





Building resilience in slum communities in Nairobi

Project implemented by YWCA Kenya

 Gituamba, Kiambu, Mukuru and Motherland slums in Nairobi

 Build resilience of teenage girls and young mothers in slums, where violence rates are recorded alarmingly high.

Background

The COVID -19 pandemic brought numerous challenges to girls, women, and young mothers living in Nairobi's urban slums. The alarming and rising rates of gender-based violence exacerbated their struggle to battle the pandemic under low living and health care conditions. In some cases, harsh economic circumstances have driven young women and mothers to engage in sex for money, compromising their wellbeing and safety by putting them at a higher risk of violence and profoundly impacting their mental health.

Intervention

YWCA Kenya is known for creating safe spaces in the heart of communities for women, young women, and girls in Kenya and linking them with pertinent social and health care services when needed. Ensuring respect, confidentiality, and a supportive environment for everyone to share and speak without any fear of judgment, are some of the core elements that YWCA puts into practice when creating a safe space.

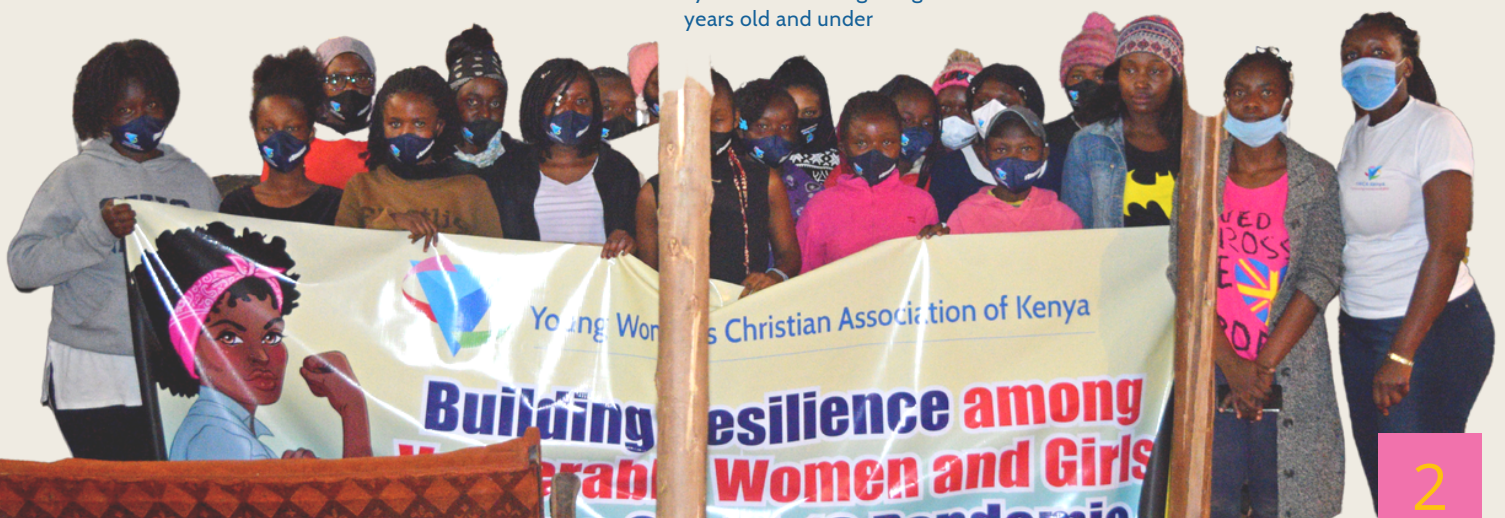
This expertise and the realities in slums drove YWCA Kenya to create a programme to enhance resilience to the pandemic challenges by disseminating critical safety and awareness information, offering psychological and socio-economic support, and providing essential hygiene commodities to women and girls. Initially, YWCA Kenya targeted to cover only three slums in Nairobi due to fund and security limitations. However, thanks to the YWCA's long leadership journey and its network with local leaders, a fourth slum was reached by getting trained champions on board in Gituamba, expanding the project's impact.



YWCA Kenya reaching out to girls in one of the targeted communities

More than 100 girls age 18 years old and under – including girls living with disabilities- gained confidence and became better equipped to practice resilience through interactive safe space sessions. Each session served to foster leadership and address important topics such as sexual reproductive rights, mental health and gender-based violence. Inspired by the sessions, many of the girls chose to become active advocates in social media. They used different digital platforms to highlight the unique challenges and inequalities women and girls faced during pandemic times and championed the need to create a gender-equal society. They were also introduced to an innovative and free mobile app developed by YWCA Kenya that features self-assessment tests for users to evaluate their mental wellbeing. The app also provides a list of counsellors and centres that can be reached when needed.

YWCA Kenya initiative with girls age 18 years old and under



Lucy, a 16-year-old champion from Kiambiu shared:

"I'M HAPPY FOR THIS PROGRAM BROUGHT TO US BY THE YWCA KENYA; WE RARELY GET SUCH OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT AND ADDRESS OUR SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH) AND MENTAL HEALTH. SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC STRUCK, IT HAS NOT BEEN EASY FOR ME AND MY SISTERS IN THE SLUMS WITH THE SCHOOLS CLOSED. SOME OF OUR FRIENDS ARE PREGNANT, AND SADLY THEY WILL NOT BE GOING BACK TO SCHOOL WHEN CORONA IS GONE. DURING THE YWCA TRAINING, I HAVE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT SRH AND HOW TO MAINTAIN MY MENTAL WELLNESS IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THE ISSUES AND STRESS FACTORS. MY MOST IMMENSE JOY WAS LEARNING TO USE THE YWCA'S APP, WHICH I HAVE SHARED WITH MY FRIENDS, AND THEY ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE FREE DIGITAL SAFE SPACE THAT WILL KEEP OUR MENTAL STATE IN CHECK. MY WISH IS TO HAVE MORE PROGRAMS LIKE THESE IN OUR COMMUNITIES BECAUSE MANY GIRLS STILL LACK SRH AND MENTAL HEALTH RESILIENCE KNOWLEDGE".

YWCA Kenya also distributed masks to the community while promoting the hashtag #StopGBV (Stop Gender-Based Violence) and setting up posters with hotlines to call in cases of gender-based violence attacks. During the campaigns, safety protocols and health guidelines were carefully followed in all physical campaigns to avoid the slightest infection risk.

Through the project, young mothers aged 30 and under found a unique safe space for entrepreneurship such as soap-making training and were inspired to explore other income-generating opportunities. The YWCA also helped establish sanitary banks in Kiambiu and Gituamba to reduce the economic burden on menstruating women and girls.

The end of project assessment highlighted YWCA Kenya's flexibility, creativity, and agility in responding and adapting to the rapidly changing pandemic situation, especially in reaching vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Soap making training with young mothers

