YWORLD™
We build strong kids, strong families, strong communities.

case study

YMCA of Nigeria
Health Education

Peer Educators in the YES Program discuss issues related to sexual health.

Introduction

The earliest YMCA presence in Nigeria dates back to 1925. In 1962, the National Council of YMCAs of Nigeria was established as an umbrella body of the many local associations. Since its inception, the Nigeria YMCA has addressed the development needs of youth in the community through creative programs and services. Today, the Nigeria YMCA's main programs center on youth empowerment, healthy lifestyles, gender sensitivity, poverty alleviation, leadership development, civic education and capacity-building towards self-reliance.

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 and has been ruled by many different military regimes. The democratically elected government of Olusegun Obasanjo has been in power since 1999. With some 250 ethnic groups and as many spoken languages, Nigeria has a rich cultural and religious diversity. Half of all Nigerians are Muslim, approximately 40 percent are Christian and 10 percent follow indigenous faiths. Although Nigeria is the world's 5th-largest producer of oil, corruption and economic mismanagement place Nigerian citizens among the poorest in the world.

One of the great challenges that Nigerians face is the spread of the AIDS epidemic. At less than 6 percent, Nigeria's HIV/AIDS prevalence is lower than many of its neighbors. However, Nigeria's sheer size (pop. 140 million) means that its number of infections among adults is the greatest in West Africa. Contributing to the difficulties are poor healthcare services, lack of sexual health information, discrimination against people living with HIV and the vulnerability of girls and young women.

Plan and methodology

The YMCA of Nigeria has responded to the AIDS crisis by partnering with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and YMCA of the USA. The Packard Foundation supports the Youth Education and Services (YES) Program which has improved the reproductive health and practices of tens of thousands of youths and families in Nigeria since 2000. In a context where reproductive health topics are difficult to address and where YMCA research has found that young people engage in high-risk behavior, the YMCA of Nigeria met the challenging and ambitious goal of reaching 120,000 young people in targeted communities.

Keys to success

In order to reach their goals, the YMCA of Nigeria used a variety of coordinated activities:

- Extensive outreach: This includes education, communication materials, referral services, knowledge of condom access and public events.
- Creation of youth-friendly services: The YMCA of Nigeria and local partners provided basic family planning, diagnoses and treatment of STDs and HIV testing and counseling.
- Community mobilization: The YMCA of Nigeria helped to improve the image of youth and improve youth-parent dialogue on adolescent reproductive health by organizing moral and technical support from parents, community leaders, religious leaders and school administrators.
- Training: The YMCA hired and trained professional field coordinators at each of the branches.
- Resource mobilization: The YMCA of Nigeria has improved its capacity to strengthen and expand adolescent reproductive health and HIV/AIDS programs.

Achievements to date

The YMCA of Nigeria's highly successful grassroots strategy reached well over 130,000 youth and families and has become a model for YMCA reproductive health and HIV/AIDS programming around the world. The YMCA recruited 50 peer educators who are supported by YMCA staff and volunteers in the target sites. Peer educators underwent 10 intensive days of training (plus refresher training throughout their tenure) and were equipped with youth-friendly materials and curricula to carry out their work. The YMCA worked closely with parents and community leaders to create an enabling environment for youth to discuss culturally sensitive topics related to youth sexuality. The YMCA has also set up referral service systems with local clinics to improve youth access to vital reproductive health, medical and counseling services.

Future plans

Made possible with a generous donation from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the YMCA is engaged in the second phase of the Youth Education and Services Program. From July 2006 to July 2008, Phase II seeks to improve the reproductive health knowledge and practices of over 200,000 youth and families through education and increased access to condoms, counseling and medical referral services. Phase II targets four YMCA of Nigeria branches in Jos, Bauchi and Kaduna (Sabon Tasa and Kakuri). This phase will also strengthen the capacity of the four local branches to design, manage and scale up programs through intensive training and technical assistance.