

AURATEEN

Empowering girls to take ownership of their reproductive health by accessing information

BACKGROUND

Asha Abbas Kombo has seen first-hand the effects of girls in her classes who dropped out due to negative peer influence, unplanned pregnancy, and motherhood.



Photo Credit: Sharon Kabha

Teenagers in Tanzania are at high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because they do not have access to complete information about sexual and reproductive health and how to protect themselves from diseases like HIV. More than 500,000 teenagers live with HIV/AIDS today in Tanzania. According to the Ministry of Health, 27% of teenage girls experienced pregnancy in 2016. Both HIV infection and pregnancy are a result of unprotected sex. Adolescents tend to engage in risky sexual behaviors because no one talks to them about these “taboo” issues, including parents and teachers. Therefore, teenagers end up depending on unreliable information from their peers, who also lack sufficient and accurate information about sexual and reproductive health. Alternatively, teenagers may decide to not talk about sexual matters and deny themselves the ability to learn and be aware of things about sexuality. Either way, they end up victims of sexually transmitted infections and unplanned teenage pregnancies.

PROBLEM

There is a need to connect youth with information and counseling on sex education and the risks of HIV infection, as well as a map of HIV testing points, to ensure that adolescent girls and young women have complete information that can protect them against HIV.

SOLUTION

Aurateen (www.aurateen.org) is an online platform that provides sexual health awareness. The platform gives girls access to the information, advice and counseling that can shape their behaviors and help them achieve their goals safely and healthy. Aurateen allows teens to ask any question about sexual health, receive counseling from volunteer health experts, and interact with peers online. Girls can speak to their peers online to discuss issues and share experiences on how they have overcome challenges. To increase user access, we are developing a mobile app and a USSD mode, which will help girls who are not able to access the Internet to obtain sexual health education, consultation, counseling, and information.

Aurateen is a national project that engages directly with teens through an online platform, via a website and mobile application. As of August 2018, Aurateen has been launched in Dar es Salaam through seminars. Through the online platform, Aurateen aims to reach teens all around the world. The website is available in different languages, allowing teens to use the language with which they are comfortable.

PROCESS

We have created a mobile application and web-based system that allow students to communicate anonymously with doctors and other health experts. During the registration process, we gather information like age, gender and education level. However, providing names and contact details is optional to maintain anonymity. The website allows youth to ask questions and provides information on relevant topics. Youth can propose a topic, and our team evaluates these questions to create relevant, up-to-date content.

To recruit doctors to the platform, we communicated with different hospitals to explain our objectives, mission and vision. After the initial introduction, we asked for any doctor or health expert willing to volunteer his/her time. For doctors to communicate with youth online, we created a special account for them using their contacts from the hospital visits. These accounts allow them greater access to the system; they can see all the questions and can reply any time. These volunteer doctors are the ones creating content for youth or helping to edit the existing content.

OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Our goal is to reach out to young people and provide them with sexual health education to keep them safe from HIV, early pregnancy, school dropouts, and negative peer pressure. As of August 2018, Aurateen has impacted more than 700 teenagers and has more than 1,250 users. Through seminars conducted at schools and in the community to raise sexual health awareness, we have been able to impact more than 500 teens. Additionally, we surveyed about 400 school students during the design phase of our project.

KEY COLLABORATORS



Asha Abbas Kombo is the 18-year-old team leader for AuraTeen. When she was in school, her fellow teens experienced issues like teenage pregnancy and school dropout, which increased their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Because of this experience, Asha came up with Aurateen to provide teens with



sexual health awareness online. The Data for Local Impact Innovation Challenge (DLIIC) is the key collaborator in the implementation of this project. Aurateen also collaborates with both public and private secondary schools in Tanzania. Moreover, the team works with doctors from Mikonimat Hospital which is located in Chamazi, Mbagala. DLIIC provided Aurateen with a USD 25,000 grant and a mentor to guide their work. DLIIC aims to engage, support, and connect Tanzanian innovators, developers, and solution providers to each other and to opportunities to make a difference in people's lives. To learn more, visit <http://www.dliinnovationchallenge.or.tz>.