

EXPLORING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN ADDRESSING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION GAPS IN KENYA



LEARNING BRIEF



Introduction

This learning brief presents key findings from the Central Operational Research (COR) study titled **“Exploring the Dynamics of Social Accountability and Community Engagement in Addressing Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Policy Implementation Gaps in Selected Counties in Kenya.”** Conducted by Amref Health Africa in Kenya, Siaya Muungano Network, and Rutgers, the study was carried out in four counties — Siaya, Homabay, Migori, and Kajiado — under the Power to You(th) (PtY) program. It explores how social accountability mechanisms and community engagement influence the implementation of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) policies, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by adolescent girls and young women (AGYW).

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Study Overview

The research aimed to:

1.

Identify effective approaches and tools for social accountability in SRHR policy implementation.

2.

Assess factors influencing community action to hold duty bearers accountable.

3.

Explore young people's priorities and capacity needs for advocacy and accountability.

The study adopted a participatory qualitative research design, using methods such as Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), digital storytelling, and desk reviews. Data was analyzed using content analysis and MAXQDA software, ensuring ethical considerations and meaningful youth participation.

KEY FINDINGS

SRHR Challenges

- **Awareness but Limited Access:** AGYW demonstrated awareness of SRHR challenges, including limited access to services, inadequate sexual education, and societal stigma around SRHR topics.
- **Prevalent Issues:** High rates of adolescent pregnancies, gender-based violence (GBV), female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and child marriages were noted, particularly in patriarchal communities.



Social Accountability Gaps

- **Knowledge Deficits:** There is a lack of comprehensive understanding of social accountability mechanisms at community, county, and national levels, with best practices poorly documented.
- **Limited Engagement Opportunities:** Despite existing frameworks, young people, especially AGYW, face limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with decision-makers.
- **Varying Participation:** Participation in policy implementation processes varies across counties, with youth alliances and NGOs facilitating better engagement in some areas.





Effective Tools and Strategies



- **Tools Identified:** Citizen/community scorecards, social audits, public hearings, participatory budgeting, and citizen charters were highlighted as effective for social accountability.



- **Implementation Challenges:** The practical application of these tools is inconsistent, with effectiveness varying by context due to gender norms, cultural taboos, and resource constraints.

Barriers to Engagement



- **Socio-Cultural Norms:** Gender norms, stigma, and cultural practices (e.g., FGM/C, early marriage) restrict AGYW participation.



- **Power Imbalances:** Fear of repercussions and lack of representation hinder AGYW from holding duty bearers accountable.



- **Resource Constraints:** Limited access to education, information, technology, and financial resources impedes advocacy efforts.



- **Safety Concerns:** Security risks deter AGYW from engaging in accountability processes.

Capacity Needs



- **Training and Empowerment:** AGYW need capacity-building programs to understand their rights, challenge harmful practices, and engage effectively with policymakers.

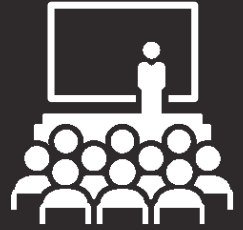


- **Advocacy Skills:** Young people expressed a lack of skills to advocate for policy change and hold decision-makers accountable.

Recommendations

1. Education and Awareness:

- Implement comprehensive SRHR education programs targeting AGYW to enhance participation.
- Promote multi-sectoral approaches and civic education from village to national levels.
- Leverage media, including social media, for awareness and accountability.



2. Capacity Building:

- Develop training curricula and mentorship programs tailored to AGYW platforms.
- Train government officials and decision-makers on SRHR and youth engagement.



3. Promoting Participation:

- Strengthen youth-friendly spaces and local accountability mechanisms, including digital platforms.
- Enhance AGYW access to decentralized participation forums.



4. Policy and Legislative Environment:

- Advocate for increased budget allocations for youth participation in governance.
- Address restrictive social and cultural norms to create an enabling environment.



5. Evidence-Based Advocacy:

- Review and disseminate social accountability research findings through grassroots networks.
- Develop behavior change strategies to address negative norms and promote inclusion.



6. Further Research:

- Investigate best practices for social accountability at multiple levels.
- Assess the impact of cultural norms on AGYW engagement.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of specific tools (e.g., citizen scorecards) in diverse contexts.





Conclusion

The study highlights that while adolescent girls and young women in Kenya are aware of the challenges surrounding sexual and reproductive health and rights, they continue to face major obstacles in participating meaningfully in accountability processes. To enable their full engagement, it is essential to adopt inclusive, rights-based approaches and strengthen existing accountability tools. Addressing persistent barriers, such as limited knowledge, cultural norms, and inadequate resources, will be key to improving policy implementation and promoting meaningful community participation in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

