



CASE STUDY Journalists Networked Across Africa

Journalists networked across Africa for increased SRHR coverage in the media

2021

This project is funded by the European Union



A project implemented by



Box 1

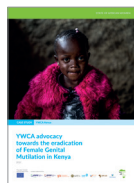
Overview of case studies and synthesis briefs (SoAW action learning process)

Case studies



The value of civil society alliances in realising women and girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

IPPF Africa Region



YWCA advocacy towards the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya

YWCA Kenya



Journalists networked across Africa for increased SRHR coverage in the media

IPPF Africa Region



Faith leadership of civil society collaboration towards adoption of the EAC SRHR Bill

Faith to Action Network



How African First Ladies spearheaded the successful launch of a continent-wide campaign to prevent HIV and AIDS in childhood

OAFLAD



Institutional change towards the integration of population and development issues in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and Faith to Action Network

Synthesis briefs



Progressing on the unfinished business

KIT Royal Tropical Institute



Coalition-building and multilevel connections

KIT Royal Tropical Institute

Journalists networked across Africa for increased SRHR coverage in the media

Armed with the barrel of the pen, journalists can change the world! This has been proven true for a vibrant network of journalists from across the continent who passionately report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues. After years of engagement with these journalists, the coverage of SRHR issues continues to increase reaching an even wider audience.

Why media reporting on SRHR?

Even though much progress has been made in African countries in improving sexual and reproductive health and rights, these continue to demand further attention. Objective and well-informed reporting in the media, on pressing issues and concerns, as well as gaps and opportunities in legal and policy reform and implementation, can play a key role in progressing on this unfinished business. Newspaper, magazines, blogs, radio and television not only contribute to raising awareness of SRHR issues among the general public, but also plays a critical role in reaching decision-makers.

In order to reach the general public with accurate and high quality news on sexual and reproductive health and rights, The Africa Regional office of IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation) formed vibrant network of journalists across the African continent. This IPPF Journalists Network brings together journalists with specialities in radio, print, television and even online media. They come together to share ideas and experiences, in addition to receiving capacity building to increase their skills in SRHR reporting. Many years after the formation of the network in 2012, they continue to champion for SRHR with the barrel of the pen. The RightByHer campaign worked closely with the journalist network members for over three years, since 2017, as a result of which many people have been reached and impacted positively with SRHR stories.



Winners of the journalism awards together IPPF Africa region staff pose for a photo

The journalist network in a nutshell

History of the journalist network

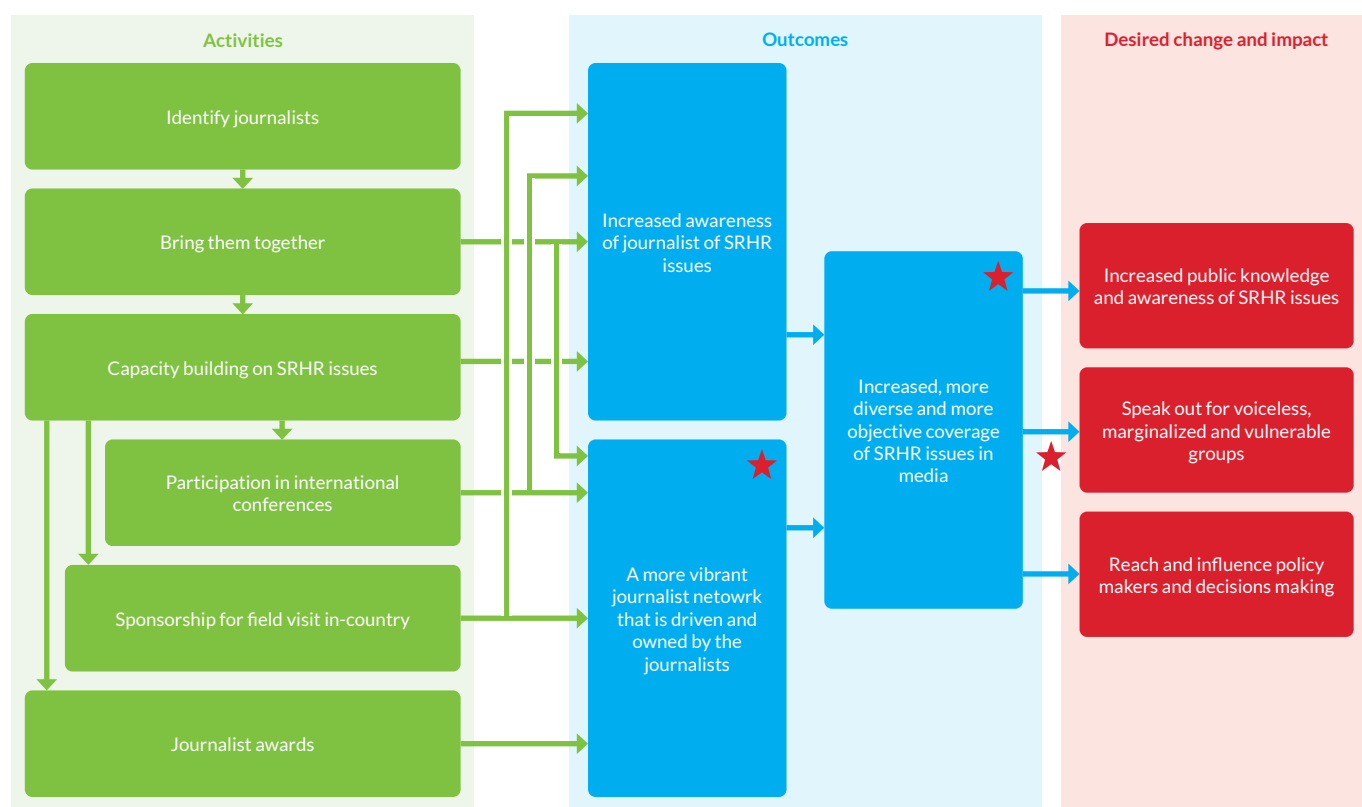
In 2012, the International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Region established a Journalists' Network to bring together journalists reporting on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. The aim of the network is to improve the quality, accuracy and intensity of SRHR reporting and increase visibility of African journalists working on these topics. The network brings together about 40 journalists spread across African countries, including Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone ones.

Journalists who join the network are selected by IPPFAR and should be maximum 35 years old. Preference is given to relatively young journalists, who have not practiced for long and are willing to learn and implement new ideas. Once selected, the journalists are engaged in capacity building sessions to increase their knowledge on issues of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

These sessions address family planning, maternal health, gender-based violence, harmful practices that includes FGM, early childhood marriages, (un)safe abortion, and HIV and AIDS, amongst others. The training also covers the basics of SRHR reporting, evidence-based reporting, simplified language for SRHR issues, as well as investigative skills, and writing for different audiences, including policy makers, social media, among others.

The trained journalists are then *linked to the IPPF member associations* in their respective countries. These linkages offer journalists opportunities to interview community members and get real life experiences on issues of SRHR. In addition, during major conferences like the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC), the Africa Health Agenda International Conference (AHIA) and others, a number of journalists from the network are *sponsored to participate* and also to interview experts on different topical issues. This simultaneously widens the understanding of the journalists on SRHR topics and contributes to wider coverage of the issues. When resources allow, IPPF has supported the journalists *to go to the field* to report SRHR stories. Finally, once in a while a *media awards* are organised by IPPFAR. During this competitive ceremony the efforts of individual journalists in SRHR coverage are recognized and celebrated. The winners are usually awarded trophies and a token of appreciation.

Figure 1.
Theory of change



The aim of the Journalists' Network is increased, diverse and more objective coverage of SRHR issues. In establishing the network and seeking to strengthen media reporting on SRHR, the desired impact is three fold. First, this is expected to increase the knowledge and awareness of the general public of SRHR issues. Second, this media reporting on SRHR contributes to a space where voiceless, marginalized and vulnerable groups can speak out. And third, increased reporting on SRHR is expected to reach and influence policy makers and decisions, and to contribute to legal and policy reform in promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is assumed that the general public, who are the audience of the news stories, would have increased knowledge and awareness of SRHR issues, and that the stories will also be read by the policy makers, who will in turn make changes to SRHR policies based on what the media stores covered.

Strategies and outcomes

Outcome 1: Increased, more diverse and more objective reporting on SRHR

The media network has so far enabled the journalists to produce informative pieces that have increased the level of awareness of SRHR among the public, educated them on pertinent issues and helped create dialogues in the public. Over time, the number of SRHR stories published in different countries has greatly increased; these include newspaper articles, websites, radio and TV articles, and not to forget, blogs.

The network has also contributed to diversification of SRHR reporting. Previously, most of articles on SRHR were mainly focusing on HIV and AIDS. A review of the media alerts and compilation of stories filed by the journalists indicate a shift, with more coverage given to family planning, gender-based violence, FGM and sexual and reproductive health more broadly. It is worth noting that (un)safe abortion and LGBTQI stories still receive little coverage, but are being addressed in a few instances. Unlike before, when most stories were events reporting, more and more stories have started to focus on the SRHR issues and the human interest. However, a surge of events-based reporting is still experienced after major conferences and events, where the journalists have been invited to participate and give coverage.

The journalists perceive the increase in reporting to be due to the capacity building initiatives.

"IPPF network is of great help in advancing skills and knowledge. I learn from other colleagues and I have upgraded my writing style to an international standard"
Moses Chimfwembe, Zambia.

In order to realize these desired impacts, the activities undertaken by IPPFAR with the Journalists Network intend to contribute to three outcomes. The first is increased awareness of the journalists themselves of SRHR issues. The second outcome is a (more) vibrant network of journalists, that is driven and owned by the journalists. And the third outcome is increased, more diverse and more objective coverage of SRHR issues in the media.

The assumptions in the Theory of Change are that lack of and weak media reporting on SRHR issues is due to low awareness of journalists of these issues. It is also assumed that the network itself and the sponsorships and awards will further motivate and support journalists to cover SRHR issues.

The link with the IPPF member associations also has proven useful. It enables the journalists to connect with and meet people who are directly affected by the SRHR issues. The support from IPPFAR for travel related costs, which are ordinarily not easily covered by the media houses when considered too expensive, has further enabled the quality of coverage of SRHR reporting. Through interviewing them on their real life experiences on different issues, the journalists are able to publish stories that give voice to the less fortunate members of the society. For example, the young girls and women whose rights are often violated due to gender violence.

For objective reporting the journalists use diversified sources of information. These range from interviewing people who are affected by various SRHR issues, as well as interviewing experts such as medical doctors, researchers, policy makers and the academia, among others. The journalists are faced with some challenges as they seek to report objectively. Many times, editors fail to publish their stories and question their interest and motives in the stories. Such editorial responses often lead to discouragement. The journalists who have since then specialised in SRHR reporting at times are assigned other beats like sports, which seem to distract them from reporting SRHR.

To circumvent these kind of challenges, some of the journalists have resorted to publishing their work on online platforms like social media, blogs, or YouTube. This allows them to publish their work instantly, without barriers in bureaucracies. It also increases the reach of their publications, and allows them to get feedback from the audience and readers on their stories. Moreover, the stories can be read beyond the national borders and hence opens up a broader scope and audience. Online publishing, however, also comes with a few challenges. If the champions fail to get revise editors, the stories may be published with some errors or weaknesses. Also, some audience may not be reached by online platforms, since they only trust the traditional media. On the other side, for IPPFAR, tracking the stories online becomes much easier through google alerts and other online story tracking mechanisms.

Outcome 2: More vibrant network of journalist working on SRHR issues

The network offers the journalists a space to interact, share and engage. The WhatsApp group is key for the journalists to share ideas and debate on some SRHR issues affecting their different countries. They also share their experiences and challenges, and then brainstorm on how best to handle them. The journalists review the work of their colleagues and advise on how to improve on the articles. If any journalist is lacking data or statistics on a given topic, the members are always ready to assist. They agree on stories on which they can write. The network has also assisted the journalists to do comparative stories across different countries on SRHR topics. During the World calendar days like World AIDS day, the network members agree on messaging and how best to give coverage.

It is worth noting that when a member publishes something, they share within the network; this has encouraged many other journalists to ensure that their stories are published. Any member of the group who is undertaking any SRHR related activity at any given time will update the members through the network. As a result, the network has remained relevant for the journalist, not only for technical support but also for debriefing purposes. The network has also been used to share opportunities that are relevant for the journalists including conferences, other media awards, competition, scholarships, among others.

The journalists have opportunities to meet face-to-face during the capacity building sessions, or during network meeting. Over time, the network meetings offered moments for reflection and recommendations. Recently, the network members recommended the importance of supporting joint field visits with the policy makers and Members of Parliament, to stimulate broader coverage of SRHR issues that are affecting the community members. These reflection feed the further strategizing of the network.

They also recommended that a lot of efforts should be directed towards news room editors, to ensure they understand the SRHR issues and dedicate space for coverage. Getting media houses to accept the SRHR stories as a stand-alone segment continues to be a challenge, most of the time it is given a small slot inside the health segment. The journalists are also assigned other duties more often making some of them to drop their quest for SRHR reporting. It will be interesting to have some editors actively join the Network from some of the media houses for them to have a better understanding of the SRHR story coverage. In future the journalists should be trained to look for SRHR angle in different stories they cover for example in relation to sport news coverage or even political reporting, among others.

Outcome 3: Impact of increased and more objective coverage of SRHR in media

As a result of the SRHR stories published a variety of topics have been covered highlighting the plight of many women and young girls, giving voice to their concerns.

“Access and lack of SRHR services among the refugee community in Kenya. Refugees are a population that are somewhat ignored or left yet they too have a right to access to information and SRHR services”

Lorna Andisi, Kenyan Journalist.

Policies have been changed in various countries due to consistent publication of the issues in the media, as both journalist stories below illustrate. In some countries, policy changes have been witnessed which can be attributed to the work of the journalists on for example family planning and comprehensive sexuality education, amongst others. In Botswana, Ruth Kedikilwe confirms that “a minister issued a national referendum on how best to approach creating safe spaces for abortions”.

The journalists continue to be recognized for their work in SRHR reporting. Some have won different awards in their home countries and others have been applauded for the good work they are doing. Yet, at the same time, a few others have received backlashes or threats due to their SRHR reporting and engagement. “Because of my articles, I was appointed as a member of the technical committee on adolescent reproductive health in my town. Apart from that, I have built strong relationships with local CSOs championing SRHR who call on me whenever they need my services. However, I am unpopular among some religious groups for fact that I have also been championing safe abortions in some of my articles.” Moses Chimfwembe, Zambian journalist. While others are known to specialize in SRHR reporting, and not taken seriously: “I have been nicknamed the sexual journalist and, on the field, I share information with my peers on some SRHR topics.” Noufou Kindo of Burkina Faso

Lessons learned and recommendations

Over the years, we have learned that with consistent capacity building on SRHR, journalists get a better understanding of the various issues, and this builds their confidence to report on SRHR in a more objective way. Inside the network, the journalists have shared ideas and encouraged each other to cover various topical and pressing concerns. With the increase in reporting and the improved quality of the media reports, the network and its journalists have contributed to setting the SRHR agenda within the region in different countries. It is interesting to note that as the journalists continue to gain SRHR knowledge, they participate in major conferences as panellists, sharing their experiences and knowledge on SRHR reporting as advocates in their respective fields. We also learned that awards motivated the journalists to do more stories not only for the hope of winning but also to seize the opportunity to showcase their work.

On their pathway, the network and journalists have faced challenges. These include accessing information, vulnerable groups as well as decision-makers, but also concern getting their stories published, printed and broadcasted. This called for joint learning on organising successful field trips or reviewing the quality of each other's work. The network meetings can be used to facilitate further learning among the journalists on how to successfully deal with challenges during field trips, or to negative responses and backlash against journalists who publish ground-breaking reports. The challenges in getting their reports published calls for the need to find ways to collaborate more closely with (newsroom) editors, or alternatively, use online media to get their stories out there. In further strengthening the network, more editors and senior newsroom staff should be reached and trained on SRHR reporting.

Opportunities also arise, and the more vibrant the network has become, the stronger the call for forming and strengthening country specific networks. These would further facilitate and support more journalist to actively get involved in investigating and reporting SRHR issues in their countries, and to ensure that high quality and diverse media coverage of SRHR issues is a driving force for change and progress in their countries and regions. Another opportunity that should be explored is working closely with other organizations in the SRHR field to pool resources together and enrich the news coverage within the region.



Three of the winners display their certificates and trophies

Journalist stories

Why writing on SRHR? – Lorna Andisi Komba

I started writing and advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality since 2015.

While growing up, I was very oblivious of my rights. Just like many African girls, I experienced instances where my gender was an obstacle to accessing some of my rights. I remember days when I stayed at home when I had my menses, because the piece of cloth that I would use would often soil causing shame and ridicule at school. I remember how some of my classmates dropped out of school because of unintended pregnancies.

I witnessed how grown men lured my mates with sweets to rape them. My chances to access secondary education were almost choked because my uncles were against my sister and I proceeding to high school. At 13, they believed we were ripe enough for marriage. My mother stood tough and took up the load of educating us.

I intrinsically knew all these things were not supposed to be happening. I worked very hard in school and vowed within my little soul to one day to change the situation. I wanted to be a journalist. Getting there was not easy. I encountered many challenges including lack of university fees. I had to work part time to cater for my education. I graduated in 2015 and right after embarked on my mission.

First, I started writing about gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices especially female genital mutilation and child marriage. This was further spurred after I interacted with women and girls from practicing communities, who shared their agonizing tales, during a training by the Guardian Media UK.

I started my blog andisilaorna.com to first create awareness, since so many people, like me, that did not know about the issue. I documented various FGM and child marriage cases across the country and shared on my social media pages. I received a lot of feedback from my readers. More and more survivors came up. They formed a youth-led movement to champion against the practices. I took up the role of documenting their work.

In February 2018, I got an invitation to attend a two-day journalists training from International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Region. I got to learn and understand the broader areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights. I learned about other continental instruments that address reproductive health and wellbeing of women and girls within the continent.



After the training, I joined the network and started writing and advocating more for reproductive health and rights. I have documented stories around unsafe abortions, the un-met need for contraception, the scourge of teenage pregnancies and high school drop-out cases, sanitary towels for girls. Through my writing, I advocated for implementation of laws and policies around these issues. I continue to hold responsible institutions, including the government, to account, on reproductive health matters that they pledge verbally and in writing to accomplish.

I believe that everyone has a right to access information and all services as enshrined in the constitution, including reproductive health and rights services. While in the field, I respect the rights of respondents. First, all respondents sign consent forms. For those that ask for anonymity, we conceal their identity. I work closely with Family Health Options Kenya, who help arrange for interviews and provide necessary materials that help in putting together the stories.

My challenge around reporting on SRHR include being viewed by family and my church as immoral and to be promoting bad behaviour. Many people believe that SRHR equals with abortion, and I am therefore seen to be promoting abortion.

I receive much support from the IPPFAR journalists network members. They read and share my work widely. I also get to read and follow their work, which builds my knowledge on continental SRHR strides and challenges. I partner with local members in production of features and stories, for bigger impact. As a member of the network, I also get invited to cover regional meetings and conferences on SRHR, which has immensely contributed to my knowledge on SRHR.

However, the network needs to compile each member work in one portfolio or website as a resource centre, where it can be accessed easily. In addition, the networks' communication and social media presence should be strengthened. Moreover, members' capacities need to be strengthened regularly so that they are able to report on SRHR within current contexts such as climate change, migration and link the issues to the global, regional and national agendas.

My work, together with other journalists work within the network has influenced changes in policy. For example, the president of Kenya recently assented a bill allowing free distribution of sanitary towels within school going girls. Because of our reportage highlighting the scourge of unsafe abortions among young people in Kenya, the High Court ruled to restore the standards and guidelines for comprehensive reproductive health, including on safe abortion.

The standards and guidelines that were first initiated in 2012 had been withdrawn the following year. Their reinstatement allows providers to offer safe abortion care when the health or life of a woman in danger, in cases of emergency and for survivors of sexual violence. In response to school drop cases and teenage pregnancies, the ministry of education is in the process of incorporating age appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in schools so that young people learn about their sexuality as they grow. In conclusion, I believe in unity, together we can achieve more.

My passion for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights – Elise Kenimbeni

As a journalist working for the past fifteen years in the field of communication and journalism, I have been trained since 2012 on health coverage and later on, in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) by several local non-governmental organizations (FESADE, APSA). The desire to do more on SRHR issues grew when I did some sponsored radio programmes of the Cameroon National Association for Family Welfare (CAMNAFAW); thanks to this, I was able to join the IPPF Journalists network in November 2014.



With time, I was more inspired by the will to work hard and recognized for my efforts. I travelled long distances by road and railway to rally points where my target groups were found in the Eastern and Northern parts of Cameroon. I got acquainted with many SRHR issues and gained more experience on topics like Female Genital Mutilation, early child marriages, obstetric fistula, maternal and infant mortality, HIV/AIDS and family planning notably modern contraceptive methods used in the youth milieu. I built up many relations with local and international organizations as well

In the first instance, I participated in a capacity building training workshop in Nairobi-Kenya. I came into contact with journalists from other African countries who had impacted on the society thanks to their publications. Some of them had gained media awards and during the three-day workshop, they shared their live experiences on the field in for instance Togo, Uganda and Kenya. I was really moved by such ambitious works and I asked myself, if they have done such reports that impact on the lives of people, why can I not do the same with the little resources I had at hand?

Back home, my first step was to accentuate my collaboration with the member association of IPPF Africa region. I decided to create more room to build my skills and knowledge on SRHR subjects in Cameroon. For some months, I closely worked with the Youth and Gender Advocate Officer, Valentine Oloume. She taught me how to design a report after carried an activity on the field and how to make terms of reference. This has been a great push in my job, as we had to work on specific SRHR topics funded by the Packard Foundation. I got more interested as time passed by and I got into contact with refugees, internally displaced persons and some vulnerable groups like young girls and women in the northern regions of my country. This created in me that will to help the needy ones. Most of the time, I try to put myself in the shoes of these people and my first reaction is to move on the field and get stories that will touch the hearts. My passion grew stronger when I was supported to 'get out of our newsrooms'.

as with other journalists and community agents. I gathered available statistics and facts that were given on the spot, and I exchanged face to face with refugees and IDPs on their stories following the Boko Haram crisis which hampered the far north region of Cameroon. Many of the people encountered became my friends and I frequently called them for news on how things were happening on their side.

Despite the hostile environments where most of the time I found myself reporting, I never abandoned the path I was following now. I was motivated and believed I could write stories that strike attention and push government to react. The challenges were enormous due to the fact that I used my limited financial resources to perform this task. I also experienced hindrances by some authorities who had information but were not accessible, or who feared I would report on some issues that will make them lose their jobs.

Take for instance the case where I found myself in the far north region, with the Governor refusing me entrance to the refugee camp. After a thorough discussion with two local media practitioners, I learned that an Italian journalist just before me had unveiled a good number of illegal practices in the camp. I understood, he was likely protecting his interests by avoiding the journalists to approach refugees. His collaborators alerted the staff of UNHCR, informing them that I am trying to step into the camp without permission. Since I was faced with the challenge to write a story on family planning and in particular modern contraceptive methods by refugees of the Minawao camp, I had to find a way to safely enter the camp.

Thanks to the relationship built with UNFPA, I was later on contacted by the resident Representative by the time; we exchanged on phone and she reassured I will be led by a team UNFPA two days after. Yet, I was really disturbed by the reaction of the governor and his collaborators. I got another hidden version of his denial. Dignity kits that were supposed to be distributed to refugees, had not been given and despite efforts of international organizations to render free services to refugees, they were not really applied. So, many of the things that were highlighted on national television by officials of the region were not taking place. It was more than a “business issue” as having a good number of Nigerian refugees means more funding.

Apart from that, in my career as an SRHR journalist, I have been confronted with situations where we have vital information, but due to lack of funds you cannot access the people involved. Or, at times people see you as a threat, as was the case of antiretroviral drugs sold by some medical staff of one of the main hospitals in my country. Such information necessitates an in-depth investigation. At times, someone can share with you information and ask to be paid in return for the service, arguing you will benefit by selling your headlines.

However, belonging to the IPPF Journalists network has been an added value. I have discovered African journalists engaged in the course of girls and women. We have been trained on several occasions on SRHR issues and on the service delivery policies of IPPF member associations, like the safe and post abortion programmes offered to girls who risk their lives by going to clandestine clinics. I have so far learnt many issues while attending high level meetings organized by IPPF Africa region and its partners. We share stories between each other, debate on themes leading to the celebration of an international day like World Contraception Day, and we develop common messages that we use on social networks.

As members of the network, some of us have been integrated in the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) League, where we interact with different stakeholders on advocacy campaigns. We take part in the preparations of meetings such as the Common African Position session held on September 4-5 2019 in Windhoek-Namibia. And looking at the publications and productions made so far through online, radio and TV, it has been a great step to assess my capacities.

So far, the dynamics instilled within the group of journalists have been very good and fruitful. Yet, much is still needed to further increase and strengthen SRHR coverage. Many journalists like me are interested in untold stories of vulnerable groups like people living with AIDS, LGBTI community and sex workers. Working on some important commitments linked to the Maputo Plan of Action, the Maputo Protocol, and Agenda 2063, and engaging with the State of the African Women campaign and Right By Her campaign, I realized that campaigns could be an increased benefit to the network.

In terms of impact, I get feedback from the public, from peers and from officials who watch or read my reports. Moreover, I have been working with many community-based organizations, I have been integrated and appointed in some local networks that work on SRHR issues. I have benefited from trainings and my reports are appreciated by officials of the ministry of public health. I have won fame as one of the recognized SRHR journalist in my country and I lead the communication of the association of young volunteers and humanitarians as well as that of the youth wing of UNFPA, known as AfriYAN Cameroon. I have received encouragement through phone calls from top officials and I have been granted audiences at several occasions by some Representatives of the UN system in Cameroon, including UNFPA, UN WOMEN, WHO and UNAIDS and recently the Minister of Public Health.



COLOPHON

This case study was published in the context of the State of African Women Campaign project implemented by a consortium of eight partners, funded by the European Union. It was developed by Mark Okundi (IPPF AR) and Elise Kenimbeni (Cameroonian journalist).

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Photography by Brian Otieno, Design by Kapusniak Design



Consultative meeting between IPPF Africa Region Member Associations and journalists

rightbyher.org

This project is funded
by the European Union



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