



Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana
NEWSLETTER

May, 2023 Edition

About PPAG

PPAG is a leading, volunteer supported, grass-root based, non-partisan and rights-based NGO with a primary focus on SRHR programming in Ghana. It is an affiliate member of the IPPF and aims at improving the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of the population especially adolescents, young people, and vulnerable groups.

The Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG) has been designated as a Center of Excellence (CoE) for youth programming among International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Member Associations in Africa.

This Newsletter is a compilation of activities of the Association for the month under review.

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Introduction

These are success stories drawn from twin projects run by the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana with funding from UNFPA. These are the Ending Child Marriage project and the Adolescent Girl Empowerment project. These projects aim to contribute to national efforts aimed at Ending Child Marriage in Ghana and improving adolescent girls' access to SRHR services.

And these are our successes over the years.....

THREE ADOLESCENT GIRLS SAVED FROM CHILD MARRIAGE

Here is the story of three adolescent girls Jessica Abaare, Joyce A. Anyopoka, and Akolbire who have been saved from child marriage in Bongo and have returned to school, thanks to the UNFPA Girls Empowerment Project. Bongo, a community in Northern Ghana has fallen for sexual and reproductive health challenges, facing both boys and girls. This is due to the lack of sex education and poor parent-child communication. Issues of teenage pregnancies and early marriages are therefore rife and yet seen as the norm as parents and guardians are happy to give out their under-aged female children for marriage and take customary bride prices in return. But Naba Adendaa Awumyele, the chief of Zorko-Kodorogo of the Bongo District has become an exception.

He recounts, that before the start of the Adolescent Girls Empowerment Project (AGP) in Bongo village, the community had no idea that they were endangering the lives of adolescent girls when they foster child marriages, until his participation in the pre-implementation consultation meeting in 2019. He narrates that "As part of the roles assigned to me by the AGP Team, I began my journey as an advocate in the entire Bongo district.

I began actively speaking on radio shows to discuss the current SRHR concerns affecting adolescents and to seek support in addressing and resolving them. I also held a number of durbars and engaged parents and the community at large to highlight the effects of teenage pregnancies and child marriages on the adolescent girl."



Through Naba Adendaa Awumyele's advocacy and intervention, the three adolescent girls named Abaare Jessica, Anyopoka A. Joyce, and Akolbire, who are below the age of 18, have been rescued from child marriages. Their parents gave them out to adult males for marriages but Naba Adendaa Awumyele having been recruited as an AGP advocate, ordered the parents of these underage girls to bring these girls back to their houses and report with them to his Palace.

Action followed this decree and the girls were safely returned to their homes to continue their education. These girls are now free from early child marriage and are attending school to pursue their future dreams and goals just as their male counterparts are. What an effort to bridge the gender gap!

TEEN MOTHER RETURNS TO SCHOOL

Still, in Bongo, we met Rose Mbii, a young adolescent girl in the Feo Community of the Bongo District of the Upper East Region of Ghana. Miss Rose Mbii was a final year student of Feo Junior High School when her adolescent boyfriend impregnated her.

According to her, she visited her boyfriend and they had unprotected sex that resulted in pregnancy. The rippling effect? She dropped out of school while her boyfriend continued with his education. Rose lost her father and her unemployed mother could not support her either.

Fortunately, with the introduction of the Adolescent Girls Empowerment project in the District, she joined the Young and Wise Club in the Feo community, benefitted from the Pregnant Adolescent and Parenting Teen groups. She had unhindered access to SRHR information on how to cater for themselves and their babies, how to access family planning services to help them avoid future unintended pregnancies and the need to go back to school after nursing their babies for some time. She put these to action and expressed interest in going back to school.



Image: **Naba Adendaa Awumyele** - Chief of Zorko-Kodorogo of the Bongo District



Image: Rose Mbii

With the support of the Girl Child Education officer in the District and PPAG, Rose is currently in the senior high school and very determined to be a better person in future to enable her to cater for herself and her daughter.

PREGNANT TEEN BENEFITS FROM DELIVERY MATERIALS

Next, we made a stop in Bolgatanga to see how the UNFPA/PPAG delivery materials saved a pregnant teenage girl during and after delivery. Economic hardships forced 19-year-old Apokalla from the Bolgatanga municipality to have a boyfriend whom she got pregnant for. Apokalla tells our team that, her boyfriend was supportive until she got pregnant for him. He denied responsibility for the pregnancy and withdrew all support to Apokalla. Apokalla, therefore, contemplated terminating the pregnancy but had no money to engage the services of a health professional. Apokalla resolved to keep the pregnancy



Image: Young Apokalla with her baby

As the saying goes ‘A kind gesture can reach a wound that only compassion can heal by Steve Maraboli, Miss Apokalla on the 6th of June honored an invitation to meet parenting teens and pregnant adolescents in the Bolga municipality. The teens received support in the form of delivery essentials from UNFPA/PPAG and sessions on antenatal and post-natal care as well as family planning. With this support, Miss Apokalla delivered on 8th June and accepted the uptake of family planning to prevent another unplanned pregnancy. A visibly teary Miss Apokalla confessed to us that “my guardian was not able to get me all the necessary delivery materials I needed for birth, I was hopeless but God being by my side, UNFPA has touched my heart. With everything I have received now, I am grateful and promise to return to school after nursing my baby. The impact will always be memorable to me and I will further my education to the level I can reach.” We wish Miss Apokalla well!

LIVELIHOOD TRAINING STOPS YOUNG GIRL FROM DANGEROUS RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION

And there is more. We did not relent in our efforts. We moved from Bolgatanga to Bolga to meet 18-year-old Rita, a beneficiary of our livelihood skill training from UNFPA/PPAG. Due to economic hardships, she could not afford to pay for her tertiary education so she decided to travel to Kumasi to make ends meet by either washing bowls at restaurants or street hawking. Before embarking on this journey to Kumasi (an urban centre), Rita heard about the livelihood skill training organized by PPAG/UNFPA and joined. Rita after getting training in liquid soup and pastry making, got some proceeds to set up a business.

And we are happy to say that, this stopped her from relocating to Kumasi where she knew absolutely nobody. Just like many other adolescent girls, it is possible that Rita would have traveled to an urban center and faced harsh street conditions such as rape, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, and the absence of shelter.

Thanks to our livelihood empowerment program, Rita now serves as the breadwinner of her family, while impacting her society by helping others who are less privileged with livelihood training. Looking ahead, Rita has plans of saving enough to expand her business while still furthering her education as planned. She is grateful to PPAG/UNFPA for the training. She said 'Thank you UNFPA for coming to my aid at a critical moment in my life. I can now feed myself and my family because of you. I will forever be indebted to you. Thank you so much!

TEEN MOTHER BENEFITS FROM SERVICE DELIVERY: BECOMES SRHR ADVOCATE

Let's journey down south to the Central region, precisely Abakam in the Cape Coast Metropolis, and meet a teen mother, Mary who could not continue her education due to an unintended pregnancy and was home with no source of income. She was in JHS when she got pregnant. Four months post-delivery, she experienced abnormal pains, discharges, and discomfort but could not access service at any healthcare Centre because she could not afford it. The cost of over-the-counter medication for candidiasis(which she suspected she was having) was GHS 8, but Mary could not afford it because it was still 'expensive' for her.



Image: Mary in a pose with her baby

Her savior was our Pregnant Adolescent and Parenting Teens Activity where Mary got the help she needed as she was identified to be a beneficiary. After her encounter with the Field Officer about her situation, she was referred to a Ghana Health Service facility in the community. Mary was diagnosed with a severe case of candidiasis and given treatment from the outreach commodities procured. Through the education she received from the nurse during the activity, she has become an advocate, encouraging people to speak up about their health.



Image: Rita in a pose with other young girls during a livelihood empowerment session

Mary intends to continue her education if given the opportunity. She still dreams of becoming a teacher and also a peer educator to educate others on teenage pregnancy and its consequences. Mary is very grateful to UNFPA and PPAG for the opportunity to receive treatment. She said, 'without UNFPA and PPAG, I would never have had the courage to speak to anyone about my condition and receive treatment, thank you for the education and for treating me free of charge.

We are motivated by these lives we have touched to achieve even more in the coming years. Thank you UNFPA. Thank you, PPAG.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LIVELIHOOD TRAINING FOR YOUNG REBECCA

We are still in Central Region precisely Ekumfi, where we caught up with Rebecca Kporxa, the firstborn of her parents. After Rebecca completed SHS in 2013, life was a bit challenging. She had no skills and her parents were not financially capable of enrolling her in the university. She narrated to us that "I struggled to make a living through the sale of pure water from 2013 to 2019 until I was introduced to PPAG as a facilitator for my community. At that time, teenage pregnancy cases were very high in my community because we had no knowledge about SRHR information, sexual and gender-based violence, or gender inequality in my community."

In 2019, Rebecca was selected by the leaders of her community to facilitate RHESY sessions, breaking the silence forums, and livelihood training skills. Through these activities,

Rebecca's community was able to eradicate teenage pregnancy, and currently, the teenage pregnancy rate in the Abakam community is zero percent. She has been able to learn the liquid soap and Azuma blow soap during the livelihood training skills and is now the proud owner of Beckybab Enterprise while looking forward to impacting more lives.

ADOLESCENT DROPOUT RETURNED TO SCHOOL

In a related development, we reached out to Princess Ninsin a school dropout who is now on her way to fulfilling her dream. She has been the one to work with her parents to feed the whole family and also pay the school fees of her siblings and their medical bills as well, and doing all these alone was very difficult for her because she wanted to go back to school. Princess said she sometimes felt like running away from her family, but she loves them and cannot do such a thing to them.

Thankfully Princess was introduced to the UNFPA/PPAG Livelihood Training activities in her community. The club facilitator talked to her parents about the importance of girl child education to girls and the society. The facilitator invited her to one of the livelihood training sessions they had and she decided to start production on a commercial basis.

Now, Princess is back to school after almost two years because of the skills PPAG and UNFPA offered them. Currently, Princess has expanded her business from just liquid soap production to the production of asana, a local corn drink.

She now makes and sells the asana during vacations and saves some money to buy school provisions and personal stuff without depending on anyone.

According to Princess, she is forever grateful to God and UNFPA/PPAG for helping her and the family. She said, “My life is a mixture of moments, some happy moments and others not so much, but regardless, I have been able to acquire secondary education, and these moments have made me the person I am today. Thanks to UNFPA/PPAG for putting me back on my dream path”. Princess wishes to complete her secondary education and continue to the tertiary level.

YOUNG GIRL SAVED FROM CO-HABITATION; RECEIVES ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

From one Coast to another, we stopped in the Volta Region and met Lornonyo Boni, a young mother of three kids from Morkplikpo, a small village located in the North Tongu district of the Volta Region of Ghana who became pregnant as a teenager while staying with her parents. She dropped out of school when she became pregnant. To compound her woes, her parents threw her out of the house leaving her with no choice but to go live with the man who impregnated her. That was when Lornonyo’s problems began. Young Lornonyo’s partner did not take responsibility for her upkeep and that of the children. Life became unbearable for young Lornonyo, having three kids with no financial support. She resorted to peasant farming (e.g., pepper, maize, okro, cassava). Later on, Lornonyo joined the Sistas club in 2019 when the project began in her community. In the beginning, she never saw the impact of the RHESY and Livelihood skills training in her life but the day she participated in the Asana/Aliha training, Lornonyo’s hope was brought to life again. Her dreams came alive right before her eyes after partaking in a few livelihood sessions. One morning, Lornonyo approached her facilitator to discuss her idea of starting the “Aliha” business in the community but she had no start-up capital so the facilitator promised

to assist her with some financial support so she can buy necessary ingredients like sugar and milk. She did not have to buy maize because she had some from her previous harvest.

The young mother of three kids (Lornonyo) financial status changed from bad to good and even better thanks to UNFPA/PPAG’s livelihood skills training initiative. Lornonyo was able to buy a refrigerator with the support of her facilitator and sales made from her small business. To Lornonyo, the livelihood skills training initiative was important to her life because it has saved her in a more self-confident way by which she makes her income which she uses to support her kids, family, and her basic needs. To Lornonyo, it was a breakthrough in her life because she lost hope in herself, her future, and that of her kids.



Image: Lornonyo industriously plying her trade

The business has expanded to nearby communities where she does deliveries on request. She said, “I will forever remain

grateful to PPAG/UNFPA for bringing such a program into her community because it has helped her to enroll her kids in school, support her family and cater to her basic needs". We are happy that, Lorloronyo Boni has become a financially stable mother to her three kids, her family, and herself. The Asana/Aliha business is not only being sold in her community but has been extended to other communities. She confessed that "I always tell my customers that it is through the help of the PPAG/UNFPA initiative that I got trained and can now stand here to train you people who want to also develop your livelihood skills."

During the second quarter of livelihood skills training, Lorloronyo Boni shared words of encouragement with the young girls who were at the training. She used herself as an example for the girls, leaving them with this quote "*in life always learn to be determined to achieve your dreams no matter the situation you find yourself in today, just make good use of the opportunities that come your way*". It is Lorloronyo's dream to take her small-scale business to a large one. She would love to own a business that produces locally made drinks of all kinds including Asana, Sobolo, and Ice-kenkey, among others to sustain her economic stability.

TEENAGER SAVED FROM CO-HABITATION IN THE VOLTA REGION: RECEIVES APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Let us stay in the Volta Region a bit longer and catch up with Seyram. Being a victim of a "broken home" in a poor rural community within the Central Tongu district of the Volta region (Mafi-Agoe/Adzasika), with all four of her immediate family members being pregnant before

18 years of age, Seyram Kpexor without adequate knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, suffered a similar fate and got pregnant at the age of 16 in a cohabiting relationship. As a teen parent and a school dropout, Seyram relied on her cohabiting partner (an Okada rider) for her daily sustenance. Even though Seyram suffered physical abuse in her relationship, she failed to break up. In one instance her face got swollen as the result of being beaten by her co-habiting partner. When asked to leave her boyfriend's house, she replied: "It would not be possible because he is the one taking care of my needs". At the time of this response, Seyram was not part of and hence has not received any empowerment from the UNFPA Adolescent girls' empowerment programme.

Eventually, after Seyram got enrolled into the PPAG Young and Wise club as the result of the UNFPA project, she became a priority to the project team who engaged her one-on-one on SRHR information, and RHESY in the club. This strategy was crucial to help Seyram improve her self-confidence/ (develop positive self-esteem); became assertive; get informed on teenage pregnancy and its effects as well as prevention; learn livelihood skills; and quit cohabitation.

Testifying of her experience with the UNFPA programme, Seyram said: "The club meetings taught me that contraceptives can be used to prevent pregnancy and that teenage pregnancy has negative effects on my health as a teenager and can prevent me from becoming a responsible person in future. I have also learned life skills that are now my source of economic empowerment so that I can reach my future goals.

Ever since Seyram joined the UNFPA girl empowerment project in 2020, she has made remarkable progress as a result of being empowered through RHEsy. She became assertive with improved positive self-esteem, which enabled her to set a goal of becoming a fashion designer in the future. With the combined effort of the project team, Seyram got enrolled in a fashion design apprenticeship.



Image: Seyram in her apprenticeship program

Again, she continues to practice the livelihood skills learned to cater to herself and the child's needs. Seyram admitted that it was hard for them to discontinue cohabitation. However, she has taken the bold step to end cohabitation at the beginning of 2022. This is good news!

In an interview, Seyram made the following remarks: "If not because of the help I received from PPAG/UNFPA, I would have given birth to a second child by now. Although I broke up the cohabitation relationship with my boyfriend, I am glad to

continue protecting myself from teenage pregnancy with a contraceptive. Thank you PPAG/UNFPA for helping me become a better person."

As a work in progress, Seyram hopes to graduate from the fashion and design training early next year. Seyram's dream is to open up a fashion and design training centre in the future to help young people in her district acquire skills in fashion and design.

TWO SISTERS EMPOWERED: ONE ECONOMICALLY, THE OTHER ACADEMICALLY

Our next stop is the Ashanti Region to hear how we have touched the lives of two sisters, Naomi Boateng and Matilda Boateng who live in Krofrom with their single mother. The economic situation for their family was burdensome until they participated in the livelihood skills session which was organized for the young and wise club in the community. Naomi was a facilitator and her sister Matilda is a member. They participated in the livelihood skills and now have started their own business in Liquid soap and Shower gel.

We are happy to announce, that Matilda has been enrolled in SHS and Naomi has a menial job aside from their Liquid Soap and Shower Gel Business. Naomi wishes to continue her education in Nursing Training but as of now, she would rather put that on hold and support her sister through SHS. Naomi and her sister Matilda are empowered with SRHR information and are able to make informed choices and decisions about their lives. Naomi has now become a trainer of trainees and holds RHEsy sessions for young girls in her community.

DISABILITY INCLUSION FOR YOUNG MILDRED

And because we are heavy on inclusivity, we do not forget persons living with disability. We promote the inclusion of persons with disability. This is the testimony of an active 18-year-old Mildred Atule.

“I want to start by thanking the Sista’s leader in my community because she has done a lot to mould me into a better person. I initially suffered an inferiority complex anytime I meet my peers, for fear of being mocked or stigmatized due to my disability. I saw myself as a half-human being in society, I never got close to my peers, I am always seated in class when the bell rings for a break and left the class after everyone had left the class. I am always the first person to come to class because I was not assertive enough to face society.”

Mildred added that “ I pitied myself for being physically challenged.”

Mildred joined the club last year when she was called and followed by the club leader to join a community outreach organized in the school. She was so worried because she knew there would be a lot of people around but she gathered and attended. On her arrival, she was welcomed and introduced to the club members. Mildred admitted she was happy yet nurtured the fear of being stigmatized as her peers in school always do. The lesson treated on Mildred’s first day was ‘body image and later, assertiveness’. These made Mildred feel relieved and began to accept herself.



Image: The ever-assertive, Mildred

Through the engagement with activities of the Adolescent Girls empowerment project; Mildred now comes to class with boldness and mingles with her peers without any intimidation because she is now empowered to make informed decisions.

Mildred, having accepted her image, compelled others to accept her too. Through this, Mildred hopes to find a partner who appreciates her disability. She said “I am Young & Wise irrespective of my disability.” Looking ahead, Mildred promises to continue to be an advocate and a peer educator to others, especially vulnerable people.

YOUNG MUFIDA EXCELS ACADEMICALLY, THANKS TO PPAG/UNFPA

Our impact is felt even in academic spheres. Let us tell you how! Aminu Mufida, a 15-year-old primary six (6) pupil had very little interest in formal education and handled her academic work with the least possible seriousness. As narrated by her mother, Madam Ayisha, her daughter, Mufida found a new excuse each day to skip school. On days when she went to school she would never complete the homework given to her from school. Mufida preferred to watch telenovelas on TV or play with her friends instead of studying or revising her notes from school. As a result, she performed very poorly whenever she took an exam in school. In addition to her lack of interest in school activities, she had a very negative attitude toward her parents and was unwilling to carry out any house chores.

But as always, UNFPA/PPAG got the solution. Mufida was introduced to the sista’s club, by her friend who is a member of the club.

member of the Anafobisi-Saabo community YOLE Young & Wise Club. She is a student of the Anafobisi B JHS and she is in form two (2)

The sista's club is a safe space created for adolescent girls to learn and share knowledge on their SRH and general well-being. As narrated by Mufida's mother, there were observable changes in her attitude after she participated in a few sessions of the Sista's club.

Sessions like self-esteem and body language, communication skills, personal values, decision making, goal setting, and planning for the future discussed during meetings were beginning to have an impact on her young life and this could be seen in her drastic transformation and change in attitude.



First, her dislike for home chores changed and she began to do them even without instruction or supervision. The transformation also impacted her love for school and academic performance and this is the part that excited her family the most. One morning, her mother ran into the house of the Sista's club leader while holding her examination papers in excitement. Her daughter had performed excellently in their end-of-term examination. For the first time in her life, she was first in her class. Engagements with other girls in the club and the topics discussed had challenged her and given her hopes for a brighter future. Through these activities, she realized the power of education and decided to take her academic work seriously.

We are happy that young Mufida remains an active member of the Sista's club in her

community and remains committed to her academic work, serving as a good example to her peers in the school and community. She is being guided by the sista's club leader and her parents to continue to excel in her academics which eventually leads her to the brighter future she hopes for.

17-YEAR-OLD TEEN MOTHER GATHERS COURAGE TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

Don't be impressed yet. Sip some water and let us hear another impactful feat our project has chalked from Josephine, a 17 year old teenage mother who partially dropped out of school but the hope of graduating from Junior High School became a reality for teenage mother Josephine. Life was difficult for her and her mother (Madam Lebene). Her mother has been the only support line as she singlehandedly raised Josephine. Raising a 17-year-old girl by herself without any aid from her father became challenging since her mother's only source of income was the sale she made from her farm produce. This made it impossible for a mother to provide all the basic needs of her young teenage daughter. As a worried mother, she kept believing that with time, hard work, and perseverance she and her beautiful daughter will experience financial stability.

One fateful day, Josephine was approached by a young man who vowed to support her and her mother should the need be. As a way of repaying his kind gesture, Josephine decided to be his girlfriend. Everything went well between her and the "Mr. Helper" until she realized she was carrying his baby. Josephine found out he had moved out of the neighborhood a few days after meeting him. All attempts to reach him proved futile, leaving Josephine frustrated, confused, and emotionally unstable. She feared talking to her mother because she was disappointed in herself. As a result, she became an irregular student at school to avoid stigma and mockery from her agetates. Her mother saw early signs of pregnancy which she confronted her and it was then only she finally let the skeleton out of the cupboard.

Their situation worsened since the young man had fled town. Josephine's mother approached one of the facilitators named Enyonam and broke the terrible news to her. As a facilitator, she felt disappointed and spread the issue to other stakeholders to get it solved. After the engagements, young Josephine was counselled on the need to go back to school.

A number of counseling sessions were organized by Enyonam Azieku (RHESY facilitator) and some community stakeholders including Josephine's mother and elders.

The counseling sessions were held after her mother had made deliberate yet unsuccessful attempts to speak to her about resuming school when she got pregnant. Thankfully, Josephine vowed to go back to school as soon as she puts to birth after receiving encouragement from the stakeholders. The facilitator did constant follow-ups on her and the baby, combining this with studies as well as going for antenatal care.

We doff our hats to Josephine for having graduated from Junior High School (JHS) on Friday 21st October 2022, which she feared was impossible since she became pregnant during 2nd year. This became possible after her self-esteem, and confidence had been restored through the counseling sessions. This has given her more buoyancy that she could still be that enthusiastic school-going girl she used to be. She was liberated from psychological trauma such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic disorder which would have had a negative effect on the health of the mother and the unborn child. Josephine is remorseful for her actions and is ready to improve herself and see things from the positive side.

She now has a better understanding and does not regret going back to school to finish her basic education.

Don't be surprised to see Josephine be the nurse she dreams to be. Josephine is grateful for the support she is receiving from her mother to take care of her baby as she continues to further her education to achieve her future aspirations.

She is now a role model in the community and speaks to adolescent girls about her experience. This is to help reduce the high dependency rate of young girls on boys and men for money and other gifts and in return offer their bodies.

Well done team PPAG

Well done team UNFPA

Well done to all stakeholders.

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