventions due to their power and influence in the community, aiming to empower both their sons and daughters in-laws.

3.2 Perspectives of formal and informal structures in Arusha, Tanzania

In Arusha, Jamii Yetu Cluster spoke and listened to Non-Governmental Organizations, Teachers, Government Officials, traditional leaders, religious leaders, parents, Bodaboda (Motorbike riders) and Traditional Birth Attendants (Wakunga).

Issues affecting young mothers and service delivery

1. The school re-entry policy allows re-entry of girls who have been out of school for up to two years. However, it does not specifically address the needs of adolescent mothers or girls with disabilities, who may require special considerations such as access to day care or flexible schedules to attend school while caring for their children. Additionally, parental consent is required for girls to return to school under this policy.

2. In 2022, the government released guideline for the return of girls to school, but further work and alignment are needed, as these guidelines are not reflected in existing policies and have not been fully implemented yet.

3. There are other contradicting acts such as the Child act which states that a child is anyone 18yrs and below is a child, while the marriage act states that child under 18yrs can be married with the consent of the parents.

4. There are contradictions in the legal framework regarding the age of consent. The Child Act defines a child as an individual under 18 years of age, while the Marriage Act allows children below 18 years to marry with parental consent.

5. There is limited ECD services; there is one ECD center serving three wards with 10 villages, which are far from each other. Therefore, not all young mothers/children can be served by that ECD center.

6. The community's cultural norms, beliefs, and practices are deeply ingrained in its cultural fabric, contributing to violence against women and girls, including early marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence. This leads to school dropout, early pregnancy, and perpetuates a

vicious cycle of violence and vulnerability.

7. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is prevalent in the community and is sometimes intertwined with the culture. Consequently, GBV is not recognized as a rights violation and is not reported to authorities. For instance, rape ceases to be an abuse if the man declares intentions to marry the girl and rape within the marriage is not recognized.

8. There are no linkages for girls to access vocational skills training, because most of them are married by the time they give birth and therefore their priority focus is to take care of their children and household. Consequently, even when these opportunities exist, they are likely to be excluded due to competing demands for their time.

9. Stigma and discrimination against young mothers are rampart because they are looked at as failures in the community. While the main expectation is for girls to get married and settle down, the girls who get pregnant before getting married are stigmatized and discriminated.

10. Women/girls have no space to be heard or make decisions unless they are senior women. Ordinary women/girls are treated the same as children and are to be seen not heard. So even when they have good suggestions, their contributions are not taken into consideration.

Recommendations

- Advocate for policy revisions that incorporate flexible school routines, recognizing the diverse needs of different categories of girls and implementing appropriate strategies to address their specific issues.

- Support advocacy efforts to amend the school return policy to align it with the provisions outlined in the guidelines.

- Engage and work with community, religious and cultural leaders to cultural norms and practices that negatively impact women and girls with the aim to shift the community value system towards respect and support for women and girls' rights.

- Create stronger linkages between informal and formal systems to link young women/girls who experience violence to protection, justice and psycho-social support.

- Sensitise the community members and young women/girls about women/girls' rights so they can recognize abuse, challenge, report and address it.

- Support girls/young women to acquire entrepreneurship skills relevant to their local setting, to enable them start income generating activities to earn income to meet their needs and those of their children.

- Create safe spaces for girls to express their views without judgment from parents, society, schools, other parties. Also ensure that their women/girls voices are sought and considered in matters that concern them.

3.3 Perspectives of formal and informal structures in Buza, Tanzania

Msichana Cluster spoke to health workers, community influencers, Local Government leaders, religious leaders, community social workers and Boda-boda (Motorbike riders). Below are their views about the situation of young mothers in Buza community and access to services.

Issues affecting young mothers and service delivery

- There is a misconception that girls in Buza do not value education, possibly due to cultural practices promoting early marriage and early exposure to sexual activities. Girls may also lack foresight due to a lack of role models, as the plight of older girls and women appears to be similar.

- Girls often fall victim to negative peer influences and group dynamics, which can lead to teenage pregnancy. They may feel compelled to conform to what others are doing in order to fit in or be perceived as "cool."

- Parents' marital problems (e.g. separations or divorce, makes girls vulnerable as they must suddenly take on family responsibilities, including providing for their siblings. This can sometimes lead to transactional sex, this a risk of early pregnancy.

- Young mothers face economic challenges in raising their children alone. This cycle may repeat when these young mothers themselves become parents at a young age.

- Many girls and women face sexual harassment when seeking employment. It can be difficult to secure work without offering sexual favours to those in charge of the hiring process.

- There is a high prevalence of Gender-Based Violence, with girls who have had children and women being subjected to physical abuse or sexual assault.

Recommendations

- Promote and build capacity for positive parenting, so that parents can take responsibility for their daughter's protection and empowerment.

- Provide life skills and entrepreneurship trainings to young mothers to empower them to start income generating activities and to achieve financial independence, while equipping them with essential life skills to navigate their motherhood and marriage circumstances.

- Create opportunities for girls to return to school, including vocational training for those interested in gaining skills for entrepreneurship.

- Establish and support safe spaces for teenage mothers to come together and discuss topics that are important to them, providing them with a supportive environment.

3.4 Perspectives of formal and informal structures in Siaya, Kenya

Siaya Cluster engaged with the chief and members of the county assembly, teachers, Civil Society Organisations, Community Health Workers, parents/caregivers, Boda-Boda riders, and religious leaders. Below are their views:

Issues affecting young mothers and service delivery

- There is an increase in teenage pregnancy in various parts of the county. Some of the reasons could be the failure to educate their children about sex and sexuality; boda-boda riders who demand for sex from young girls whom they ride to school on credit, after their parents fail to pay; exposure of young girls to sexual information and activity through online activity and social media;

- The growing trend of individualism, as people mind less of others and therefore diminishes the values of communal living and responsibility for protection of girls.

- The re-entry of young mothers into schools is hindered by stigma in both community and school environments, as well as a lack of social support for childcare, which would enable them to concentrate on their studies. Some parents intentionally withhold their support from their daughters as a form of punishment for early sexual activity.

- Teachers contend that they do not have the required skills to handle young mothers who have returned to school; leaving them unsure whether to treat them as children or adults.

- Lack of income generating options compels young mothers to engage in transactional sex or prostitution to be able to support their children.

- Several civil society programs target young

mothers, but the problem persists. It's unclear whether these programs are effectively addressing the issue or inadvertently contributing to it, as some girls may become pregnant to participate in these programs.

- Young mothers delay to access antenatal care, thus increasing risks of pregnancy complications

- There is a reliance on "quacks" (untrained personnel) to conduct abortions, which increase risks of complications (including death. Unfortunately, some of these abortions are procured with the support of parents/caregivers.

- Some parents/caregivers want to talk on behalf of the young mothers, rather than allowing them to express themselves, which can lead to misrepresentation of their views.

- The shame and stigma associated with early pregnancy compels parents to send their girls to villages where access to maternal health services is limited, thus increasing the risk of complications.

Recommendations

- Investigate the underlying causes of the increasing teenage pregnancies in the county, despite government and civil society interventions. Reflect on the existing approaches, why they have failed, and identify potential alternative strategies.

- Integrate mental health and wellness into programs for young women to help them address stress and depression related to early pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare.

- Mobilize, guide, and empower male champions among parents/caregivers and partners to promote and support young mothers' safe return to school, offering real-life examples of the benefits of male support.

- Conduct community awareness campaigns (barazas) to facilitate discussions and identification of solutions for teenage pregnancy within the community.

- Create linkages with referral pathways to link young mothers to available economic and psycho-social support services.

- Integrate daycare/early childhood education into schools, communities, and vocational training centers to facilitate the return of girls to school and enable their participation in skills training and other social and economic empowerment activities.

- Train and guide teachers on how to support young mothers and to create a safe and conducive learning environment for them to settle back in school.

- Promote partnerships and collaborations that consolidate resources, avoiding one-off programs and making it easier to sustain initiatives targeting young mothers.

- Mainstream the issues of young mothers into existing policy frameworks, recognising their unique needs. This inclusion will ensure that they are considered in government and other actors' efforts, including budget provisions at the county level.

- Offer young mothers nutrition and nurturing care to ensure the well-being and healthy growth of their children.

- Provide age-appropriate sex education to girls to raise awareness about the issues and risks they may face and the dangers of early sexual activity. This will help build their skills and confidence to make informed decisions.

- Support girls who experience GBV in pursuing justice. This will send a signal to community members that abuse will be dealt with, with seriously and also encourage others to report.

Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund

Ending Violence, Building Power

Block 244 Plot 1963, Diplomate Rise Muyenga
P. O. BOX 32387, Kampala, Uganda.
Tel.: (+256) 393 216 519
Email: info@crvpf.org