Improving Adolescent Reproductive Health

Kenyan youth are severely threatened by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Data from within Kenya and other countries in Africa show that young people are at the greatest risk for new HIV infection, and yet they have the best chance of reversing trends in behavior that place them at risk. They need to make responsible decisions about sexual behavior and protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It is with this in mind that Population Council and PATH worked with the Ministries of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), Health (MOH) and Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services (MGSCSS) to develop and implement, on a pilot basis, a multi-sectoral approach to addressing adolescent reproductive health and HIV prevention in two districts in Western Province through the Kenya Adolescent Reproductive Health Project (KARHP).

KARHP implemented the pilot project successfully within the government ministries and tested innovative approaches for reaching adolescents (both in and out of school), their parents, teachers and community leaders. The goals of the pilot project were to encourage discussions on adolescent reproductive health, prevent HIV transmission, delay age of sexual debut among young people, and encourage safer sexual behavior among sexually active young people. The following activities were implemented in the community, schools and health-facilities:

PATH developed a curriculum with the MOEST to offer appropriate information on reproductive health including HIV prevention and life skills. Guidance and counseling teachers from public primary and secondary schools were trained to facilitate sessions and were supported by student peer educators.

Social Development Assistants (SDA) from the MGSCSS received training and supported to work with civic and religious leaders and with peer educators drawn from out-of-school youth to gain support for community-wide discussions and education concerning adolescent reproductive and sexual health.

Health care providers in public and private clinics were trained to provide ‘youth-friendly’ services, recruited and supported peer educators, and created a space for counselling adolescents.

KARHP implemented and evaluated these activities using an operations research approach to systematically test their effectiveness for improving knowledge about reproductive health and encouraging a responsible and healthy attitude towards sexuality among adolescents. The objectives were to improve knowledge; build decision making and negotiation skills; delay the onset of sexual activity among younger adolescents; promote the adoption of safe behaviors; decrease the risks of HIV and other STI infection and of unwanted pregnancy among sexually active adolescents.

Findings from the operations research indicate that it was feasible to implement this set of activities at the location level, in schools, in public health facilities and with community organizations. Teachers in the school intervention areas reported that their training in the life skills curriculum with modules on sexuality, relationships and general reproductive health including STI and HIV prevention strategies enhanced their ability to carry out this mandate.

For more information about KARHP, please contact:

Eva Muthuuri
Program Officer
emuthuuri@path.org
The curriculum exposed adolescents to life skills and contributed to greater understanding of reproductive physiological development, general health and risk factors for STIs including HIV and AIDS. Peer educators provided vital outreach and links among project activities, reporting over 10,000 contacts through school, clinic, individual and group encounters. The increased parental communication with adolescents has exposed them to reproductive health messages creating an environment that encourages preventive norms. Through the activities, adolescents’ self-esteem and assertive skills essential for avoiding situations such as teenage pregnancies and risky sex were developed. The results demonstrate that by providing crucial reproductive health information to adolescents in schools and in the community and linking them to health services, there is a marked improvement in STI, HIV and pregnancy prevention and in communication with parents and other adults.

Project scale up
Given the successful implementation of the activities, and the initial expressions of interest by the communities and all three ministries to consider incorporating them into their routine operations, a follow-on, scale up project was initiated in August 2003. This project seeks to facilitate the process of institutionalizing the reproductive health and HIV and AIDS activities within the three ministries at the district level, and for facilitating their replication in other locations, districts, and provinces. In May 2005 the plan to scale up this activity to a national level was put in place.

The objectives for this scale-up process are the same, with the goal to replicate it throughout Kenya between 2005 and 2008. In 2005-2006 KARHP activities were scaled up in Western Province. During this time, KARHP activities expanded to cover all the districts within Western Province; with an emphasis on building capacity of all three ministries: 1,760 teachers, 375 public health technicians, and 280 SDAs were trained.

Materials development
PATH revised and developed training and educational materials based on the needs of all three ministries. The KARHP Core Curriculum for teachers was revised based on feedback received during focus group discussions held with teachers, students, and peer educators who had been part of the pilot phase. The curriculum now includes background information to increase teachers’ knowledge of adolescent reproductive health issues in order to be better prepared and able to answer students’ question, and to include information to improve facilitation skills and increase the use of participatory teaching methods. This updated core curriculum is now part of a series of materials entitled ‘Tuko Pamoja’, which means “We are together.” This phrase is used colloquially to mean “Do we understand each other?” and was selected as a title to encourage open and honest communication and education around adolescent reproductive health. In addition to the Adolescent Reproductive Health and Life Skills Curriculum, the Tuko Pamoja series includes a Guide for Talking with Young People about their Reproductive Health for Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services and the Ministry of Health, and a Peer Educators Manual for in- and out-of-school youth.

The Tuko Pamoja: Adolescent Reproductive Health and Life Skills Curriculum was designed primarily for use by teachers with in-school youth, though can also be used with out-of-school youth and other community groups. It contains age-specific adolescent reproductive health and life skills content and activities. This curriculum was nominated for review at a PEPFAR ABY meeting and was crosschecked against USAID criteria and found to be exceptionally responsive to their requirements. PATH also developed training workshops facilitation manuals for all three ministries to ensure that the trainers had the necessary resources to effectively facilitate the cascade-style training workshops. The facilitation manuals are used by the master and core trainers when leading the various training sessions.

National-level advocacy
PATH provides technical assistance to the three ministries at the national level to ensure that policies and procedures are developed for integrating adolescent-focused reproductive health and HIV activities into their programs, and that funding for adolescent HIV and reproductive health programs receives attention during budgetary planning, especially as transitions to sector wide approaches and budgetary support evolve. Assistance was also provided to the districts and provinces to assist them in preparing strategies, workplans and budgets that explicitly include resources to support this approach.

Geographic expansion
Starting in August 2006 KARHP moved into two new provinces. PATH and Population Council are now in the initial stages of implementation in Eastern and Nyanza provinces. Advocacy and training activities with representatives at the national, provincial and district level from each ministry are ongoing.

KARHP Materials
Tuko Pamoja: Adolescent Reproductive Health and Life Skills Curriculum
Tuko Pamoja: A Guide for Talking with Young People about their Reproductive Health
Tuko Pamoja: A Manual for Peer Educators
MOEST trainers facilitation manual
MOH trainers facilitation manual
MGSCSS facilitators manual