

Quarterly Newsletter



Dr. Angela Akal

From the Editor

Welcome to our first edition of 2024.

As the quarter winds down, we take time to remind ourselves of the onerous task ahead. The many steps that partners for reproductive health justice are taking to expand the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights space for all women and girls in Africa.

At the Alliance, we continue to engage in capacity strengthening of the health care providers, advocacy for social justice and educating communities through grassroots organizations. We are seeing fruits of these efforts as we continue pull together and work with both the national and county governments as the duty bearers.

We appreciate the interconnectedness of often nuanced factors that affect access to basic health rights. We are adaptive and constantly improve interventions based on emerging evidence to stay the cause.

In this issue we share research findings that bring to the fore the nexus between climate impacts and health systems access to SRHR for pastoralist communities, the impact of capacity strengthening of care providers in increasing family planning commodity uptake, and strengthening grassroots organizations.

We invite you to enjoy the read.

Enhancing competencies among providers of family planning services



Ipas Africa alliance in collaboration with the Ministry of Health conducted a comprehensive training program for 32 Post Medical Abortion Contraceptives (PMAC) providers. The training aimed at developing provider-competencies in the provision of short-acting methods inclusive of DMPA IM and SC. Ultimately, this would expand access to high-quality Family Planning (FP) services through the pharmacy channel.

The providers received practical counseling training organized within various facilities. They were also introduced to the medical eligibility criteria tool, a valuable resource aiding in the assessment of clients with underlying conditions, thereby facilitating

informed decision-making regarding contraceptive methods. Documentation and reporting of FP services was emphasized to ensure that the services provided are systematically recorded and contribute to data-driven decisions and program improvement efforts.

The training has enhanced their skills and ability to effectively serve a diverse clientele. Providers have attended to 836 MA clients. Notably, 89.1% of these clients, totalling 745 individuals, opted for a post-abortion contraceptive method of their choice. This uptake demonstrates the effectiveness of the training in increasing access to post-abortion contraceptive services.



“
For most women, including women who want to have children, contraception is not an option; it is a basic health care necessity.”

— Louise Slaughter

Stakeholders reveal insights on climate-induced health challenges in Samburu County



In a recent stakeholder validation meeting held with community and stakeholders in Samburu East and Central Sub Counties, Ipas Africa Alliance shared critical findings of research conducted on the resilience of communities to access, and of the health system to provide comprehensive SRHR including contraceptives and safe abortion during climate change-induced extreme weather.

The meeting was attended by stakeholders including service providers, Community Health Volunteers (CHVs), local administrators, religious leaders, teachers, and health management teams, to reflect on the finding and address the emerging challenges.

The highlighted climate-change health impacts on communities include incidences of food poisoning and diarrhea attributed to the consumption of dead livestock, particularly camels. . Additionally, open defecation during migration led to an upsurge in cholera cases. On gender roles, men increasingly engaged in household chores while women ventured into economic activities such as sheep rearing and poultry farming.

Gender roles

The effects of climate change were not uniform across genders: Girls skipping school to avoid stigma associated with menstruation and women living with

disabilities facing challenges in accessing basic health services were commonly cited. On the other hand, limited resources during droughts and related stress make young men and school-going boys become casual labourers and resort to alcohol consumption. Cattle rustling-induced conflicts leave a trail of deaths. The widows remarry, leading to the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.

Adaptation Strategies

The stakeholders proposed the following adaptation strategies to the challenges: Men taking on additional responsibilities such as fetching water and setting aside animals for food and sale to raise funds for hospital bills and personal effects during a crisis; destocking large numbers of cattle and keeping drought-resistant livestock such as camels; providing life skills training to youth, including mechanics and carpentry, to diversify income sources; and ensuring gender parity in recruitment at health facilities to cater to the specific needs of both men and women.

Opportunities and Implications

The meeting identified opportunities for interventions, such as expanding livestock insurance and providing vocational training for youth. It recommended that the Ministry of Health address gaps in SRHR service provision and disseminate research findings to inform policy and programming.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging opportunities, stakeholders can work towards building resilient communities and health systems that prioritize the SRHR needs of all individuals, irrespective of gender or ability.



“School going girls opt for herding during their periods to avoid periods-related stigma, study reveals.”

“Contraceptives unlock one of the most dormant, but potentially powerful assets in development: women as decision-makers. When women have the power to make choices about their families, they tend to decide precisely what demographers, economists, and development experts recommend. They invest in the long-term human capital of their families.”

— Melinda Gates



Empowering communities through sexual and reproductive health initiatives

The 21st century is hailed as the age of information. However, access to comprehensive SRH information remains a critical challenge to the majority of women and girls from communities grappling with entrenched societal norms and persistent myths.

As part of its community advocacy and sensitization efforts, Ipas identified and trained SRH champions. These are young individuals, actively spreading awareness by conducting community discussions with young girls and women, engaging in dialogues at institutions, and organizing football tournaments to reach other young men with this crucial information.

Rural To Global and We Reach, community-based organizations, have played a significant role in this initiative. They served as the key channels for disseminating information to the champions, who in turn, raised awareness within their respective communities and institutions.

The community engagement focused on the following:

1. **Access to SRH information and services:** Ensuring that individuals have the necessary knowledge and resources to access SRH services.
2. **Challenging gender norms surrounding the ideal men and women and their impact on SRH decision-making:** Addressing stereotypes and expectations related to gender roles and how they influence decision-making in matters of SRH.
3. **Contraception for adolescent girls and access to safe abortion care:** Promoting safe and informed contraceptive choices for adolescent girls and ensuring access to safe abortion care when necessary.
4. **Violence against women and girls:** Raising awareness and working towards eliminating all forms of violence targeting women and girls, with a particular emphasis on SRHR issues.

Through in-depth discussions and



The dedication of the champions and their grassroots efforts serve as catalysts for change, igniting conversations and fostering a culture of openness and empowerment.

At a cross learning event, the team identified some challenges. The lack of alignment between CBOs and expected outcomes highlights the need for greater coordination and synergy in delivering SRH initiatives. Also, young adolescents face challenges in obtaining precise and reliable information about a variety of contraceptive methods including safe medical abortion services, further limiting their choices. This underscores the urgency of expanding access to comprehensive SRH services, particularly for marginalized communities.



Additionally, young men should intentionally be part of these conversations, recognizing their role in addressing issues such as early unintended pregnancies and gender-based violence. Through inclusivity and participation, these initiatives can effectively address the root causes of SRH disparities and promote gender equality.

Looking ahead, stakeholders agreed on the need to prioritize access to SRH information and contraception while also addressing gender norms and violence against women and girls.

By strengthening partnerships, enhancing community engagement, and expanding outreach efforts, this initiative will create lasting change and empower individuals to take control of their sexual and reproductive health.

dialogue sessions, participants confront deeply ingrained beliefs and societal attitudes that perpetuate harmful behaviors and restrict access to essential SRH services.

This initiative challenges the prevailing narratives that act as barriers to SRH education and access. From debunking misconceptions about contraceptive use to confronting harmful gender stereotypes, these efforts seek to create a more inclusive and informed society where individuals can make choices about their sexual and reproductive health free from stigma and judgment.

Grassroots organizations step up to greater roles in promoting SRH rights of women and girls

Ipas Africa Alliance collaborated with community-based organizations in Kakamega County to implement interventions aimed at greater enjoyment of SRHR by women and girls through enhanced bodily autonomy and agency, and reduced SRHR stigma.

The project achieves this through:

- Working to shift community norms that normalize and perpetuate early sexual debut, sexual violence, and denial of women's and girls' SRHR in East Africa.
- Cultivating a supportive county level environment that encourages dialogue and accommodates different perspectives on SRHR, including access to contraception and comprehensive abortion care, in East Africa.

- Increasing self-efficacy and agency among adolescents and young people in Kenya's Kakamega and Homa Bay Counties.
- Enhancing the capacity of grassroots CSO networks to advance SRHR and influence related policies at the country level in Kenya and Uganda.

In the brainstorming session, Rural to Global and Bumulusi developed a comprehensive set of innovative activities to achieve the four outcomes. The proposed activities will focus on creating community safe spaces for mother-to-mother and unsafe abortion survivors, engaging with media, collaborating with community health promoters, utilizing storytelling, holding community intergenerational dialogues,



Ideation with Bumulusi CBO Members

and school and church outreaches in partnership with relevant stakeholders at the community and county levels.

The proposed activities demonstrate a comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing community norms, fostering supportive environments, empowering individuals, and influencing policy changes. These initiatives will contribute to transforming societal norms and advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

“We gained valuable insights from my interaction with the Bumulusi Women Group. Their articulate discussion of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) issues and their unwavering determination to tackle the challenges faced by women and girls in Navakholo and surrounding areas left a lasting impression. Their commitment was not only impressive but also served as a source of encouragement for the broader cause.”

“Globally, young people –especially adolescents – do not have regular access to reliable, up-to-date information related to sexual and reproductive health, including contraception. **This information can help inform their decisions and potentially save lives.**”

– Jill Sheffield, Chair of FIGO’s Contraception and Family Planning Committee

#WorldContraceptionDay



Co-creation with Rural to Global organization

