

RYCULTURE HEALTH AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Youth Champions Network



Leveraging the power of youth networks to advance access to quality
sexual and reproductive health information and services

Report on Menstrual Hygiene Campaign

28th May 2022

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Acknowledgement

Ryculture Health and Social Innovation acknowledges and applauds the efforts of Mwarakaya Youth Initiative, Uhembo Primary School, Winam Chanua Dada CBO (CHADALA), New Dawn CBO and County Youth and Adolescent Network (CYAN) for their dedication and contribution in the execution of the Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Day 2022 campaign. We also acknowledge and appreciate Maisha Meds for their support and contribution towards this especially in collaborating with CYAN in their campaign at Sindo Town, Homabay County.

We acknowledge and appreciate generous donors who supported this campaign through donations both in kind and in cash with a total net collection of **Kshs. 33,450**.

Acronyms

| | |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| AGYW | Adolescent Girls and Young Women |
| GBV | Gender Based Violence |
| HTS | HIV Testing Services |
| MHM | Menstrual Hygiene Management |
| MH | Menstrual Hygiene |
| MHH | Menstrual Health and Hygiene |
| SRHR | Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| YVN | Youth Voices Network |

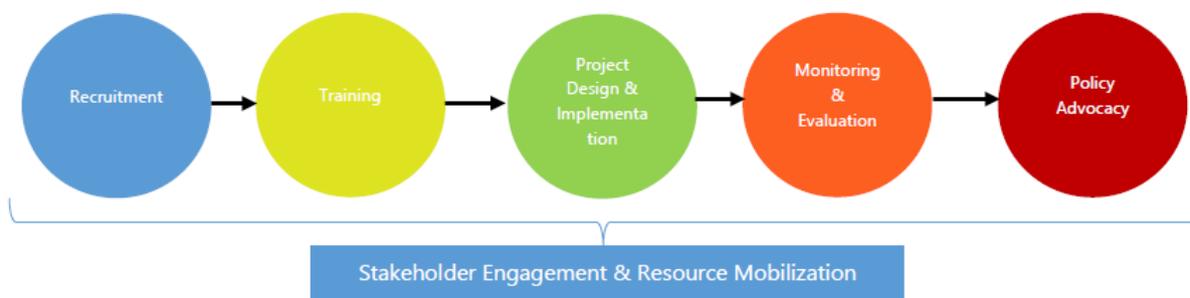
Background

Ryiculture Health and Social Innovation is a forward-looking social enterprise committed to improving access to quality healthcare service and promoting human capital development through health research, health communication, health systems strengthening and human capacity development. In line with our mission to collaboratively work with stakeholders in the Kenyan healthcare space and amplify contributions of each partner for sustainable, impactful execution of global health projects as well as to inform policies to be responsive to industry needs, we developed the YouTH Voices Network (YVN) Programme, an initiative aimed at equipping young people with requisite skills, competencies and enabling them access resources & opportunities required in the realization of their goals & aspirations.

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Youth Champions Network, an initiative under YVN, works with youth-led organizations and youth leaders with an inclination to advancing access to quality sexual and reproductive health services in their communities. We collaborate with like-minded organizations from non-governmental organizations; private sector players to public institutions to train, equip and amplify the impact of these youth led initiatives sustainably.

We engage youth-led organizations and youth leaders working on sexual reproductive health and rights related concerns in their communities with an established need, build capacity in them through trainings, collaboratively design interventions with them and other stakeholders for implementation in the communities; document, monitor and evaluate the outcomes of these interventions. Insights gained are collated and used in policy advocacy towards evidence-based, practice-driven policies for SRHR in the country

Operating Model



Executive Summary

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Youth Champions Network program in the first phase of work saw the recruitment of 12 youth leaders and youth-led organizations working to advance access to sexual and reproductive health services across the country. The subsequent phase of the programme served as an implementation phase, following the trainings that were undertaken during the first phase.

Guided by the overarching theme, *"Leveraging the power of youth networks to advance access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services"*, Ryculture seeks to bolster a sustainable, all-inclusive and youth-centric SRHR network and interventions. Subsequently, in a bid to commemorate Menstrual Hygiene Day, the selected organisations, with the support of Ryculture Health and Social Innovation, provided Sexual and Reproductive Health information and services to their respective communities. The organisations that participated as captured in this report were: Mwarakaya Youth Initiative, Uhembo Primary School, Winam Chanua Dada CBO (CHADALA), New Dawn CBO and County Youth and Adolescent Network (CYAN).

This report summarises success stories, lessons learnt, challenges and recommendations in SRHR from the activities undertaken on the 28th May 2022, as reported by the various partners. The highlights of this report serve as a wakeup call and provides an avenue for involvement and continued dialogue among private sector, policy makers, youth, the community and government, in tackling the addressed challenges in SRHR.

Objectives

- To provide access to MHM information and services.
- To break the taboos and end the stigma surrounding menstruation by raising awareness about the challenges regarding access to menstrual products, education about menstruation and period-friendly sanitation facilities.
- To provide free dignity packs and free sanitary pads to vulnerable adolescents.
- To provide free integrated sexual reproductive health services.

Introduction

Menstrual Hygiene Day is a global awareness day that seeks to highlight the significance of menstrual hygiene management and raise awareness on challenges faced in a bid to access information, menstrual products and proper disposal of the same. The day is commemorated on the 28th of May every year because menstrual cycles average 28 days in length and people menstruate an average of five days each month (May is the fifth month of the year).¹

The space of menstrual health, in many communities in Kenya, has long been clouded by stigma, taboo informed by socio-cultural beliefs, sextortion and lack of access to menstrual products and proper disposal of the used menstrual products. A situational analysis that was commissioned by the Ministry of Health revealed the issues bedeviling women and girls in a bid to access proper Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). Some girls admitted to transactional sex for pads, inability to afford menstrual products, lack of information on MHM and poor sanitation facilities leading to improper disposal of sanitary products. Consequently, this directly infringes on fundamental human rights of women and girls collectively: right to education, right to sanitation.²

In a bid to address the gaps in MHM, The Ministry of Health Kenya came up with MHM policies to facilitate efficient and sustainable MHM interventions. The policies of interest are;

1. **Policy Objective 1** - To establish an enabling legal and regulatory environment for MHM at both National and County levels.
2. **Policy Objective 2** -To ensure that myths, taboos and stigma around menstruation are addressed by providing women, girls, men and boys access to information on menstruation, and
3. **Policy Objective 3** - To ensure women and girls have access to safe and hygienic menstrual products, services and facilities.

Under the devolved function, county governments are mandated to include MHM in The County Integrated Development Plan and provide budgetary allocation for MHM activities. Unfortunately, implementation is a big issue, given that sanitary towels take time to be distributed to schools vis-a-vis the natural occurrence of menstruation on a monthly basis. Similarly, community members lack information on basic MHM activities.

¹ Menstrual Hygiene Day 2022: <https://www.unfpa.org/events/menstrual-hygiene-day>

² Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy 2019 – 2030, Kenya. <https://www.health.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MHM-Policy-11-May-2020.pdf>

Such challenges call for a holistic and integrated approach towards addressing MHM. It calls for involvement of not only the government but also youth-led organisations and community leaders to provide information on SRHR particularly MHM at a grassroots level. Ryculture, as response to addressing menstrual hygiene management and SRHR at large (*through the SRHR Youth Champions Network*) supported and collaborated with the aforementioned organisations to provide SRHR information and services and menstrual products to the community and women and girls respectively.

In culmination of this project, we have established a standing partnership with Uhembo Primary School through teacher Joyce Odhiambo to support through mentorship and donation of menstrual hygiene management products on a rolling basis as we structure sustainable ways of ensuring reliable access to sanitary towels for the girls.

Organisation Based Activities/ Reporting

1. Mwarakaya Youth Initiative.

Mwarakaya Youth Initiative is a youth led group meant to proactively help youth realize their full potential by enhancing participation as we find solutions to Adolescent and youth challenges and advocating for Access to Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR) services including reporting and responding to GBV as well as child protection & Youth Economic Empowerment.

Proceedings

Mwarakaya Youth Initiative commemorated Menstrual Hygiene Day by undertaking two activities that targeted:

- i. Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW). The team provided SRH information and menstrual products (sanitary towels) to the adolescent girls at Vwevvesi Primary School. They were able to reach 120 girls aged 15-24 years, courtesy of Ryculture Health and Social Innovation support to the initiative through donation of funds towards the purchase of sanitary materials.



A situational analysis that was carried out by The Ministry of Health in Kenya, revealed that mothers are the primary source of information on menstruation, followed by teachers. Unfortunately, parents tend to focus more on avoiding teenage pregnancy thus leaving out menstrual hygiene. Boys and men, also consider it shameful to speak about menstruation. As a way to contributing to efforts on MHM information access, the girls were provided with information on **menstrual health management**. This entailed a detailed illustration on how to properly put on pads, proper disposal of menstrual products for a safe and healthy environment, and access to sanitation facilities. There was a call for action for advocacy for

safe and hygienic menstrual management and dispensation of the same information to men and boys.

Secondly, there were discussions **on breaking the bias and demystifying narratives around menstruation**. Various communities have various narratives informed by socio-cultural beliefs (women/ girls are considered 'unclean'), leading to stigmatisation of menstruating girls. As a result, the stigma comes with shame and girls often miss school which infringes on their right to education. Periods are not shameful rather a natural occurrence in the female body. Menstrual hygiene should be treated as a rights issue. Every girl should be able to access safe and hygienic menstrual management without stigma or shame. Additionally, they spoke about **health conditions associated with menstruation**. Lack of proper safe and hygienic menstruation health management – particularly proper menstrual product usage and disposal – could lead to health conditions. Usage of toilet paper, pieces of clothing etc. could lead to conditions such as urinary tract infections, toxic shock syndrome and other vaginal infections. Similarly improper disposal of menstrual products could lead to health conditions.

- ii. **Community Engagement** in addressing SRHR. This involved a dialogue with key members of the community, which took place at Mwarakaya Primary School. The dialogue was representative of key community members and involved; 6 youth (3 male and 3 female), 2 kaya leaders, 2 imams, 2 pastors, 2 teachers, 2 administrators (village elders represented the chief and assistant chief) and 4 elderly people. This session was paramount as it addressed the importance of community engagement in addressing SRHR. There's need to approach SRHR from the grassroot level that way it transcends to the larger community; in churches, mosques, in leadership and at the household level. Relaying information to community members helps demystify myths, stigma and taboo associated with menstruation. The discussions involved how community leaders could contribute towards safety of adolescents and access to SRHR, including how to respond to cases of gender-based violence. They also discussed about ignorance of parents contributing to early marriages and teen pregnancy in Kilifi south. Parents should be more involved in sex education with their children to mitigate cases of teenage pregnancy. They equally tackled governance in SRHR- whereby community leaders should contribute to safe and hygienic environment for adolescent girls and young women by mobilisation of resources and by pushing for proper allocation and disposal of menstrual products.

2. Uhembo Primary School

Joyce Odhiambo, a teacher at Uhembo Primary School laid bare the challenges pupils at Uhembo Primary School face in a bid to access proper MHM information, facilities and products. She mentioned **period poverty** as the major challenge in MHM. Some of the girls come from a poor background and live in very deplorable conditions. Affording basic needs is a challenge and therefore limits access to sanitary towels, since the money gotten would rather be spent on catering for basic needs. These girls are therefore forced to use tissue papers and pieces of cloth during their periods, making them susceptible to vaginal infections. The teacher revealed that sometimes she is forced to buy some of the girls' sanitary towels from her pockets and this is not sustainable.

Case:

The teacher cited an instance of one of her pupils who lives with her mother (single mother living with epilepsy) and due to her medical condition; they are forced to live with a distant relative - elderly woman (Dana) - following the passing of the maternal grandmother. The household of six struggles to put food on the table as "Dana" can only sell sugarcane by the road side. This girl can barely afford uniform that can last for two years. Therefore purchasing/ affording sanitary towels that are to be used on monthly basis is not a priority.

Secondly, girls face **stigma associated with menstruation**. Consequently, this leads to shame and low self-esteem. They are therefore forced to resort to absenteeism during their periods which negatively impacts on their grades (deteriorating grades/ poor performance). As a result, some are even forced to completely drop out of school.

Most girls in primary experience menarche and there is **insufficient access to information on pre-menarche** that prepares these girls for their first period. Being a new experience, they lack information on MHM with regards to menstrual hygiene and proper disposal of menstrual products. Girls using reusable pads or pieces of cloth, lack information on how to properly wash them and even with information, there's **inadequate supply of water**.

"It is high time that menstrual health be treated with the importance it clearly deserves. After all it is only from this that we end up having knowledgeable and empowered women who have a say on their reproductive health. If shelved, then definitely a huge crack will emerge that will only leave us having a huge population of women with a damaged self-esteem and hence mental health problems."

Joyce Odhiambo, Teacher, Uhembo Primary School.



In the spirit of marking Menstrual Hygiene Day, the teacher availed sanitary towels (sufficient to serve them for three (3) months i.e., 2 pieces per month to a total of 20 girls from needy backgrounds, courtesy of Ryculture Health and Social Innovation. They also created awareness on menstrual health management and this served as a strategy of creating a paradigm shift around menstruation.

3. Chadala

Chanua Dada CBO (CHADALA) is an LBQ women-led organization that seeks to help improve the health and livelihood of indigenous young women and girls in the rural areas of Nyanza Kenya, through facilitation of Arts, Social Activities, Advocacy and Networking with focus on SRHR, SGBV, Mental Health and Substance Abuse among LBQ community.

Lessons Learnt/ Challenges.

CHADALA hosted 10 Teenage mothers from Dunga and Nanga Region (Rural Nyanza) on menstrual health day. From their discussions with their rights holders- the teen mothers- it was noted that **period poverty** is a major challenge affecting young women and girls in their diversity in rural Nyanza and her informal settlements. Accessing menstrual hygiene products is a problem as the **dignity products available are costly** and in many instances the vulnerable young women are forced to use clothes, rags or cotton wool which is not hygienic and can cause infections.

Some of the young women have sadly been forced to exchange **sex for sanitary towels**, something that negatively impacts on their self-esteem and is regarded shameful. A few of the young mothers are forced to stay indoors during their menses, something that hinders them from fending for their young families.

The **notion that women are “unclean”** during this time of the month is still deeply rooted in rural Nyanza, with many men including the young women’s partners considering it a **“taboo”** to serve them food during their menstruation period. Many shy away from attending church as they are perceived to be “unclean”, thus being denied the freedom to worship and associate.



Remarks

The young women were very happy with the donation and thanked the sponsors for their kind support as the sanitary towels given were enough to last a period of two months even as they mobilise resources to purchase more. The idea of having a sanitary dispenser was welcomed by the rights holders as they will now have access to sanitary towels whenever in need. This will save them from the vice of having to trade their bodies for sanitary towels, as it further exposes them to HIV/AIDS and STIs which is on the rise in rural Nyanza Kenya.

4. County Youth and Adolescent Network (CYAN)

CYAN Kenya under the partnership of Ryculture [SRHR Youth Champions Network \(SRHR-](#)

[YCN](#)), a network of youth leaders and youth-led organizations working in their communities to address reproductive health challenges alongside other partners organized an integrated event to commemorate Menstrual Hygiene Day by providing different reproductive health services. The event was held in Sindo town; Suba South sub county- Homabay County.

The partners present were:

- Population Services (PS) Kenya
- Mild May International Kenya
- Maisha Meds
- Ministry of Health
- Homabay CSOs Network
- Genlink CBO

Activities of MH Day

Poor menstrual hygiene caused by a lack of education on the issue, persisting taboos and stigma, limited access to hygienic menstrual products and poor sanitation infrastructure undermines the educational opportunities, health and overall social status of women and girls around the world. As a result, millions of women and girls are kept from reaching their full potential. Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH Day) is a global advocacy platform that brings together the voices and actions of non-profits, government agencies, individuals, the private sector and the media to promote good menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) for all women and girls. It is meant to advance menstruation as a biological process so that people can menstruate without being cast out or missing out, without feeling fear or shame and without being treated like less or exposed to vulnerability. It also raises awareness of period poverty, or the inability to afford the menstrual supplies needed to manage health and hygiene with dignity. Besides, it is a day to `break the silence, raise awareness and change negative social norms around MHH, and engages decision-makers to increase the political priority and catalyze action for MHH, at global, national and local levels.

As response to MH Day, CYAN together with the aforementioned partners provided reproductive health services to the community in Sindo Town. The following strategies were employed:

i. Peer to peer learning

The participants went to breakout sessions for reproductive health education, whereby a male facilitator guided a discussion with the ladies while a lady facilitator engaged with men. This was to strengthen male involvement in menstruation matters, and as such, it is

not only left as ladies' affair. For purposes of monitoring and evaluation- response towards seeking different services, as well as to enhance accountability, participant forms were issued to register everyone at the event, while the other list was recorded at the service delivery tent, this was to help track the total number of participants present, against those who received services.

ii. Offering of SRH Services

The following services were offered:

- Contraceptive and Menstrual Health Management Services

Homabay County is among the leading counties on issues of teenage pregnancy within the country. This is not just statistics but rather a sad reflection of adolescent girls whose academics and careers were cut short and their dreams shuttered because of being subjected to early and forced marriage. Similarly, girls engage in transactional sex for pads, resulting in teenage pregnancies. One of the ways to overcome these challenges is through contraceptive uptake, and for these reasons eligible participants were offered contraceptives and information on contraceptives was shared. Dignity packs and sanitary pads were also offered to women and girls.



- HIV Testing Services (HTS)

Kenya has shown tremendous strides in prevention, care and treatment to reduce the national prevalence to 4.5%, with young people having 62% of all new infections. The prevalence has been recorded in many counties across Kenya with various age groups. Homabay County has been described as a "Hotspot" of HIV infection at an estimated 20.7%, which is 4 times higher than the national overall prevalence³ attributed to the high incidence rates among key populations; occupational subpopulation of sex workers, fish traders and

³ Homabay County Report on the HIV Implementing Partners Online Reporting System (HIPORS) for the Financial Year 2016/2017: <https://nacc.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Homa-Bay.pdf>

beach dwellers. As HIV continues to be a public concern, we integrated HTS Services during this day so that participants may be aware of HIV information and their status as well. In addition to this, participants were screened for STIs



- Cervical Cancer Screening

Kenya has a population of 16.2 million women ages 15 years and older who are at risk of developing cervical cancer. Current estimates indicate that every year 5236 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 3211 die from the disease.⁴ Cervical cancer ranks as the 2nd most frequent cancer among women in Kenya and the 2nd most frequent cancer among women between 15 and 44 years of age. It is the leading cause of cancer morbidity and mortality among women. Although screening is an effective prevention method, uptake is low among eligible women. It is against this background that we integrated free cervical cancer screening services.

The table below provides a summary of the services offered.

| No. | Type of service | Total number who received services |
|-----|---------------------------|---|
| 1. | Contraceptive | 86 |
| 2. | HIV Testing | 31 (1 person tested positive; was linked) |
| 3. | STIs Screening | 22 |
| 4. | TB | 4 |
| 5. | SGBV Cases handled | 4 |
| 6. | Cervical cancer screening | 4 |
| 7. | PREP | 1 |
| 8. | Dignity packs distributed | 5 |
| 9. | Sanitary pads distributed | 227 |

⁴ Kenya Human Papillomavirus and Related Cancers. Factsheet 2021: https://hpvcentre.net/statistics/reports/KEN_FS.pdf

Challenges:

There was a bulge in the number of participants than expected, which prompted the team to reduce the number of pads per individual from three to two each so as to accommodate the numbers.

5. New Dawn CBO

New Dawn CBO joined the world in commemorating MH Day by holding an MHM information dissemination program at Mawe Mabomu Primary School, In Kilifi, Rabai Sub-

County. They were able to reach 50 female participants.

They were guided by the following objectives:

- To break the silence on Menstrual taboo
- To return back the confidence of girls that have been lost due to lack of proper information
- To share an eventful and educative day with the girls

Activity summary/ Key activity outcomes

The activity was to be able to reach as many girls as possible to discuss the challenges that they go through during their periods and to provide a safe space for them for the day. It was also aimed at providing the girls with sanitary pads.



Activity outcome

The girls were responsive and active during the activity and their participation was very good. They were happy with the pads that they were given and were appreciative.

Challenges

- Adolescents lack sexual reproductive health and rights information.
- There is a huge gap on academic mentorship for the young students.
- Female students have difficulties in accessing sanitary towels hence negatively affecting their studies.
- Lack of proper hygienic amenities such as bathing soaps, water and inner wears.

Lessons learnt

- Sexual reproductive health and rights information is very essential to every young person because it entails issues that they encounter every now and then.

- There is need for more stakeholders to come on board and partner with New Dawn Organization so as many young girls' lives will be positively impacted.
- Menstrual Hygiene is very important yet our young girls still do not have the sufficient and correct information about it thus the need to do more mentorship in schools and the community at large.

Conclusion

From the above narratives as provided by the respective organisations, it is evident that MHM is not as its best. The key challenges that were highlighted and cut across the board were; period poverty, lack of proper WASH services, stigmatisation, myths and taboos around menstruation and lack of information. These challenges have negative socio-economic impacts.

These gaps could be attributed to partial and non-comprehensive implementation of MHM policies that are in place by the national and county government. There's need for effective monitoring and evaluation of these policies to see to it that women and girls have access to MHM services. Dissemination of information is equally important to demystify myths around menstruation. Every girl and woman should be able to access sanitary products, without facing stigmatisation and in a safe and hygienic space. Menstrual health should be treated as a rights issue as it directly impacts on the rights and freedoms of individuals that lack information and services i.e., right to education and freedom of worship just to mention a few. It is therefore paramount that MHM issues are addressed in order to narrow the gap in information and service delivery.

Recommendations

- There is need to implement existing policies on MHM with effective monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Sustainable interventions should be put in place such as sanitary pads dispensers particularly in schools, effective WASH services in communities.
- There should be adequate dissemination of information on MHM; provided to both males and females to help demystify societal 'narratives' on menstruation and to prepare girls for their first time.
- There's need for more stakeholders to come on board and continue the dialogue, support and push for interventions.
- Periodically hold integrated community health outreaches.

Pictorials



Photos of Uhembo Primary School pupils receiving sanitary towels and information on MHM.
Photo Courtesy of Joyce Odhiambo, Uhembo Primary School



Photos of Mawe Mabomu Primary School pupils receiving sanitary towels, PHOTO courtesy of New Dawn CBO



Photos of Vwevvesi Primary Pupils and representative groups of the community receiving information on MH Photos courtesy of Mwarakaya Youth Initiative



Sindo town ladies receiving dignity kits. Photo courtesy of CYAN