

Breaking Socio-Cultural Barriers for Women's Health & Safety

Dear friends & Partners,

As we approach Giving Tuesday and in the spirit of your unwavering commitment and support for women's health and safety, we bring you our November newsletter where faith seamlessly intersects with health pointing at our compassion for a thriving society.

In the months of October and November, we collaborated with the government of Siaya County, the Ministry of Health department, and trained 35 Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) providers to uncover and address the sociocultural barriers hindering the provision of Sexual Reproductive Health services to women and girls in the local communities

Our end game is to prevent rising cases of teenage pregnancy, new HIV infections, and early/child marriages.



A group photo of IFAGE team and SRHR providers from Siaya county at Dotreece



Bondo Sub-county SRH Coordinator, Mr Domnick Omollo presenting the 2016 National Guidelines for Accessible, Affordable, Acceptable and Quality youth-friendly SRH services to SRHR providers on 25th October 2023

This collaborative effort took place during a two-day training that brought a diverse group of training participants including Youth-Friendly SRH Providers, Community Health Assistants, Community Health Volunteers, SRH Service Providers, and representatives from the County Government Health Management Team.

Challenges Unveiled:

Siaya County in Kenya celebrated for its breathtaking landscapes and vibrant cultures, conceals a pressing concern beneath its picturesque exterior. However, the issue at hand is the challenges faced by women and youths/girls more particularly adolescents in accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Despite huge campaigns and efforts to end teenage pregnancy, new HIV infections, and early marriages, persistent socio-cultural barriers pose significant challenges, hindering the delivery of essential SRH services to women and youths including marginalized individuals in Siaya County and across the whole country Kenya.

Insights Lessons from Training:

A primary obstacle identified during the training is the inadequacy of age-appropriate basic sex education among youths and adolescents in schools and communities. This gap fosters misunderstanding about sexual and reproductive health, with a prevailing misconception linking comprehensive sex education to early sexual debut. This false belief hampers open discussions and impedes the sharing of essential knowledge, particularly within school settings.

Siaya County is shrouded in a taboo nature surrounding discussions about sex. The word "sex" is often spoken in whispers, perpetuating stigma and taboos. SRH providers armed with knowledge find it challenging to openly address crucial topics like contraception, safe abortion, and sexual orientation, fearing social judgment and backlash from parents and caregivers.



Bondo Sub-county SRH Coordinator, Mr Domnick Omollo presenting data on teen pregnancies in Bondo and Rarieda Sub-counties on 25th October 2023

Kenya's religious diversity with its significant Christian and Muslim population contributes to a complex shadow of beliefs and traditions around SRH. Some religious beliefs oppose key aspects of SRH, such as contraception or comprehensive sex education, creating challenges in service provision within schools, communities, and even in church settings.

The need for parental consent in Kenya serves as a towering obstacle, especially for youth without supportive parents. The very guidance intended to be provided by parents unintentionally becomes a hurdle, limiting access to crucial SRH services for those who need it most.



SRHR providers from Rarieda Sub-county in a group discussing cultural and religious barriers hindering provision of SRHR services on 24th October 2023

Deeply ingrained cultural norms and traditions, including practices like early/child marriage and wife inheritance, pose substantial challenges to SRH services. "Kangaroo courts" in some communities obstruct progress in addressing issues like Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and rape/defilement.

Gender disparities in Kenya significantly impact access to SRH services, with poor education among women and girls limiting their agency. Power dynamics within relationships often lead to resistance when providers attempt to offer services that empower young women, such as family planning or information on sexual health.

Finally, Inconsistencies in laws and regulations surrounding SRH present further hurdles for providers.

A Call to Action:



SRH providers from Bondo Sub-county in a group discussing cultural and religious barriers hindering provision of SRH services on 24th October 2023

Breaking the silence surrounding SRH in Siaya County demands a collective endeavor for education, empowerment, and enlightenment. Our initiative is a call to arms for a future where women's health and safety is a priority and youth are empowered to live healthy and informed lives. Together, alongside our dedicated SRH providers, we take action to strategically address socio-cultural barriers by:



SRH provider presenting SRH challenges in her area during the group discussion on
24th October 2023

- Working closely with SRH providers to establish youth-friendly spaces, ensuring that services are tailored to the specific needs and concerns of marginalized youth.



Anne, IFAGE's programs coordinator carrying out Safeguarding before the training begins on 24th October 2023

- Engaging SRH providers in creating programs that involve parents, offering a platform for understanding and addressing parental concerns while promoting open communication within families.
- Collaborating with SRH providers to advocate for policy changes that support easier access of SRH services.
- Investing in ongoing training and capacity-building programs for SRH providers, empowering them with the tools to navigate and overcome socio-cultural challenges effectively.

As we observe and celebrate Giving Tuesday, please consider IFAGE as your organization of preference. We need your support to bring hope to women's health and safety, we need to end teen pregnancies, domestic abuse, gender-based violence and child marriages.

For this Giving Tuesday, DONATE and support our work for a lasting change and impact for women's and girls's health and safety.

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With gratitude,
Rev. Misolo & IFAGE Team



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