

Project name: Nimechill Initiative
Project leader: Saqifa Walli & College: Cornell University
Project dates: 4-6th July, 2019
Location of project: Kilifi County, Kenya

Brief background and problem analysis

Latest statistics from the County Children Department in Kilifi, Kenya indicate that over 13,000 girls between 15-19 years are expecting babies, while some, from as young as 14 years have already given birth. Shockingly, during the 2018 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, many girls sat for the national exam when pregnant while others in the hospitals before and after delivering. A research done in Kilifi county last year indicated that most girls lack Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) knowledge, and this was placed as the top contributor at 31 per cent. In the coast region of Kenya, Kilifi County has ranked as one of the counties with high rate of teenage pregnancies. A report by the county government of Kilifi shows that the county has 22% of girls between 15-19 years affected by the early pregnancy menace (Baraka Fm, Kilifi County report, 2018).

World Health Organization (2008) quotes a number of studies that look at the impact of early childbearing on pregnancy outcomes and child survival, with regards to health of teenage mothers and their infants, as well social and economic effects at the individual level, and societal level. Among others, the studies conclude that children born to adolescent mothers are at greater health and mortality risks than those born to older women. Early pregnancies are associated with significantly worse prenatal health care and vaccination behavior, leading to lower birth-weights and higher mortality. Adolescent mothers also have higher health risks and lower health outcomes. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for 15-19 year-old girls worldwide.

Sex education is a taboo in most homes and lack of awareness in schools makes matters worse for the girls who are youth and are mostly unaware of the consequences of what they get themselves in. Most disheartening is that when a girl drops out of school, the continuous Poverty cycle is perpetuated since girls are not able to complete their high school education. Most of the time, pregnancies result in dropout, marriage and delayed time in acquiring education. Pregnant girls quote stigma of pregnancy and discrimination by teachers and peers as the main reason that forces them out of school. Most importantly, a conversation needs to start and as a scholar that is aware and passionate about girl's education, I am willing to be the change that I want to see by starting a 'Nimechill' Initiative.

Project objective and description

With sex education being a taboo topic and a social stigma in Kilifi County schools, 'Nimechill' initiative aims to raise awareness about early pregnancy cases in 3 identified schools. The schools are Kombeni Girls Secondary School, Kakoneni Girls Secondary School and Ngala Memorial Girls Secondary School. All these schools are girls' high schools and they have been affected by the same issues. 'Nimechill' is a (Swahili-English slang meaning "I have chilled" or "I am abstaining"). The strategy here involves making abstinence a "cool", smart and responsible choice and highlighting the effects of irresponsible, teenage pregnancy among girls. The targeted group will be the first year high school girls from the 3 schools. The ages of the girls vary from 14 to 20 years old.

Our objectives in the 'Nimechill' initiative are to use our 3 day program from July 4-6th to:

1. Raise awareness to the young girls to value and respect their education life while being able to see sexuality as a natural positive part of life
2. To teach skills and make informed and responsible decisions through activities presented by our sex education expert Mrs. Milkah

3. Start a bi-annual conference program with the help of the 3 schools in ensuring the girls meet up and have a free space to talk and create long lasting friendship with other girls from other institutions and the creation of peer to peer mentorship program
4. Install query boxes around the schools for anyone with questions which are sexually concerned.
5. Encourage the girls to create friendship bracelets which will be a reminder of their commitment to always confirm their 'Nimechill' stance!
6. Start a Mentorship program link with already established 5 successful women from the area. These women have already agreed to take part in the mentorship program
7. Report to the county government on the importance of sex education implementation in secondary schools

The tentative schedule for the 3 days is as follows:

July 4th: Awareness talk and activities for the girls. Talk will be given by our sex education expert, question and answer sessions. Valuing and respecting the education life

July 5th: Creation of friendship bracelets and creation of query boxes and placing them around the school compounds

July 6th: Girls reflections and more question and answer session. Talk by our 5 established successful women from Kilifi County on importance of education.

All these efforts are in order to substantially decrease the rate of teen pregnancy in the Kilifi county schools. The objectives are strategically employed so that the 'Nimechill' Initiative equip the girls with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and provide them access to reproductive healthcare talks and awareness. The 'Nimechill' awareness campaign will thus seek to encourage a conversation between the teachers and students and parents about sex education issues and ways to prevent early pregnancies. Eventually, educating girls and ensuring that they stay in school will help meet the Kilifi County development goals in ensuring that girls maintain high literacy levels.

Feasibility & Sustainability

The project is sustainable because the identified schools have expressed to us their willingness to collaborate with us in piloting our initiative. The 'Nimechill' awareness campaign is rooted in the active schools involvement and thus they will eventually take charge of the project in ensuring the continued success of the project. The schools have also agreed to provide the resources needed in order to conduct the project. The head principals of the schools, the girls involved and the county government and the women mentors from Kilifi County have all pledged support.

In addition, the minimal cost of running the program makes it sustainable in the long run. The schools are close and minimal transportation costs will be incurred. The installation of query boxes will go in a long way in ensuring that the girls can be free to anonymously ask questions. In addition to these, we will encourage the girls to create friendship bracelets which will be a reminder of their commitment to focus in education, career and community development. Our mentors have also pledged to visit the schools every bi-annual conference that will take place in the 3 schools to offer mentorship to the students. In the long run, the project seeks to promote peace by ensuring that girls are able to complete their education and be good example in the society. With uninterrupted education these girls have a chance in impacting their future positively and ensuring that they break out of the vicious poverty trap that is resulted by early pregnancy cases. A peaceful environment with shared problems and solutions will be able to foster peaceful minds that are dependent on themselves.

In conclusion, I am very passionate about girls' issues and would love to be one of the few peoples to implement impactful changes in their lives. As a woman that has benefited from higher education, I know the importance of education and want to make sure that all other girls just like me see the benefit of education in ensuring that we lift ourselves.