

Africa's Voices Foundation



Citizen Evidence and the DREAMS Innovation Challenge: Girls' Education and Reduced Vulnerability to HIV Infection

Location: **Kenya & United Kingdom**

Year formed: **2015**



Who we are

Africa's Voices Foundation (AVF) is a young non-profit organisation based in Kenya, spun out of research at the University of Cambridge. We are committed to amplifying citizen voices. We support partners with innovative and robust methods that put citizens at the heart of effective and accountable development.

What we do

AVF combines media, technology and social research to turn citizen engagement into evidence. We use expertise in Africa's media spaces to curate large, inclusive and trusted public discussions. We analyse audience participation using unique data and social science techniques, and then deliver evidence that improves programmes and their social accountability.

Key areas of focus

- Governance and accountability
- Evidence-based social change
- Citizen evidence innovations and knowledge-sharing

CONTEXT

In 2015, about 1.6 million Kenyans were living with HIV/AIDS; it caused 3 in 10 adult deaths. Some counties are especially vulnerable. About 1 in 4 adults in Siaya lives with HIV/AIDS, 4 times the national average. Over 11% of Kenya's total HIV/AIDS population lives in Nairobi. Adolescent girls and young women (15-24 years old) are especially at risk, accounting for 21% of new infections. Evidence shows that keeping girls in secondary school can dramatically reduce vulnerability. Effective social programmes face localised socio-cultural barriers, including around stigma, gendered self-efficacy and social control. AVF worked in a DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe Women) Innovations Challenge consortium, led by Trocaire and including Girl Child Network and LVCT Health, in Siaya and Nairobi. Focused on keeping girls in secondary school, these partners led field programming. They looked to AVF to provide citizen evidence to shape these programmes and also their mode of delivery (including communications messaging).

WHAT WE DID

Deploying our tested model of using interactive radio shows for both citizen engagement and social research, AVF generated valuable insights for DREAMS partners and stakeholders into the socio-cultural and gender-based barriers to girls transitioning to secondary school and/or completing their secondary school education, that puts them at risk of HIV.

Two research questions were developed collaboratively:

- 1) **What are the socio-cultural and gender-based beliefs that prevent girls staying in or returning to secondary school?**
- 2) **What do communities believe makes adolescent girls vulnerable to HIV infection?**

AVF turned these research questions into engaging radio questions on six topics (school drop-out; menstruation; HIV stigma; HIV vulnerability; pregnancy; cross-generational relationships); tied to media scripts and follow-up SMS survey questions. Interactive radio shows were run on local language radio stations (Ghetto FM, broadcasting in Sheng in peri-urban Nairobi; Ramogi FM, broadcasting in Lou nationwide), with over 7,400 audience participants across two seasons.

AVF's mixed methods analysis provided socio-cultural insights that were explored in workshops with partners and government stakeholders. Findings were also shared and discussed with adolescent girls at bridge centres in both counties.



CHALLENGE

Social programmes pre-designed at 'proposal' stage have contracted results and metrics. Citizen evidence can thus be constrained to adapt programming, let alone transform it. County government officials valued our findings and sought more. Yet this work stream - part of an aid 'project' - was not embedded within their policy making and service delivery plans.

☆ OUTCOME

We were working with partners with more domain specific and country knowledge than us. But they rethought their programs based on our grounded community insights. Importantly, among five drivers of drop-outs that we identified in citizen evidence, the role of the home/family came out as critical; yet this was seriously under-addressed in programs/policy (which focused heavily on schools and girls). Partners pivoted their programs to include family counselling, for which girls expressed satisfaction.