

outcome HIGHLIGHTS

Youths in Dar es Salaam discuss the content of their videos on teen pregnancy.



Photo: C. Pfeiffer

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Voices of Youth

Tanzanian teens turn their own lens on teen pregnancy

In brief

Tanzania has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the world. NCCR North-South research looks at how adolescents in Tanzania handle reproductive health challenges. In the project described here, youths in Dar es Salaam and Mtwara Town planned, scripted, and acted in short dramatic videos about teen pregnancy and sexuality. The narrative medium enabled youths to depict their own experiences and gave adults a window into the problems they face. To spur creation of better interventions, the videos were shown and discussed with policymakers and practitioners in workshops. They are now used for reproductive-health interventions targeting adolescents and have aired on Tanzanian TV.



Research featured here was conducted in Tanzania

Teen pregnancy: a public health issue

Teen pregnancy is a major health concern, especially in developing countries, due to the high risk of complications, even death, for both mother and child. Tanzania has spearheaded many efforts to better understand and improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people. However, to create interventions that will effectively steer young people towards responsible parenthood, more knowledge is needed about their capacities as well as their social environment.

Resilience: focusing on adolescents' resources

NCCR North-South researchers apply a social resilience approach. It seeks to identify resources in youths' environment that enable them to avoid unwanted pregnancy. For this, a cross-sectional survey was conducted with more than 1,250 young women ages 15 to 19 in two separate rural and urban settings – Mtwara Town and Dar es Salaam, respectively. About 15% of these young women turned out to be pregnant or mothers.

One key finding was that the media, such as radio programmes and magazines, represent a very important source of information for young people looking for answers about sexual and reproductive issues. Two Tanzanian youth magazines – *Fema*, aimed at in-school youth, and *Si Mchezo!*, for out-of-school youth – are widely read. The two magazines present information about sexual and reproductive health in a way that appeals to young people. Youths are also invited to share their own experiences and questions. The interactive format appears very effective in engaging them.

Another finding was that parents are gaining in importance as sex educators in Tanzania. Traditionally, this was not the case. But due to changing family structures, girls and boys are increasingly turning to their parents with questions about sexual and reproductive health. This makes parents' knowledge and sensitive communication skills crucial, particularly regarding teen pregnancy.

Giving youth a voice...

To gain more vivid insights into young people's realities, a PAMS project was implemented (see box) in

Youths presenting their videos during a workshop with policymakers and practitioners in Dar es Salaam.



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which adolescents in two secondary schools in Dar es Salaam and Mtwara were invited to create short fictional videos on: (1) what they see as key reasons for teen pregnancy; (2) their main sources of information on how to avoid teen pregnancy.

After intense discussions, each youth group developed a screenplay for a story about negotiating sexuality and dealing with the risk of teen pregnancy. With the help of a professional video producer, they brought their screenplays to life.

The finished videos strikingly illustrate some of the common sexual pressures faced by Tanzanian youths. One clip, for example, shows a mother telling her teenage daughter to contribute to the household income by finding a so-called “sugar daddy” – a wealthy older man willing to support her financially in exchange for sex. Another video depicts a girl who has the courage to reject the sexual advances of a boy, who plies her with expensive gifts, thanks in part to the information she gains from a youth magazine. The videos portray the youths’ realities in a very direct, affecting manner.

... and making their voice heard

To ensure the videos reached key audiences, a workshop was organised that brought together youths and rel-

evant stakeholders, such as government representatives, national and international NGOs, and international donors. The young video makers were invited to present their clips and speak directly to policymakers. It was the first event of its kind to facilitate direct communication and interaction between policymakers, sexual-and-reproductive-health practitioners, and affected youths.

Youths as agents of change

Through the videos, the youths themselves became the protagonists of a campaign to improve their lives. Various international and national NGOs and donors expressed great interest in the videos. Several Tanzanian TV stations also aired them. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) recently agreed to finance screenings of the videos during outreach activities in four districts in Tanzania, inviting the young video makers to participate as agents of change. In addition to highlighting the communication strengths of a visual medium like video, the project also showed that print media – such as youth magazines – are a very powerful means of reaching young people. A similar PAMS project has already been launched in Ghana, involving production of a magazine by and for youths.

The videos can be downloaded from the following website: www.socialresilience.ch/reproductive-resilience/

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Researchers

- Constanze Pfeiffer, PhD
- Collins Ahorlu, PhD
- Joel Lehmann, PhD
- Richard Sambaiga, MA
- Alice Mbelwa, BA

Select partners

- Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH), Switzerland
- Videmus, Kenya and Switzerland
- Matatizo Production Company, Tanzania
- Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- Umoja Secondary School, Mtwara Town, Tanzania
- Msimbazi Secondary School, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- Centre for Training and Integrated Research in Arid and Semi-arid Lands Development (CETRAD), Kenya

Further reading

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Further information

Boniface Kiteme, PhD
Regional Coordination Office
East Africa
Nanyuki, Kenya
b.kiteme@africaonline.co.ke

Or contact Constanze Pfeiffer:
constanze.pfeiffer@unibas.ch

Outcome Highlights feature effective collaborations between researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and local communities in the NCCR North-South network.

Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes (PAMS)

are pilot projects designed to test NCCR North-South research in real-world settings. Developed jointly by researchers and local stakeholders, they aim to promote mutual learning and reveal paths to sustainability.

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