Out-of-school youth are probably one of the hardest groups to reach with reproductive health information. In Kenya, it is estimated that the number of school-age youth who do not attend school equals the number who are in school. When youth are not part of an institution such as school, the workplace, or other information networks such as youth organizations, it is very difficult to find a way to reach them with reproductive health programming. This is especially true because the information we want to convey—on human sexuality, reproductive health, sexually-transmitted infection (STI) and HIV/AIDS prevention, and skills for sexual decision making—is sensitive. Even if out-of-school youth had access to television (which most of them do not) and radio, the government-controlled mass media in Kenya would not allow frank discussions of these topics.

Scouting was identified as a potentially effective way to reach out-of-school youth because it is an institution that has the potential to reach them. Given the size of the Kenya Scouts Association (KSA), which has 12,000 adult volunteers and over 175,000 scouts throughout Kenya, the Ministry of Education appealed to the scouts to increase their efforts to reach out-of-school youth and to provide a Family Life Education course in their programming. In 1995, in collaboration with the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, KSA developed a 2-year pilot project to test whether scouts could effectively reach out-of-school youth with a family life skills (FLS) curriculum that would impact their sexual and reproductive health decision-making. The pilot project was designed to address the following commonly-found problems in Kenya: the difficulty reaching out-of-school youth; increasing unwanted pregnancies; the high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections including HIV; and minimal or no dialogue between parents and children about reproductive health issues.

PATH and KSA selected two appropriate sites for research, and identified and trained scout leaders in the FLS curriculum. At the first site, Kijabe primary school in Central Province, youth aged 11 to 16 who lived in the area around the school—about 30 who were in-school and 22 who were out-of-school—were recruited to the program. Program staff found that despite rules opening scouting to any youth, the strongest and most active scout units were school-based and had student members. This pilot project placed in-school and out-of-school youth together so they could interact and learn from each other, increasing their knowledge of sexual and reproductive health information. The second site, a scout center in Machakos, Eastern Province, served as
a training and rehabilitation center for street children. About 24 youth were recruited to the program, as were 16 of their parents (2 men and 14 women) who agreed to participate in the project’s educational activities.

Scout leaders in both sites trained youth in FLS, using weekly lesson plans that covered sexuality and gender roles; the life cycle; male and female anatomy; rites of sexual passage; health and personal hygiene; self-esteem; decision making; population dynamics; drug and substance abuse; pregnancy prevention; STIs and HIV/AIDS; sexuality and feelings; relationships; and sexual abuse and violence in the family. The 18 lesson plans amounted to over 72 hours of classroom time, in addition to group games, exercises, and teamwork to reinforce key messages and to make learning "fun."

PATH also trained the Machakos scout leaders to work with parents (or interested adults) to improve their communication skills and help them talk to youth about sexuality. The curriculum for parents included information on: ways to enhance their own self-esteem; how to be a good role model; how to help youth build self-esteem and give them discipline; and how to initiate dialogue with and listen to youth. Following their training, the parents were involved in inter-generational discussions with the youth.

Staff did not offer any monetary incentives to ensure that scouts came to and continued attending the program; the scout leaders periodically organized outdoor camping expeditions on weekends and the program sponsored the youth to an international scouts jamboree where scouts could interact and compete with groups from other countries. Both of these activities proved to be enough incentive for the scouts.

**Evaluation Results**

PATH and KSA staff members closely monitored the progress of the project. Project staff visited the two sites each week to observe how sessions were handled, and conducted exit interviews with scouts to get their feedback on the curriculum. Parent-child discussions were also monitored closely in order to evaluate their appropriateness from the leaders, parents, and scouts’ perspective. PATH then contracted a private researcher to analyze the data gathered during monitoring visits.

The data showed that the project had tremendous success. Among the scouts, the project demonstrated that it is possible to reach out-of-school youth with FLS through scouting. Machakos, the site with a homogeneous group of out-of-school youth, recorded the greatest enthusiasm among youth. Among the parents, their involvement in activities was low at the beginning, due to their feelings of guilt for not being able
to provide economically for their children. However, the module that emphasized building one’s self-esteem helped the adults overcome this "guilt" and progressively helped them warm up to the program.

In October 1998, KSA received funding from the UNFPA to expand this project to all its scout units over a four-year period. PATH will continue to provide technical assistance to KSA in revising and strengthening the training materials for both scouts and parents, and to train more scout leaders and volunteers.

Lessons Learned

PATH’s work with the Kenya Scouts Association taught us that:

- Working with homogeneous groups—either in-school or out-of-school—yielded the best results. Although it improved over time, interaction between in- and out-of-school youth was minimal.
- While the initial response and level of participation was low, with time, participants grew more comfortable and participated more readily in the program.
- Spending lots of time initially to train scout leaders and orient them in using the lesson plans was a worthwhile investment because scout leaders had not previously taught reproductive health issues in the depth described in the lesson plans. It was necessary to ensure that in integrating the lessons into scouting, the content was not diluted.
- The sessions on self-esteem were extremely beneficial in helping parents gain self-confidence and participate effectively.
- Involvement of all stakeholders in planning and executing the project facilitated a more efficient implementation. PATH and KSA sought the guidance of parents, teachers, scout leaders, and the management board of the scouting movement, which helped in circumventing potential negative reactions.

The greatest achievement of the project was that it confirmed the fact that scouting is indeed an effective vehicle for reaching both in-school and out-of-school youth with sexual and reproductive information, and a strategy that can be taken to scale since it works through an existing infrastructure. When reproductive health programs for young people are incorporated into scouting activities, youth are much more likely to respond and benefit than when they are provided independently.

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