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Promoting Regional Collaboration for Youth-led Advocacy



WOMEN'S
GLOBAL NETWORK
FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

W G N R R
AFRICA

A Case Study of
Women's Global Network for
Reproductive Rights
(WGNRR)

Young people across the East and Southern African region continue to face barriers in exercising their right to access Sexual and Reproductive Health information and services, these challenges include inadequate knowledge of reproductive rights, sexually transmitted infections, the prevalence of child marriage, third party consent and correspondingly high levels of adolescent fertility. Limited access to quality, age-appropriate, and youth-friendly reproductive health information and services compounds these risks. Such barriers to information on reproductive rights lead to poor SRH outcomes. 57% of young women and 48% of young men in the region report having had sex by the age of 18 years (WGNRR, 2020). These figures underline the importance of ensuring East and Southern African adolescent's access to Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE).

Young people in the ESA region continue to be the tokens in the SRHR advocacy spaces, are mostly painted as the victims and are not given spaces, skills and tact to navigate the advocacy spaces. Although young people lead and participate in SRHR advocacy in the region, the meaningful participation of adolescent girls remain shallow, the grassroots youth-led CSOs/networks report having limited opportunities and knowledge on policy analysis and monitoring the implementation of the regional youth and adolescent SRHR-related commitments. This sidelining and siloed nature of youth SRHR advocacy associated to the limited knowledge of young people on youth related SRHR policies and monitoring mechanisms, makes progress more difficult, provides opportunity for the opposition movement to fight back and undermine the progressive youth and adolescent SRHR agenda.

Although young people lead and participate in SRHR advocacy in the region, the meaningful participation of adolescent girls remain shallow, the grassroots youth-led CSOs/networks report having limited opportunities and knowledge on policy analysis and monitoring the implementation of the regional youth and adolescent SRHR-related commitments. Further, the few existing youth networks have few if not, no direct in-country and cross-national or regional interlinkage with those undertaking community and local policy level advocacy initiatives. As such, adolescents and community-based youth CSOs/networks do not see themselves as part of a broad national and sub/regional advocacy work. This sidelining and siloed nature of youth SRHR advocacy makes progress more difficult and provides opportunity for the opposition movement to fight back and undermine the progressive youth and adolescent SRHR right agenda.

To address these gaps with support from the Regional Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Fund, WGNRR conceptualized and implemented a cross-national Adolescents Reproductive rights program aimed at increasing adolescents' participation and improving collaboration among youth CSOs for a strong, harmonized, and empowered reproductive rights advocacy in Tanzania, Kenya, and Malawi. They did this by building and supporting a grassroots sub-regional youth movement to enhance young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, including safe and legal abortion.



Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) Africa is a grassroots-led feminist network that promotes and supports grassroots initiatives for reproductive rights. Their work ensures that reproductive rights are respected and fulfilled as universal and indivisible human rights for all people, especially the most marginalized communities. Specifically, they work to ensure that women and young people in their diversity access their right to make informed decisions regarding if and when to have children, free from coercion, discrimination, and violence, irrespective of their class, race, disability, or marital status.

WGNRR's work addresses social, cultural, economic, and policy barriers to SRH services and information for marginalized communities. They also create an enabling environment for all people across Africa to have the social, political, and economic power to make autonomous decisions about their gender, sexuality, and whether, when, and how many children to have. This goal ensures universal access to SRH services and information (in line with SDG 3.7, SDG 3.8, and SDG 5.6). To achieve this, WGNRR Africa organizes and works in partnership with grassroots partners and allies to accelerate the implementation of reproductive rights targets within the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the SDGs alongside commitments made under the Beijing Platform for Action.

TARGET 3.7 **3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**



UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE CARE, FAMILY PLANNING AND EDUCATION

By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.

TARGET 3.8 **3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**



ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

TARGET 5.6 **5 GENDER EQUALITY**



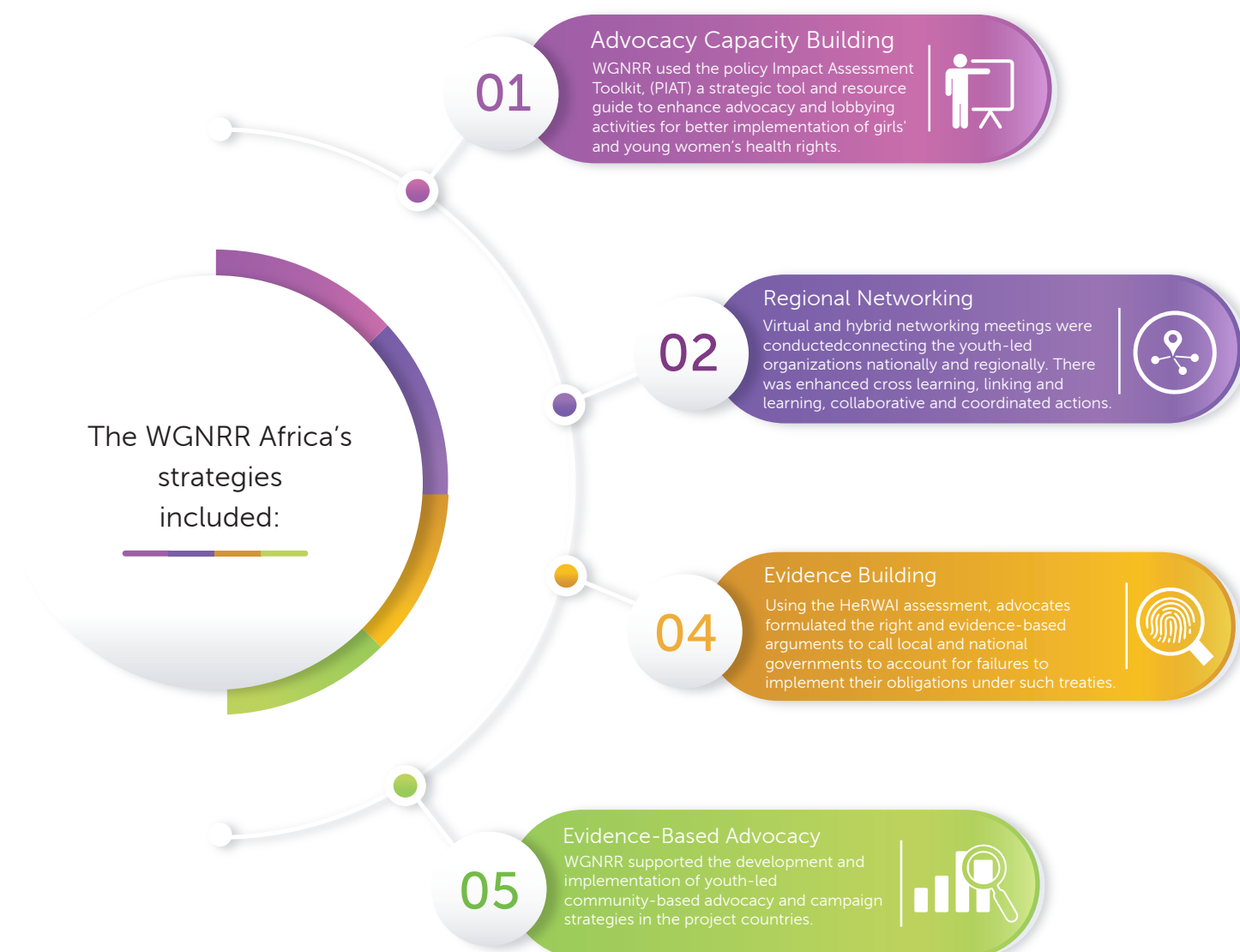
UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action

The WGNRR model identifies and organizes youth-led grassroots organizations, assesses their advocacy capacity and needs, and tailors training tools to respond to the identified needs. Additionally, it strengthens the local partners' advocacy and communications skills, connects them, and supports them in developing and implementing world-class advocacy and campaigning strategies. This approach addresses social, legal, and normative barriers to reproductive rights.

In Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi, WGNRR Africa works with youth-led organizations to ensure that the societal response to young people's reproductive health needs is informed, safe, and youth-friendly. WGNRR builds the capacity of youth-led organizations, and in turn, helps other youths understand their sexuality and protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and subsequent risks of unsafe abortion and infertility. They also build the ability of young people to influence the availability of and access to youth-centered SRH information and services. With support from the Regional Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Fund, WGNRR Africa has increased adolescents' participation in accessing their reproductive rights. They have also improved collaboration among CSOs and networks for strong, harmonized, and empowered reproductive rights advocacy in East and Southern African countries. The project increased the ability of grassroots youth advocates to formulate and implement effective advocacy and campaign strategies. The goal is to influence policies and practices that limit the fulfillment of their reproductive rights at the national and regional levels. They also provided a cross-national platform for linking and learning for interconnected and coordinated advocacy actions. The platform increases opportunities for youth advocates to mobilize and conduct joint advocacy and campaigning actions in national and regional fora.





Advocacy Capacity Building

WGNRR used the policy Impact Assessment Toolkit, (PIAT) which integrates a Health Rights of Women Assessment Instrument (HeRWAI), a strategic tool and resource guide to enhance advocacy and lobbying activities for better implementation of girls' and young women's health rights. The PIAT capacitated local advocates to analyze local or national policies impacting women's health. It compares how well the policies meet the human rights and other internationally agreed treaties.



Regional Networking and Collaboration

Virtual and hybrid networking meetings were conducted connecting the youth-led organizations nationally and regionally. There was enhanced cross learning, linking and learning, collaborative and coordinated actions, shared strategies and mutual solidarity among youth SRHR advocates and youth-serving organizations to address systemic barriers and challenges to SRHR faced by adolescents in the ESA region.



Evidence Building Using HeRWAI Assessment

Using the HeRWAI assessment, advocates formulated the right and evidence-based arguments to call local and national governments to account for failures to implement their obligations under such treaties. There was increased ability of grassroots youth advocates formulating and implementing effective advocacy campaign strategies to influence policies and practices that limit the fulfilment of their SRHR at national and regional level thus increasing their knowledge and skills on right-based and evidence-based advocacy and communications around reproductive rights of young people using the HeRWAI instrument. Through this approach, WGNRR formulated evidence and rights-based recommendations for policy improvement.



Evidence-Based Advocacy

WGNRR supported the development and implementation of youth-led community-based advocacy and campaign strategies in the project countries. Supporting their meaningful participation in regional policy discussion forums, such as the SADC People Summit and the East Africa SRH Bill advocacy spaces.



01

Increased knowledge levels on human rights and policy analysis concepts, and increased ability to analyse the impact of policies on adolescents' SRHR. There was an increasing ability of grassroots ASRHR advocates to formulate and implement effective advocacy and campaign strategies to influence policy change. Adolescents and young people and their organizations involved in the project have demonstrated increased knowledge and ability to analyse the policies and generate evidences that supported their advocacy efforts to meaningfully engage and bring in national and regional policy discussions the adolescents and young people's SRHR concerns and demands.

02

Enhanced ability of and increased opportunities for adolescents and youth advocates to mobilize and conduct joint advocacy and campaigning actions in national and regional forums. Findings from the analyzed policies have since been used to create awareness on ASRHR and to support young people's CSOs advocacy efforts in their respective countries and in the region.

03

Strengthened collaboration and solidarity among youth-led/serving CSOs/networks themselves in creating awareness and advocating for ASRHR at country and regional levels. A regional cross national platform for linking and learning, and interconnected and coordinated actions, the project broke the silo approach previously used by youth-led/serving organizations by connecting them, empowering them and coordinating their advocacy efforts both at community, national and regional levels.

04

Improved approaches (replacement of the silo action by a collective approach) in addressing ASRHR policy related issues both at country and regional levels.

05

This approach enhanced young people's ability and increasing opportunities for youth engagement in policy discussions; the project imparted policy analysis and advocacy knowledge and skills among ASRHR advocates which they used effectively to engage in the SADC summit, the ESA recommitment and the EAC sexual and reproductive health bill consultations; and to bring on the tables of discussion the SRHR agenda of adolescents and young people.

06

Increasing leadership of young people and solidarity among themselves in driving change around their SRHR. Youth-led/serving CSOs have participated or took specific actions around global days of actions to advance ASRHR of adolescents and young people.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations



There remains a great need for strong, youth-led coordinated advocacy action. The need is to address issues obstructing young people's access to reproductive rights. Evidence shows that across the region, including Tanzania, the majority of young people lack free and fair access to information and knowledge about sexual and reproductive services. This project has provided insight into best practices of how to coordinate at local, national, and regional levels.



The policy analysis approach provided strong evidence that a research-based communication of outputs and insights is key in raising awareness and conducting advocacy around reproductive rights.



Tools for empowerment, such as training, up-skilling, and collective voice have been evident to equip young people with confidence and capacity for action. When capacitated, young people can make a difference: This is a typical example of boosting young people's leadership in driving change toward their reproductive rights.



From the success of this pilot in some parts of Tanzania, a call to scale up is key. Utilizing the lessons learned to link other ongoing initiatives to reach the entire youth population. There is still a long way to go. There is a great need to polish the skills of these advocates and coordinate their efforts to amplify their voices and promote an intersectional approach to advancing the reproductive rights of adolescents and young people in the region.

Conclusion

The key outcomes of the project successfully promoted adolescents' and young people's leadership in SRHR. Building on the gains obtained from the implementation of the project WGNRR will continue to strengthen and sustain a strong, harmonised and empowered youth movement for coordinated advocacy actions around ASRHR in the ESA region.



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CafeSRHR



SRHR Community Café



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