

A4HU Newsletter

January - March 2021



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Message from CEO

Dear Reader,

Hope you are staying Healthy. The year started off rather challenging as political discussions and processes took precedence over health and social issues. We had a series of elections; first for the President and Members of Parliament, then District Councils, and finally urban authorities. Despite the political processes and associated tensions and disruptions; and well as the constraints occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 started off relatively well and we continued implementing our ongoing projects.

The European Union is designing a new strategic partnership program for Uganda for the period 2021 – 2027. Action 4 Health Uganda is among the national CSOs who have been selected to give input into the ongoing EU's strategy development process. We are excited to be involved in these consultations and took this opportunity to highlight the importance of our work with young people to address SRHR, socio-economic empowerment, governance, and

other challenges of our times including environmental issues.

A4HU continued to innovate to make young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services a priority. A4HU also made progress to advocate for a conducive SRHR policy environment for young people through participation in national and subnational technical working group meetings.

In this quarterly issue, we share a quick snapshot of what has been achieved from January to March 2021.

Happy Reading, Stay Safe, Stay Healthy!

Robert Ochai

Chief Executive Officer – A4HU

ADVOCATING FOR INCREASED BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR FAMILY PLANNING IN UGANDA

As a strategy to influence budget allocation for reproductive health and family planning (RH/FP), DSW and Action 4 Health Uganda (A4HU) conduct annual FP budget analyses at the national and subnational level in the districts of Kamuli, Mityana, Mukono and Tororo to inform and advocate for improving budget allocation to the health sector – particularly RH/FP.

The study applied A4HU/DSW methodology in which focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among the community to assess attitudes on FP services, availability of services at health facilities, and district health budgets for resource allocation and expenditure. At the national level, budget and expenditure analysis was tracked through three main agencies: the National Medical Stores (NMS), Regional Referral Hospitals (RRH) and Ministry of Health (MoH). The Financial year 2020/21 study was conducted between October and December 2020 in the four districts of Mukono Mityana, Kamuli and Tororo and at a national level.

During the quarter, A4HU conducted a validation exercise with key stakeholders at national and sub national level. The exercise targeted district officials especially the technical teams from health and other contributing departments like planner, secretary health and District Community Development Officer and other Civil Society Organisations that implement advocacy interventions at the subnational level.

At the national level, the meeting targeted officials from Ministry of Health(MOH), National Population Council (NPC) and other stakeholders implementing family planning interventions in the country verify the quantity of both approved and spent figures of the budget for financial year (FY) 2020/21 and expenditure for FY 2019/20 at national and subnational level in project locations.

Budget Findings

The health budget analysis indicates a growth of 7 percent from approximately **UGX 2.6 Trillion** in FY 2019/2020 to **UGX 2.8 Trillion** in FY 2020/21. Despite the budget increment, the change falls short of the 15 percent of the total



A4HU budget study findings

annual national budget as proposed by the Abuja Declaration. Retrospectively, the overall health

budget has reduced from 10.2 percent to 6.2 percent of the total annual budget in FY 2019/20 and 2020/21 respectively.

Furthermore, despite the continuous increase of the health sector budget, only a small portion of funds were allocated to SRH/FP. In the FY 2020/21, only **UGX 15.2 Billion** was allocated for SRH/FP in comparison to **UGX 16.2 Billion** allocated in the FY 2018/19. This represents a 6.1 percent reduction in less than two financial years, hence, rationalizing the need to invest in FP to meet unmet needs. Though the allocation to SRH/FP remains limited, the spending is above 98 percent in both FY 2018/2019 and 2019/20.



During the quarter, A4HU in collaboration with Family Planning Budget Advocacy Group (FPBAG) partners, presented a position paper to the health sector committee of the Parliament of Uganda. The FPBAG partners also sought to agree on the nature of support MPs can offer on prioritizing SRH/FP issues in the FY 2021/22 budget.

The position paper highlighted FP funding priority areas that should be considered in the FY 2021/22 budgeting, including ring-fencing resources for procurement of SRH/FP sup-

plies (FY 2021/22 Vote 116 Allocations).

The CSOs also requested the ministry of health to operationalize the Village Health Team (VHT) Strategy. The strategy will support the provision of health services, including family planning at the community level. The paper proposed an increase in the Primary Health Care budget (where FP falls) from the current 30% to 50%. It also called on the

members of parliament to pass the National Insurance Health Bill. Through its Chairperson, the parliamentary committee on health committed to table a stakeholder consultation report on the floor of parliament to support the passing of the National Health Insurance Bill 2019. They also committed to debate the bill if the Minister for Health tables a motion to withdraw it since the 10th Parliament is coming to a conclusion. The MPs promised to fast track the bill to ensure it is passed.



Ministry of health official making a presentation at FPBAG meeting

A4HU Led Advocacy Efforts Leading to Increased Budget Allocations at Sub-National Level



different commitments made by the districts on FP priority areas and presentation of CSOs joint Advocacy family planning funding asks. Through these meetings, the following commitments have been made and implemented:

During the quarter, A4HU supported the Family Planning Technical Working Group meetings in the districts of Mityana, Mukono, Tororo and Kamuli districts between 9th and 18th March 2020. The meetings were aimed at ensuring that FP line items are maintained and included in the FY 2021/2022 district and health annual work plans and budgets. The meeting was also used to follow up on

In Mityana district, it was noted that despite the cut in the district health budget from Ugx 944,595,097 FY2020/21 to 740,855,935 FY2021/22 due to Covid-19 and revenue reductions, the district committed to continue prioritizing FP with the resources that they have. The district further committed to train health workers in provision of youth friendly corners and functionalising them. The dis-

trict further committed to integrate FP services in to the existing planned activities like outreaches, dialogues conducted in communities and schools.

In Mukono, the district committed to maintain the FP line items in the district budget and work plan as follows though there was a reduction in the district revenue: 8million for quarterly review meeting for family planning performance in the district, 3million to support world contraceptive day, and 300,000 quarterly for family planning activities in health centre IIs. Tororo district committed to use the District Costed Implementation plan to guide in district planning and budgeting FY2021/2022, The Kamuli DHO committed to allocate 2.2% from local revenue and unconditional grant or PHC through health facilities as fulfilment of last year's commitment.

Distribution of reusable sanitary pads and awareness raising on menstrual hygiene

A4HU continued to raise awareness on menstrual hygiene in 59 schools and distributed reusable sanitary towels to 1774 girls in reproductive age.

The girls were further empowered to experience menstruation without shame, ensuring they can experience their periods with dignity and fulfil their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The intervention is hoped to improve school attendance for girls and consequently reduce school dropout rates.

Nakajubi Christine, 15 from Bakijjulula Primary School is among the many beneficiaries on menstrual hygiene awareness activities. She also received reusable pads from A4HU.

“Girls who go into menstruation have now learnt how to manage themselves which has reduced on dropout rates. In fact, there are more girls than boys in classes today,” Najjembe.

Through these activities, Nakajubi says she has learnt how to keep clean during her menses, and encourages her peers to wash their hands after visiting the toilet. She also learnt how to use pads which keeps her in school even when she is on her period.

“In the past, I would stay at home when I am on my period. I used to use a cloth which would let blood through which made other pupils laugh at me at school. But now I got pads from A4HU and learnt how to use them. I now regularly attend classes,” Nakajubi noted. “I want to become a teacher when I grow up” she says of her vision for the future.

A4HU also provided technical assistance to teachers through mentorships on promotion of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and sexuality education. The mentorships were premised on the fact that menstrual hygiene management is an im-

portant component of a “WASH-friendly school” and therefore an integral aspect of learning not only for teachers but also for the students. Teachers’ capacities were further built to manage aspects of providing students with basic information on puberty, menstruation, menstrual hygiene management, youth and gender friendly communication. Mentored teachers will be supported to cascade knowledge on menstrual hygiene



Reusable sanitary pads demonstration

management in schools through engaging school health clubs. Because of the training they got from A4HU, Najjembe Proscovia, Senior Woman Teacher, Bakijjulula

Primary Schools revealed that they were about to form a school health club. The club does health talks on menstrual hygiene for both girls and boys including career guidance and counselling which she notes has reduced fear and improved school attendance for girls.

“Before A4HU came to our school, girls used to miss school when they go into menstruation. Absenteeism among girls used to be high, they used to miss lessons which ultimately affected their performance,” Najjembe says. According to the senior woman teacher, there was also high school dropout rate among girls because of stigmatisation mostly by boys when they went into menstruation.

“Girls who go into menstruation have now learnt how to manage themselves which has reduced on dropout rates. In fact, there are more girls than boys in classes today,” Najjembe.

Commemoration of Women's Day in Kamuli district

Action 4 Health Uganda joined Kamuli district to commemorate international women's day under the theme: "Building on Women's Strength for a Better Future in a COVID-19 World." During the celebrations, there was a reported increase in early child marriages and teenage pregnancy. The Assistant District Health Officer, maternal and child health noted that during the period January to December, 2020, 3,183 teenage pregnancies were recorded in the

district. The partners led by A4HU called on the district officials to increase funding for sexual reproductive and health to solve the challenges the district is facing in regards to SRH/FP. The partners also urged district to fast track the approval and implementation of by-laws and policies to end teenage pregnancies and early marriages.



Youth Champions Supported to Conduct SGBV Integrated Outreaches and Intergenerational Dialogues

A4HU supported 24 SRH Youth Champions to conduct 10 intergenerational dialogues (community conversations) to discuss challenges that inhibit young people from accessing the knowledge that is fundamental to informing the choices they make in life; economic, social and cultural choices. A total of 420 (283 Males and 137 Females) persons participated in the conversations. A4HU, facilitated Youth Champions to work closely with community leaders, gatekeepers and opinion leaders to facilitate discussions about human rights in the local context that challenges existing beliefs about reasons for gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, substance abuse and early marriages. The inter-generational approach to addressing harmful cultural practices was significant as some communities presented the need to establish by-laws against the negative practices. As a result, the structured conversations brought together young people, Police, government officials, policy makers and civil society towards improvement of the adolescents and youth sexual reproductive health and rights. These leaders are powerful agents of change towards motivating the community to protect the survivors. A4HU will follow up with the Community Development Office on supporting communities to establish community by-laws.

Ten (10) interactive sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) awareness and integrated health sessions were conducted and reached 984 young

people. Dialogue sessions were conducted in a manner that enabled staff, health workers, Youth Champions,



Community Action Committees (CACs) and other GBV actors to offer age-

appropriate and gender-sensitive SRHR information to the young people. Through the activity, A4HU advocated for the prioritization of gender-based violence interventions by the duty bearers and their increased involvement and responsibility. Communities have also been enabled to understand the GBV referral pathway and how it functions.

CACs further engaged community and influential leaders and parents towards increasing community responsiveness and capacity for mobilizing locals in achieving long-term, sustainable development outcomes. Sensitization activities with parents, teachers and community leaders are increasing support for the rights of young people, including the right to access youth-friendly and youth-responsive services. The engagements enabled young people to gain awareness on their reproductive health rights, and the existing national programs and plans addressing sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response concerns.



Media Watch

Action 4 Health Uganda (A4HU) published an article in the New Vision Newspaper celebrating the tremendous efforts by women and girls, especially the young peer educators, youth champions and health workers who have borne the brunt of COVID-19, and are shaping a more equal and just society as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and look toward a brighter tomorrow. A4HU called upon Government to prioritize the health of

women and girls in service delivery, and to create safe and youth friendly spaces at all health facilities.



The Youth Truck: “Impacting Communities” - Reaching the Hard-to-Reach

The Youth Truck is a mobile outreach service, which sensitizes youth on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), HIV/AIDS prevention and social economic empowerment in rural areas and urban slums, many of whom live in the far outer lying areas of Uganda including internally displaced camps.

The Youth Truck aims at instilling positive behaviour change among the Youths through a variety of activities such as providing accurate health information on SRHR and other relevant topics, promoting positive behaviour and dispelling myths. The Youth Truck team works closely with Youth Empowerment Centres, Youth Clubs, and Peer Educators involved in providing SRHR information, education and services.

It gives access to information on various topics to young people. It combines a mobile approach with highly participatory and youth friendly methods including; health outreaches, edutainment during sports events, distributing IEC materials, role plays and town hall-style dialogues in which adolescent SRHR issues and relevant themes including entrepreneurship skills training, life skills education and non-violent conflict resolution are addressed.

The Youth Truck is equipped with a solar system that powers a public address system through which enables it amplify its messages to a minimum effective radius of 150 meters from its loca-

tion. This enables A4HU to take its services directly to target groups and to adapt them to the local services and needs. The Youth Truck is staffed with a trained



youthful team on board

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Through edutainment, games and sports, the Youth Truck team engages the young people in discussions on SRHR, counselling and guidance, entrepreneurial skills, income generation, gender based violence, non-violent conflict resolution/peace education and life skills education.

It combines a

mobile approach with highly participatory and youth friendly methods including; film shows, edutainment, games and sports activities, health outreach set, IEC materials, group work, role plays and discussions.

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Action 4 Health Uganda

About A4HU

Action 4 Health Uganda (A4HU) is a youth empowerment organization dedicated to mainstreaming young peoples' engagement in socio-economic development and promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

A4HU envisions a healthy society where all young people develop their full potential and our mission is to contribute efficiently and transparently to the improvement of the health and socio-economic situation of young people in Uganda. We advocate for the prioritization and provision of health services for young people at national and sub national level to enable the establishment of a supportive socio-cultural, political and legal environment, which protects young people's rights, and enables them to access health information, education and services that are gender sensitive and youth friendly.

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