COMMUNITY SENSITIZATIONS ON THE NEED TO SUPPORT SRHR EDUCATION AND SERVICE, TRANSACTIONAL SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP AND IMPLICATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

(SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) has been a developmental issue and research has shown that it is a taboo to have an open discussion on some SRHR topic and this has left young people to have their own ways of accessing information on their
sexual reproductive health and rights. Access to SRH service is fraught with so many challenges and sexual rights of young people are abuse.

It is for the above reasons and others that CIWED GHANA designed this activity to complement the project which is implemented in Northern Region and was earmarked for this activity. It seeks to increase the knowledge and sensitise young people between the ages of 10 to 25 years and community leaders in the community to take action in support of young people accessing SRHR at health facilities and communities are able to discuss transactional sexual relationship and implications. The main goal is to contribute to improved sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in district and the northern region of Ghana. This would be achieved through this specific objectives improved support for SRHR activities from participating communities and key stakeholders (parents, religious and traditional leaders, decision makers, etc.) and increased access to quality SRHR services in the Region.

The project team therefore is organized a community sensitization on the need to support SRHR education and service, transactional sexual relationship and implications for young people in the Region to deepen their understanding of SRHR issues. The activity brought together community advocacy group members and peer educators, young people, traditional, religious and opinion leaders, parents who have been engaged in similar activities for the past one year to enhance their knowledge on key thematic issues such as open discussion on SRHR, teenage pregnancy, family planning, transactional sexual relations etc. This report contains the details of the activity implementation and the outputs from the sensitization.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY
2.1 Implementation process The activity was planned by the project team at a meeting with roles and responsibilities shared. Request for funds and logistics for the activity was done for the respective Officer leading the process of making contacts with participants for the activity. Sang, Sanbu, Jimile and Nalongri were the communities earmarked for the sensitization with advancement arrangement made.
The facilitation was participatory with active engagement of community members by the resource persons. The facilitator solicited community views on the issues to be discussed and shared with them his knowledge on the SRHR issues. This made the sensitization interactive and revealing.

2.2 SUB-ACTIVITIES

SRHR open discussion

The facilitator on this topic first seek opinions of community members on the prevailing SRHR issues in the community before he discusses the content of the topic. Some of the common issues mentioned by the communities include teenage pregnancy, lack of knowledge on SRHR, prevention of unwanted pregnancies, no discussion of SRHR among households, poverty, lack of parental care and guidance, foster children, night jams which lead to boy-girl early relations, no role models/mentors in communities, no proper monitoring of wards.

This gave him the direction as to what to address first and how to do it. He revealed to the communities some research findings that was done in 2013 and it revealed that 700,000 young teens were recorded pregnant (teenage pregnancy) of which in ranking it by regions and percentage, Northern region was second in position with just a little difference from the first rank Central region. This revelation kept the community in shock and triggered their emotions towards the discussions and finding ways to reducing the cases of teenage pregnancies. Some members of the communities were honest to admit that, SRHR were not discussed in their homes not even among them couples and so their children have no idea about sexuality education even from the school. The assemblyman for Nalogni shared his story with us.

"I have been encouraging my siblings and relatives to discuss SRHR in their home and also encourage the young girls to stay in school. My younger sister got pregnant while in school, we allowed her to deliver and afterwards sent her back to school. She is now in the secondary school at Buipie. This is because we know the importance of
education to her and we also took the responsibility of not teaching her sexuality to guide her.”

Still on the topic open discussion of SRH issues, community member were able to realize that this could facilitate an open affair between parents and wards. They could share sexual problems and related issues with them. A parent would by this be able to know whether his/ her ward is actively involved in sex or not and hence guide them to pick a family planning method to avoid unwanted pregnancy, STI’s, unsafe abortion leading to school dropout or death.

**Transactional sexual relations**

Information on the prevalence of engaging in transactional sex also covers a broad range, depending on the age group of adolescent girls, and phrasing of the questions. In general, the sensitization point to large majorities of adolescent girls who have been involved in transactional sexual relations. Most parents who shared their views refer to ever involvement in transactional sexual relations, of girls (aged 12-18) had ever engaged in sexual relations in exchange for money or gifts. In Sang community, we realized that teachers were more involved when it comes to transactional sexual relations. They lure these young girls in exchange of marks, extra classes and favor in class. Community members gave manifest of such situations and even to the extend they committing unsafe abortion.

The teachers organize night extra classes for the young people and this have given them the opportunity to engage in those sexual acts, some of the teacher has also curved a place for video shows and this attracts the girls to go there at night. They either claim they are going for classes and run to a over or go to night jams. It is observed that at the day of every night jam a girl becomes pregnant.

“A teacher impregnated my daughter and we asked him to take responsibility of her. He accepted and welcomed the idea not knowing he had the intention of aborting the pregnancy. After some months when she came home without the pregnancy, the
teacher had aborted it. Only God knows how it was done and whether with the consent of my daughter. I have since been pissed by the teachers and their claiming of teaching the children during school and extra classes.” A parent from Sang shares this during the sensitization

“I witnessed a case where a school teacher impregnated a student and went scot free without any punishment. The girl is finally being married to him and they are staying as husband and wife. This is because there are no rules or punishment for those people and this is sending our girls backward. They do not have role models to inspire them they either end up as school drop outs or go for kayaye.” Assemblyman, Mr. Yakubu Abubakari, Sang

2.3 IMMEDIATE RESULTS
The sensitization was very successful with the following immediate results:

1. 4 communities, (800 adult male and female, young male and female) increased knowledge on a number of SRHR issues such as teenage pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy leading to unsafe abortion, prevention of unwanted pregnancies (family planning and contraceptives), puberty changes sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

2. All of the community pledge to encourage each other and also involve teachers to have open discussion of SRHR in their home and schools. For instance, an elder from Nalongri, said this as his pledge:
“I had all along thought that discussing sexual issues with my children means telling them to have sex. But I have realized today that, it will rather help them practice safer sexual relations and life. I have from today pledge to have open discussions with them and even occasionally invite their teachers too.”

3. 3 of the communities have resolved to design a bye-law for the community. For instance, the traditional ruler from Sang advocated strongly for that and with support from the Assemblyman and all community members present.

“I have always been having sleepless nights and nightmare due to the rising number of teenage pregnancy happening in my community. Every day and now parents bring complaints of teenage pregnancy to my palace to resolve but it’s always difficult because, there is no law or punishment that has been laid down for such people and so cultural factors and relations will turn the issue to a null one and this has been an encouraging grounds for them to continue. I would like the Assemblyman in consultation with the community and your support to help us design a community bye-law to resolve this trauma one and for all.”

3.0 ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATIONS
3.1 Media Engagement

There was no media engaged

3.2 Other Collaborators (if any)
4.0 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. The time given by some communities did not enable us have enough deliberations into the topics/issues</td>
<td>Subsequent sensitizations could be discussed far ahead time to create time for enough discussions</td>
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<td>b. some communities did not want to discuss some issues of SRH e.g., condom use, teenage pregnancy</td>
<td>These communities will be the perfect to target in subsequent educations (Jimhe and Sambu)</td>
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5.0 LESSONS LEARNT The implementations of the activity on the issues have exposed the deficiency of the community members on SRH issues. Modernization has also affected the upbringing of the children; they have access to television, internet and pornographic movies. Lack of knowledge on SRH issues and awareness of ones act has affected the young girls in the communities especially those on the street and business areas.

6.0 WAY FORWARD FOR PROJECT The peer educators, advocacy group members are expected to effectively continue their routine peer education and community engagement on SRH issues. Community focal persons are to lead the design of the byelaws and get back to us when they need our assistance.

CONCLUSION (overall impression of activity)

The sensitization was very intuitive with relevant content for parents, teachers and young people. The facilitation was very appropriate with exhibition of knowledge on the topics. The prior discussion with the focal persons aided flow in facilitation and discussion. The ability for the facilitator to relate well with the community members ensures participation of all present.
APPENDICES

Community elder from Sambu during the sensitization

Community opinion leader making contributions during the session on support for brilliant but needy girls

Community elder from Sang during the sensitization

Cross section of students who were present at the sensitization at Ji rne