



Lessons learned from nimble adaptations to organisations' responses to the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of adolescents in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Country: Kenya

Youth in Action

Youth in Action (Y-ACT) was formed in 2017 at Amref Health Africa by a group of young innovators to address challenges prioritized by the youth. The organization provides tailored training, mentorship, coaching, and coalition-building support to youth advocates and youth organizations in Africa. Y-ACT believes that Africa's youth have a tremendous opportunity to shift in-country and regional policy landscapes, address challenges they face, and achieve their full potential.

Were you delivering services to young people before the COVID-19 crisis?

We were not delivering services to youth before because it was outside of our core work. We are a youth-led policy advocacy project leading SRHR and gender equality policy-strengthening at the county and national level. However, we changed our core work once COVID-19 started in Kenya.

Young people are our primary advocacy actors and audience; therefore, when COVID-19 hit Kenya, they expressed the need for service delivery interventions at the community level to meet their immediate SRH needs as opposed to our traditional policy advocacy work. Their demands informed our shift to incorporate service delivery outreach to young people, which moved us to forge partnerships with like-minded civil society organizations and corporations to help us meet these needs. We realized that we would reach many women and girls in different regions by using our network of organizations. We made use of product distribution chains utilized by our partners, including those for food and dignity packs that were already being delivered to the target population during the COVID-19 lockdown. In terms of location, we worked in the counties where we already had a presence and a working structure. We hence ensured that we minimized risks and maximized our ability to reach girls and young women in need.

What new approaches did you use to respond to the barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic to reach young people?

We partnered with 49 community-based organizations in the counties of Nairobi, Kisumu, Kilifi, and Samburu to distribute 16,000 pads -donated by Procter and Gamble- in April 2020. Our target group was school-going girls who were now at home due to the closure of schools. The closing of schools meant that female students would not access sanitary pads, as most public schools provide sanitary pads to female students.

Through this initiative, 8725 adolescent girls and young women received sanitary pads and other essential products like food and dignity packages in partnership with other organizations.

As a membership organization with 3000 registered youth advocates and 750 youth-led organizations, we tapped into this resource to map product distribution partners. The organizations we worked with had different distribution methodologies, including distribution to girls in their homes, in safe houses, in addition to providing supplies to homeless families, and the inclusion of the pads in food and dignity packs distributed to vulnerable households. Afterwards, we followed an integrated approach as we combined the sanitary pads with other goods that were already being distributed.

How are you working to find out if these approaches are having the desired impact?

We developed a report-back sheet for distributing organizations with recipients' details, including their names, age, and area of residence. Through this tool, we were able to track where each product was distributed. A total of 8725 women and girls received pads from this initiative.

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