

MID-TERM IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE STATUS OF WOMEN PROJECT

An Overview of findings on Option project in Kilifi District

In 2000, a mid-term impact evaluation of the Options for Improving the Status of Women Project was carried out in Kilifi District. Data was collected in four locations sampled randomly out of the seven locations in which the project operates. The sampled locations were namely Chasimba, Tezo, Ngerenya and Matsangoni. A total of 885 individuals from 435 households were successfully interviewed. The evaluation methodology included individual interviews, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and comprehensive literature review.

Findings:

Community Participation

The results obtained clearly show that the project was well received by the target community. They viewed it as relevant and beneficial to them as well as meeting their reproductive health needs. The project Advisory Committee (PAC) was said to be an effective strategy in addressing culturally sensitive issue such as early marriage.

Addressing Practical and Strategic Gender Needs

The results obtained indicated that the project addresses practical gender needs for information upon which informed decisions on reproductive health and early marriage can be made. A total of forty percent (40%) of the respondents in Kilifi stated that Volunteer Community Gender Educators (VCGEs) were the main source of information on early marriage, and women's health issues and rights.

IEC Materials

The project has produced two print IEC materials, a pamphlet and two posters on early marriage. Seventy two percent (72%) indicated that the IEC materials were relevant, effective and factual and that they enhanced their reproductive health knowledge.

Increasing Local Support for the Project

Annually the project reaches over 4,000 people for the target population comprising the youth, parents, teachers, members of PTA, religious leaders and administrative leaders through formal and informal discussions, public meetings, seminars, workshops, lectures, meetings and group talks. Sixty one percent (61%) of the respondents in Kilifi felt that the community supported the project and perceived it as their own.

Creating awareness on Reproductive Health and SRH Rights among young women

- The study revealed that ninety eight percent (98%) of the respondents indicated that early marriage adversely affects girls' education and ruins their career prospects.
- Most respondents reported that the project equipped young girls with knowledge and skills on reproductive health and related issues. The results indicated that the objective of improving the status of 1,800 young women in the project locations by providing them with knowledge and skills on their legal and reproductive health rights is being achieved.
- The majority of the respondents cited that early marriage is a social practice that is deeply entrenched in the community and in such a situation a change of people's attitude and behaviour will require a gradual process of education and empowerment.

Behaviour Change

Forty eight percent (48%) of 303 respondents indicated that the project messages have improved the way they related to the opposite sex. The information contained in the IEC materials had resulted in some action being taken and in some behaviour change for instance stopping the promotion of early marriage and encouraging girls' education. Eighty five percent (85%) of the respondents disapproved of early marriage. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the respondents agreed that early marriage was a bad tradition and violation of the girl-child's rights.



Use of folk media as a tool for campaigning against early marriage

Reduction in the Prevalence of Early Marriage

The results suggest that twenty seven percent (27%) decline in the prevalence of early marriage in the project locations as compared to the results of 1998 KDHS data on early marriage for the whole of Kilifi district. However, the study results indicate that 58% of 278 married women interviewed were married by age 18.

Adolescent Pregnancies

Information obtained in the focus group discussions indicates that adolescent pregnancies and abortions were very common in the project locations. These preceded most of the early marriages.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Drug abuse and excessive drinking were common in the project locations. Drug abuse is rampant among the youth while excessive drinking of "mnazi", the local brew, is a common addiction among many men.

Project Weaknesses

The evaluation revealed that the project had not set specific targets to be achieved on elimination of the culture of early marriage. The results also indicated that some of the VCGEs had not received basic training. There was also weak supervision and low compensation for VCGEs' work. The project also had little focus for adolescent health.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The project was concluded to be relevant and beneficial to the community. Funding and project sustainability should therefore be addressed. The activities should be strengthened and intensified in the project location.