



ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Capability Statement

OUR APPROACH

VSO's work is unique. We achieve greater and sustainable development impact through the power of volunteering. Volunteering provides the foundation for systemic and sustainable change, through a focus on inclusion, participation, empowerment, social action, ownership and accountability. We enable people, and, in turn, their organisations and communities, to play a central role in development.

VSO has a relational volunteering model, which demonstrates how we are able to achieve a lasting impact. This model of working through different forms of adaptive volunteering distinguishes us from other organisations fighting poverty; unique because it carries an 'accompaniment' process of training, mentoring and coaching that empowers beneficiaries, or primary actors, as VSO chooses to call them, to make meaningful and lasting choices and enabling partners to build up capacity. It mobilises volunteers of varied competencies to work at all levels, from grassroots to policy development, in one collective action.

Last year, working in conjunction with communities, local non-governmental organisations, host country government agencies and policymakers, our programmes reached over 2 million people in 24 countries across Africa and Asia-Pacific in the sectors of Health, Education and Livelihoods.

AYSRRH PROGRAMMING

VSO is working to create a world in which adolescents and youth enjoy the right to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), improving their quality of life and enabling them to become healthy, active and engaged members of their local and global communities. Last year over **125,000 adolescent girls and boys and young women and men in 12 countries across Africa and Asia¹** benefited from VSO's work to empower them to access the SRH care they need and see their SRH rights fulfilled.

VSO's approach to AYSRRH is **pro-poor, people-centred and rights-based**, and combines an evidence-based social model of demand creation with capacity building of key stakeholders, aiming to:

- **Create spaces for meaningful engagement** - We work with our partners to bring about positive change in SRH knowledge, attitude and behaviour amongst adolescents and youth, their families and communities. We work with youth as advocates, decision makers and volunteers to design and implement our programmes, and we engage traditional and religious leaders, parents and other community members in our efforts to create an enabling environment for the supply and uptake of AYSRRH services.

¹ Bangladesh, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

- **Build capacity of key actors and systems** - We build the capacity and work to challenge the attitudes of public and private sector service providers across the existing health and education systems to ensure that teachers and health workers provide adolescent/youth-friendly, confidential, accessible, well managed and good quality SRH and education services. Crucially, we support the meaningful participation of adolescents and youth in the design, delivery and review of services.
- **Champion evidence-informed AYSRHR best practices and innovation** – VSO works with partners to identify, develop and deliver new and innovative AYSRHR interventions. To achieve this we work in partnership to scale up the use of evidence-informed best AYSRHR practices that enhance SRH outcomes.
- **Build platforms for informed advocacy** - We also work with our partners and primary actors to create a more enabling policy environment for the realisation of AYSRHR.

OUR SRHR PROGRAMMES

The husband school, Sierra Leone (DFID, 2016-2017)

Taking an innovative approach to bringing about positive community SRH behaviour change, VSO has worked with the local partner Fambul Initiatives Network for Equality Sierra Leone (FINE-SALON). Together they have implemented an innovative male engagement project. This has created a network of local men in Kenema district in Sierra Leone who provide a community support system that aims to enable adolescent girls and young women, who are most at risk of gender and sexual-based violence which negatively impacts on their SRH, to live safer lives. The project works on the premise that real and lasting change around SRH can only be achieved when men, as decision makers, power wielders and perpetrators of gender-based violence, show positive attitudinal and behavioural change in relation to SRHR. VSO and FINE-SALON have empowered influential men from the community to engage fellow men on a range of SRHR issues and enhance community-based accountability. This is being accomplished through a variety of initiatives such as husband schools, in-school boys' clubs, male volunteer-led marital mediation and referral, mentorship programmes, and policy dialogue with local traditional leaders.

The preliminary findings of an internal evaluation show that the approach contributed to a 50% reduction in the number of cases of domestic violence reported to the local Family Support Unit, as well as a reduction in sexual-based violence at the community level. The

project also contributed to a 10% increase in women giving birth in health facilities. This was due to a higher number of husbands encouraging their wives to deliver in hospitals and an increase in the uptake of family planning use amongst the wives of those men reached by the project. There has also been a reported reduction in the number of illegal female genital mutilations (FGM) as a result of an increased awareness amongst men about the health risks connected to the practice.

SRHR for Youth and Adolescents, Bangladesh (DFID, 2015 - present)

Through a multi-year DFID-funded AYSRHR programme, VSO has developed an effective youth-led and community-based approach to improve the SRHR of vulnerable adolescents and youth in rural areas of north-west Bangladesh. Partnering with local civil society organisations, we are holistically tackling the root causes of poor AYSRHR by working at individual, family, community, health service delivery and policy level.

In addition to building the capacity of front line community health workers to improve the quality of the first line SRH services they deliver, VSO has been successfully implementing a community change model combining comprehensive peer education in AYSRHR with community-led prevention of child marriage to empower youth and adolescents and their communities to become agents of change. The special value of this model lies in the creation of community structures that the same communities hold as their own, ensuring agency, participation and social action. Through the establishment of girls' hubs in schools and Child Marriage Prevention Committees at the community level, VSO has been able to create sustainable and safe platforms for dialogue and spaces for social mobilisation and action.

“It is independent and democratic – it is our freedom. Before this we had no space or choice.”

Girls club member - Bangladesh

In a context where speaking out about SRH is a social taboo, over 4,500 adolescents and young people from three rural districts reported a marked increase in knowledge and understanding of SRHR, the availability of SRH services and the negative effects of early marriage since the launch of the programme. A reduction in cases of child marriage has been observed at the community level in the Dinajpur region as a result of the Child Marriage Prevention Committees.

TALK, Zambia (Big Lottery Fund, 2015-present)

Since 2015, VSO's Adolescents Training and Local



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Door to door educating the public about domestic violence

Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (TALK) project, partly funded by the Big Lottery Fund, has been applying a comprehensive approach to empowering girls and boys in rural areas of Zambia to make informed decisions about their SRH. This has included combining adolescent SRH awareness-raising techniques, implementing SRH community behavioural change models and capacity-building of SRH service providers. Working in partnership with Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia (PPAZ), the project has reached approximately 8,000 youth through the establishment of seven youth-friendly corners in health facilities or schools where girls and boys can access adolescent and youth-friendly SRHR information and services. It has also provided increased community-based distribution of SRH and family planning commodities and has increased the engagement of young people on SRHR issues. This was done through the introduction of radio listening clubs where girls and boys can access live call-in discussions on local community radio, led by trained SRH peer educators. The project also contributed to reducing myths and misconceptions about AYSRHR at community level by engaging over 200 traditional leaders and other key decision makers as youth SRH champions. Documented evidence over the past year suggests that this approach is proving effective with the target youth. Adolescents report feeling more confident and empowered to make SRHR decisions. The adolescents also attribute their increased knowledge levels of SRHR to the project. There is also evidence of a 28% increase in the number of decision makers that actively support adolescent SRHR.

“Before TALK, our young people did not understand that teenage pregnancies, marriages and HIV/STIs affected their health and education. With the project, they are

even teaching us SRHR issues”

Local community leader

Gender empowerment and development to enhance rights, Swaziland (SIDA, 2013-2017)

Through a five-year regional programme funded by the Swedish Government (SIDA) that combines health and livelihoods interventions to improve the SRHR outcomes of youth and adolescents, VSO has been applying an innovative edutainment approach to SRHR behaviour-change education and communication for in-school youth in Swaziland. This includes the use of music and dance as a means to share HIV and SRHR messaging. VSO volunteers have supported the development of girls’ clubs where adolescent students find a safe place to voice the HIV and SRHR-related challenges they face, and learn about how to raise awareness about these through composing songs and developing dance routines. Students perform their routines to educate other young people and the wider community to expand the impact of the project. Recent evidence shows that the intervention has positively impacted on the knowledge and behaviours of youth and adolescents in the region. Members of the girls’ club reported that VSO’s edutainment approach increased their understanding and knowledge about HIV and SRHR issues, while teachers reported a marked decrease in school drop outs due to teenage pregnancy. HIV positive adolescents reported a reduction in stigma and discrimination and club members confirmed that they are now more confident to identify and report cases of sexual abuse. The success of the girls’ groups led to the establishment of boys’ clubs, which provide complimentary community edutainment about SRH through the use of the traditional gumboot dance.

MAIN PARTNERS AND PAST PERFORMANCE LIST

| Project Name | Country | Donor | Duration | Amount |
|---|---|---|---------------------|------------|
| SRHR and HIV & AIDS in Prisons (SHARP) | Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania | Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) | Oct 2015 – Sep 2018 | £2,506,400 |
| Gender Empowerment and Development to Enhance Rights (G.E.N.D.E.R) | Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland | Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) | Jan 2014 – Mar 2017 | £3,600,000 |
| Provincial AIDS Capacity Building Project | Papua New Guinea | Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) | Jun 2013 – Jun 2016 | £1,964,193 |
| Preventing Gender-based Violence through Democratic Policing | Pakistan | Amplify Change (via MannionDaniels) | Jan 2016 – Jan 2018 | €350,000 |
| Addressing HIV and AIDS in the Beira Corridor (ABeCO) | Mozambique | Big Lottery Fund | Nov 2012 – Sep 2015 | £499,857 |
| Improving health of HIV+ prisoners in Zimbabwe | Zimbabwe | Big Lottery Fund | Jan 2012 – Jan 2015 | £495,462 |
| Hear our Voice - Amplifying the voices of people affected by HIV in Zimbabwe | Zimbabwe | Comic Relief | Aug 2017 – Sep 2018 | £219,176 |

