

Women embrace digital media to address SRHR issues in their community

By Frank Jabson

Young women and adolescent girls in Bulawayo province, Zimbabwe have embraced digital media platforms as critical in exploring Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and other women's human rights issues such as Gender Based Violence and violence against women and children.

The young women and adolescent girls are part of the project being implemented by the Creative Centre for Communication and Development (CCCD).

The project, which started in January 2014 engaged 32 young women and adolescent girls on a journey that opened up opportunities for them to learn new technologies and how to use them to address SRHR issues affecting their communities.

All the women and girls had limited or no prior knowledge about the digital world and they were excited to take advantage of the training to acquire important ICTs life skills.

One of the participants, Pauline Togarashaya said that technology offers huge opportunities for women to mobilise and advocate for their rights.

“Digital platforms can enable us to reach the global community. Our efforts to fight for our SRHR may reach other women from other parts of the world if we make maximum use of digital media platforms,” said Pauline.

Pauline and her colleagues have recently completed a digital storytelling training where they each produced a digital story on their SRHR experiences. The digital stories have now been compiled into a DVD that will be used to set the tone for community discussions on SRHR issues.

As the project progresses, the women and girls will be exposed to various digital platforms such as blogs and social networks that they will use to advance SRHR issues.

The women and girls now join millions of people across the globe using digital media platforms albeit they are using it to address crucial issues affecting them and their communities unlike the majority of users who are only interested in socialising.

The project comes against the background of increased violations of women rights and violence against women in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, premarital sexual activity is met either with denial, prohibition or silence and sexuality education and SRHR services including contraception for young woman remain inadequate. Sex is considered a private matter governed by religion and culture. Issues of child marriages/teenage pregnancies have been on the increase with girls as young as 12 marrying men as old as 50 years. This reflects the country's negative attitude towards women revealing the fact that important decisions such as marriage, choice of partner and women's sexuality are all controlled by others from an early age until old age.

This project, which is being funded by the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) seeks to prevent sexual and reproductive ill-health of young women and girls by using citizen journalism and digital media platforms to enable young women to not only seek, receive and impart SRHR information but to also listen and be heard, understood, learn, create and respond to their specific SRHR needs and concerns.

Failure to address this problem will result in increased prevalence of teen pregnancies, child marriages, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation of women and girls in Bulawayo metropolitan province, Zimbabwe.

The project, entitled; *Wanted sex, good sex and the right to enjoy sex!* seeks to promote positive approaches to sexuality and achieve comprehensive sexuality education for young women and girls in Bulawayo Metropolitan province by the year 2016 through the use of citizen journalism and digital media platforms.

According to Gertrude Pswarayi, the Director of the implementing organisation, this project is in line with the mission and vision of the Creative Centre for Communication and Development (CCCD).

CCCD was formed to advance communication rights of marginalised and vulnerable women and girls in Zimbabwe where the operating environment and stringent media laws violate people's communication rights.

The organization seeks to ensure that all women and girls enjoy the right to have their stories and views heard. This is because communication is an essential human need and, therefore, a basic human right. Without it, no individual or community can exist, or prosper. By recognising, implementing and protecting communication rights, CCCD is recognising, implementing and protecting all other women's human rights.

The project is anticipated to result in young women using citizen journalism and digital media platforms to make informed decisions and access SRHR information and services that prevent their sexual and reproductive ill-health. They will also be using mobile technologies and applications to not only seek, receive and impart SRHR information but to also listen and be heard, understood, learn, create and respond to young women's specific SRHR needs and concerns. Parents, community and religious leaders in Bulawayo Metropolitan province will also provide an enabling environment to change social norms and forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for implementing positive approaches to sexuality and comprehensive sexuality education for young women.



Faith Mlotshwa, Leeann Peters and Nomasiko Ncube are part of the group of 32 women and girls who are undergoing training to use digital media platforms to explore Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)