

# HEALTHKEEPERS NETWORK (HKN)



## “Link UP” :Adolescent & Sexual Reproductive Health Program

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## **HEALTHKEEPERS NETWORK (HKN)**

HealthKeepers Network (HKN) is a local non-governmental development organization founded in Ghana in 2009. HKN brings innovative and sustainable self-help solutions to the fight against diseases, chronic hunger, and poverty. Together with its partners, HKN equips individuals, families, and communities with the resources they need to build futures of hope, health, and dignity.

The HKN program is an initiative which provides unprecedented and sustainable access to life-saving health protection products and services, along with information, to the vulnerable and marginalized populations of Ghana, particularly women, children, and youth who are often underserved. HKN builds on the entrepreneurial spirit of community based agents and existing distribution channels, as well as the organization's own expertise in health training and service linkages for marginalized and hard to reach people in rural and underserved communities.

## **HKN'S ADOLESCENT SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROGRAM**

In many Ghanaian communities, the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of the youth are not fully met as they grow from adolescence into adulthood. A number of factors impede their right to be educated on SRH, forcing them to face many challenges including teenage and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/ AIDS.

HKN, realizing that SRH is important to the development of the youth into adulthood, has designed a youth-centered program known as "Link-Up." The program seeks to improve the knowledge of students on their reproductive health rights, such as the use of contraceptives against unwanted pregnancies, teenage pregnancies, STIs, and loss of lives through unsafe abortion practices.

## **HKN'S STRATEGY**

Link-Up is tailor-made for students in both senior high and tertiary institutions. With this target group, HKN's strategic approach has been to make family planning (FP) an attractive life style so as to reach a wider audience, especially the youth with no families of their own. To this end, HKN is repositioning FP as "fertility management" and presents lectures to students on the theme "Entrepreneurship in FP" in order to make the subject of FP attractive to them and also to create business opportunities for them in FP programming.

HKN recruits students from their institutions and equips them with the skill sets they need to become peer educators in their schools and in their communities. The young peer educators receive training on adolescent SRH, adolescent fertility management, abstinence, STIs including HIV/AIDS, and youth friendly services. The programme seeks to achieve behavioral change among youth by addressing some of the current crises, especially the increasing rate of teenage pregnancies and the high incidence of STIs facing the youth today.

Another HKN strategy has been to organize outreaches in schools to educate students on FP and HIV/AIDS prevention methods. Students are also taken on as interns by HKN and provided with training in community-based family planning (CBFP) and HIV/AIDS prevention programming.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HKN collaborates with various institutions and individuals in the implementation of its activities. The organization works with Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies school health education program units, their health directorates, and education coordinators, as well as the heads of various schools who participate in the training program.

The youth in the various institutions that HKN have educated so far have welcomed the program and called for its scale-up in their various schools and its expansion to other schools. Over twelve months, 122 students, including 68 boys and 54 girls, drawn from second cycle schools in the Ga South and Adentan municipalities, have been recruited and trained.



*Pictures: Training of Senior High Students drawn from various schools in the Ga South Municipality*



*Pictures: Training of Senior High Students drawn from various schools in the Adentan Municipality*

## SCHOOL OUTREACHES

HKN has adopted the strategy of encouraging students to abstain from early sex. However if this approach is not taken, HKN encourages the use of FP by linking the benefits of using FP and HIV prevention methods to the demand generation of commodities like condoms and other services.



*Pictures: Some UPSA students interacting and buying contraceptives from the HKN team during a school campus program*



*An outreach with students in the Ga South Municipality*

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN FAMILY PLANNING**

HKN has made presentations on CBFP programming to graduate public health students of the University of Ghana's School of Public Health, and also to students of Kings University College at Aplaku in Accra, as part of their Students Representation Council Week celebrations.

## **INTERNSHIP**

HKN receives student interns from Ghana and abroad. The interns from the United States come mainly from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and recently from Ohio State University. In Ghana, they recruit interns from the University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, and Central University College. These internships increase the student's knowledge of CBFP programming and provide them with first-hand experience in community based project design and implementation.



*Pictures: Some HKN Interns*

## **COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

HKN has been able to achieve this level of success through active collaboration and the strengthening of partnerships with a number of public and private sector organizations. These organizations include but are not limited to the National Population Council, Family Health Division of Ghana Health Services, Ghana Aids Commission, Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Commodity Security (ICC/CS) members, and various Municipal and District assemblies in HKN's focus regions, namely Greater Accra, Central, Western, Volta, and Northern Regions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

HKN's Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health program has made great strides, but not without encountering challenges. The absence of clear and harmonized in-school health policies between the Ghana Health Services and Ghana Education services coupled with the personal biases of school heads and teachers makes it difficult to reach some students with key messages on SRH.

In spite of these challenges, HealthKeepers Network's Link Up program has made great strides. HKN greatly values the management, technical assistance, and support it obtains from the USAID-Ghana office and JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., as well as the funding support of USAID and its partnerships with the various agencies which have made such progress possible.