

Title: Empowering Adolescents with Life Skills for Informed SRHR Decisions and Prevention of HIV/AIDS and STIs

Learning from Youth Friendly corners using IMPACT+ Model from Southern Africa Region-Zambia.

Margaret Phiri Mushingo, Child Protection Lead – World Vision Southern Africa Region.

Michael Musumali, Child Protection & Participation Manager - World Vision Zambia

Adolescents and young people comprise over 50% of the population in the Southern Africa region. This group faces several challenges in accessing Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services and information to make informed SRHR decisions and prevent HIV/AIDS and STIs. According to UNICEF¹, in 2023, 63% of new HIV infections occurred among adolescents (10-19 years) and only 69% of adolescents living with HIV are on treatment. One out of three adolescent girls (15-19 years) have given birth, and one out of five young women (18-24 years) experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. These staggering statistics highlight the importance of interventions that cater to the needs of adolescents and young people such as adolescent-friendly spaces.

World Vision Southern Africa Region has been implementing a project model called IMPACT+, this is an adolescent program model, which is an integrated life skills approach to adolescent engagement that addresses key sectoral (covering child protection, education, **health**, sanitation/hygiene, and livelihoods) issues holistically facing adolescents. The goal of IMPACT+ is that adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, transition well into adulthood as active citizens empowered with competencies, values, confidence, and social connectedness. The IMPACT+ model uses two proven and powerful education methodologies – the excitement of **experiential education** and the effectiveness of **service-learning**, in youth and adolescent-friendly spaces.

¹ UNICEF Report: Snapshot on HIV/AIDS – Eastern and Southern Africa. 2023



National Offices in Southern Africa Region with area programs where child protection is implemented:

1. Angola (4 Child Protection Projects)
2. Eswatini (15 area programs)
3. Lesotho (11 area programs)
4. Malawi (32 area programs)
5. Mozambique (32 area programs)
6. Zambia (29 area programs)
7. Zimbabwe (32 area programs)
8. DRC (29 area programs)

In response to these challenges, World Vision Zambia (WVZ) partnered with the Ministry of Health and the Global Fund to develop and implement adolescent-friendly spaces (AFS) across Zambia. These spaces aim to create supportive and accessible environments where adolescents can receive essential SRH education and services. Central to this initiative is the integration of the IMPACT+ model, a comprehensive approach to adolescent wellbeing that combines life skills training, behavior change, and service-learning Projects.

The IMPACT+ model has been instrumental in the AFS in empowering adolescents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to make informed decisions about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). It helps reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS and other STIs, in areas where it has been implemented while promoting personal growth and resilience, especially in the context of drought exacerbated by climate change in Zambia.

Additionally, it model addresses critical issues such as the effects of drug abuse, risky sexual behavior, and peer pressure that affect the well-being of adolescents.

Through the efforts of WV Zambia and its partners, over 30 health workers (Peer educators) are empowered with IMPACT+ skills and 36,000 out-of-school adolescents have been reached with SRH interventions, benefiting from experiential education and service-learning methodology of IMPACT+.

“I dropped out of school at the age of 13, as I had gotten pregnant, during my pregnancy while attending antenatal I joined the IMPACT+ club at the clinic, where I would meet with my age mates and talk about my fears and also how I felt about my future, I found peer educators who were almost the same age as me, who encouraged to go back to school after having my baby so that I could be able to take care of my child, I have continued to go to the club as I have found a group of friends who want to make something of themselves” Gracious, a 17-year-old girl, after attending the IMPACT+ at the AFS program, decided to return to school and access family planning services.

Integrating, IMPACT+ into adolescent-friendly spaces improved adolescents' knowledge of SRHR, and provided them with the tools to make positive, informed choices about their health and futures. The adolescents have been equipped with life skills to be assertive in their communication and negotiation.

The integration of the IMPACT+ model within adolescent-friendly spaces has proven to be a highly effective strategy for improving access to SRHR education and services, increasing the number of adolescents participating in the friendly spaces due to its interactive approach of games and stories and learning by doing which empowers adolescents with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their health and fostering active citizenship.

Despite the successes, ensuring the sustainability and long-term impact of the initiative requires continued investment in improving the IMPACT+ model to address SRHR dynamic needs, community involvement, and support from the government through social protection funds such as Constituency Development Funds (CDF). Ongoing capacity building of health workers on how to engage adolescents and, conducting community service-learning projects that will address the stigma surrounding SRHR topics remain essential to the initiative's effectiveness. Increasing community buy-in and parental support is critical to improving engagement and participation among adolescents, especially in rural areas where access to health services remains limited.