

Empowering Futures

The DREAMS Program's Impact on Economic Independence and HIV Mitigation among Adolescent Girls and Young Women in Uganda

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BACKGROUND

PEPFAR's Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) program aims to mitigate the risk of higher HIV transmission rates among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 10-24 years.

In many countries, including Uganda, HIV prevalence among young women aged 15-24 years is three times higher (3.3%) than the rate observed in men (0.8%).

The DREAMS program offers an evidence-based comprehensive package targeting factors contributing to AGYW's vulnerability to HIV: limited economic opportunities, educational barriers, and gender-based violence.

Two Ugandan military bases, supported by URC, with funding from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP), enrolled 1,525 AGYW in DREAMS between October 2022-September 2023.



A group of AGYW at Mubende being trained in making traditional pancakes during skills training in bakery.

DESCRIPTION

- ▶ Provided a package of HIV prevention services; financial literacy and trade skills training, tools and guidance.
- ▶ Guided AGYW on selecting microenterprises and forming Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA) groups to create opportunities for income generation.
- ▶ Provided start-up kits for income generation activities.
- ▶ Conducted vocational skills training with 57 AGYW who were assessed as critically vulnerable.
- ▶ Interviewed 289 AGYW, two months post-program completion, using qualitative, in-depth guides and two focus group discussions.
- ▶ Transcribed and thematically analyzed data to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of economic empowerment initiatives.

RESULTS

- ▶ All 1,525 AGYW completed the DREAMS socioeconomic empowerment component increasing their potential to generate income using their new skills.
- ▶ Among 289 AGYW interviewed, 74% (n=214) initiated small trades, such as retail shops or second hand clothes, using funds accumulated through VSLA.
- ▶ The majority, 87% (n=251), reported achieving an improved level of financial independence through the project.
- ▶ Four AGYW secured jobs immediately after completing vocational training.



UPDF officer hands over start-up items to the AGYW DREAMS participants (bakery group) at Gulu at end of training.

CONCLUSION

The socioeconomic strengthening component of the DREAMS program not only fostered entrepreneurial economic opportunities but also led to immediate employment and income opportunities for AGYW, showcasing the program's ability to promote economic empowerment.

This has the potential to reduce HIV vulnerability often associated with poverty.

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