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Project SOAR

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Strengthening Capacity to Prevent HIV among Adolescent Girls and Young Women: Supporting DREAMS-Like Programming

Many adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) lack opportunities and access to resources, and experience the harms of discriminatory gender norms. Despite decades of investment in HIV prevention, many AGYW remain invisible, underserved, and at disproportionate risk of HIV infection.

The DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) Partnership aims to significantly reduce HIV infections among AGYW. DREAMS is groundbreaking in its commitment to deliver evidence-informed approaches that go beyond the health sector to address structural factors that fuel AGYW's HIV risk, including poverty, gender inequality, sexual violence, social isolation, and lack of schooling. With support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Girl Effect, Johnson & Johnson, Gilead Sciences, and ViiV Healthcare, DREAMS originally launched in 2014 focusing on 10 high-burden countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017, five additional countries known as DREAMS-Like countries—Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Namibia, and Rwanda—received support for DREAMS activities.

Research Partners: Population Council

Location: Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Namibia, and Rwanda

Study Duration: 2017–2018

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Participants at a workshop in Rwanda for implementing partners use the Population Council's Building Assets Exercise to debate which protective assets AGYW need by different ages.

OUR APPROACH

Project SOAR is providing technical assistance (TA) to implementing partners in DREAMS-Like countries to help them reach the “right” AGYW with evidence-informed, community-based programs. In these settings, the “right” AGYW are those who face the highest HIV risk because they exhibit known HIV risk factors: being out of school, experiencing early pregnancy, or struggling with economic instability. The primary goal is to help implementing partners improve their targeting of appropriate girl-centered interventions and reach those AGYW who often miss out on HIV prevention efforts. Our approach is based on the Population Council's decades of research and experience determining ‘what works’ in girl-centered programming. It builds on the Council's earlier work to strengthen the capacity of implementing partners in the original 10 DREAMS countries to engage marginalized groups of vulnerable AGYW.

Through the project, we strengthen the capacity of implementing partners to collect the actionable information they need to design, deliver, and course-correct their community-based programs for AGYW. We do so by training implementing partners in DREAMS-Like countries on the intentional design of girl-centered programs. Intentional design entails using practical program tools to collect information about AGYW in catchment areas (see box below). Information such as which girl segments are “on track” to a safe transition to adulthood and which are “off track” is used as the basis for program design, delivery, and monitoring.

We strengthen implementing partners’ capacity for intentional design through interactive in-country workshops and remote TA. In the workshops, participants learn about the vulnerability of excluded AGYW, targeting to improve coverage, and tailoring content to respond to AGYW’s diversity. They also

Tools and resources for girl-centered programming

Based on our research and experience, the Population Council developed a suite of tools and resources to help implementers build girls and young women’s protective assets by translating evidence on “what works” into girl-centered programming. Examples include:

- Girl Roster™ tool, which uses a mobile device and digital information collection to determine which girls live in a program community and which segments to prioritize for programming.
- Community Resource Scan, which uses a mobile device to identify what resources and hazards exist in a program community.
- Coverage Exercise, to ascertain who a program is currently reaching.

Available at: popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2016PGY_GirlsProtectiveAssetsTools.pdf

What are protective assets?

An asset is a person’s store of value—which can be tangible or intangible. Our theory of change is that programs can build assets to empower AGYW so they are better able to reduce their risks and expand their opportunities. We categorize protective assets as social, human, economic, cognitive, and legal and political. Assets may include social support, personal safety plans, self-efficacy, financial literacy, and health knowledge and skills. Assets endure beyond a program’s end, extending the impact as participants age.

learn which protective assets AGYW need at different ages to reduce HIV risk and improve their prospects (see box above). Workshops build participants’ skills to use a suite of practical program tools, positioning them to improve program coverage of and impact for AGYW at highest risk. After the workshops, we assign an expert coach to a sub-set of participating organizations. Coaches provide remote TA to support partners as they collect information and use it to improve their coverage and enhance their impact.

EXPECTED RESULTS

As a result of SOAR’s capacity strengthening activities, DREAMS implementing partners will better be able to:

- Generate and use local information to inform effective policies and programs for AGYW.
- Design, target, implement, and monitor programs to strengthen the protective assets of AGYW.
- Adapt program content and learning strategies to respond to the realities of diverse segments of program participants such as out-of-school girls, migrants, or 10–14-year-olds with children.