

Presentation Submitted to NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs

Title: Promoting alcohol and drug free environment through Children and Young People's clubs

Organizaton: Foundation for Rural and Urban Transformation

Representative: Boi-Jeneh Jalloh

Theme: Demand reduction and related measures (Prevention of drug abuse)

Children are agents of change, and not only as targets for drug control.

1. The Problem/Challenge

The Outcome Document of the 30th United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem (2016) spells out operational recommendations on demand reduction and related measures, including prevention and treatment, as well as other health-related issues. Implementing recommendations for the prevention of drug abuse, particularly those that place children and young people at the heart of addressing the drug problem are critical to achieving lasting results and protecting the future. Experiences from this project will contribute to building effective mechanisms that give greater voice to children as change agents of change.

The Sierra Leone National Drug Policy (2008) spells out measures to deal with drug abuse and drug trafficking. Illicit drugs are easily available. They are sold and Leone is known as one of the transit points for the trans-atlantic illicit drug trade. Common drugs used in Sierra Leone are marijuana, tramadol and to some extent cocaine. Some of their sale points are easily identifiable in neighbourhoods. While police continue to crack down on illicit drug sale, local drug control is generally unimpressive. Children and young people are vulnerable to alcohol and substance abuse.

Alcohol prevention also benefits drug prevention and vice versa. An integrated approach to dealing with harm from drugs and alcohol therefore helps deal with both problem. The project therefore focusses on both drugs and alcohol. Sierra Leone does not have a national alcohol policy that restricts the sale of alcohol to children. The archaic Liquor Act of 1920 does not respond to current development and human rights challenges of alcohol availability and consumption in the country. There is a proliferation of cheap alcoholic drinks that are available almost everywhere in the country including school environment. The sale of alcoholic drinks is unrestricted with weak consumer protection strategy.

The Child Rights Act (2007) gives children the right to express their views and have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. Child participation is still quite low irrespective of the legal and policy frameworks that guarantee the voice of children in matters that affect them. Keeping the school environment alcohol and drug free should not only target school children as beneficiaries, but also as instruments to prevent and mitigate substance abuse.

2. The Response

FoRUT, with support from FORUT Norway, has implemented a four-year project on alcohol and drug prevention that targets children and at the same time, puts them at the centre of drug prevention and mitigation.

a. Project Objective

The project objective is to prevent and mitigate alcohol and drug abuse among school children.

b. Target

The intervention directly targets over 38,000 children and young people who attend 54 schools supported by FoRUT in the five year project period. Many more children and young people in other schools, and out of school in targeted communities are reached. In addition, the project indirectly also reaches parents and family members of school children, and other members of the school communities.

c. Strategy

The project implements a child-led advocacy approach that equips and supports 1,578 Children and 54 Young People's Clubs (CYP) in FoRUT supported schools to lead prevention and mitigation actions that reduce alcohol and drug use among children and young people.

3. Support Children to Young People

FoRUT undertakes the following activities as strategic actions that enable the CYP clubs to take the lead in preventing alcohol and drug abuse in their school environment:

a. Capacity Building

FoRUT facilitates trains CYP club members to understand the dangers of harm from alcohol, and equips them with skills for advocacy, leadership and group management. It also support the orientation of new CYP Club members who join the club every year.

Trainings are also conducted for teachers who serve as Focal Persons /Counsellors of the CYP Clubs, the school authorities, and the police so that each of these groups of leaders are able to confront alcohol and drug related issues at their respective levels for an alcohol and drug free environment in schools.

b. Material and Financial Support to CYP Club Activities

FoRUT provides technical and material and financial support to CYP clubs to enable them develop their annual activity plans, organize awareness raising activities, and participate in national and international celebrations, such as International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking and the Day of the African Child.

FoRUT provides assorted indoor and outdoor recreational materials and support mini projects for competitions among schools. FoRUT also constructs multipurpose centres (MPCs) in some of the schools, which are used as safe spaces for hosting guidance and counselling sessions, peer group education sessions, indoor games, CYP club meetings and other child-led activities in the target schools. A total of 12 MPCs have been constructed in 12 schools in the Western Area. Recreational and sport materials are also provided to the targeted schools to keep the children from harm's way regarding alcohol and drugs.

FoRUT also liaises with the Focal Persons /Counsellors for quality supervision of the clubs under their guidance, and with the school authorities for implementation of Teachers Code of Conduct and implementation of the child rights principles. FoRUT also conducts periodic supportive supervision to the leadership of CYPs and Focal Persons to enhance their performance and sustain CYP club activities.

4. Child-Led Advocacy Campaign

CYP clubs have reached over 38,000 of their peers with messages on the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. They have carried out awareness raising sessions in their respective schools through peer education, drama and quiz competitions in schools and outreach to other schools and communities.

CYP clubs have used recreation and sports to educate their peers about the harmful use of alcohol and drugs. Awareness raising among CYPs club members and focal persons in schools on alcohol and drugs prevention for children has increased through peers education, skits and drama etc. They seek financial support for inter schools quiz and debate competitions among CYP club members and other out of school activities like friendly football matches. They use these events to share messages on the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse.

The clubs also undertook sensitisation in the school environment to discourage alcohol and drugs related businesses from operating around their schools. Some of the CYP clubs have engaged pupils in other schools around them and their parents to discourage them from taking alcohol and drugs. Over the life of project, Focal Persons /Counsellors have held over 650 sessions of counselling and discussions sessions on harm from alcohol and drugs were offered to CYPs members vulnerable to alcohol and drug use in their schools. More discussion than counselling sessions have been held for CYPs because of their low involvement in drug abuse.

5. Results

The child-led campaign has resulted in the reporting of minimal number of alcohol and drug related cases in target schools every year. Some schools, particularly those in the rural areas, hardly report drug related cases because of little or no exposure to drugs in their environment. CYPs monitor and report on alcohol and drug cases in and around their schools. The counselling and discussions facilitated by Focal Persons/ Guidance Counsellors and peer education by CYP Club members has also helped children and young people to stay away from drugs and alcohol.

Children and young people are growing into dynamic child rights advocates for alcohol and drug control policies and implementation of child rights policies in schools and communities. They analyze the actions or inactions of leaders in their schools and communities and have conducted radio talk shows to voice their concerns for protection of their rights.

Schools rules stipulate that children who are on alcohol and drugs risk expulsion. CYP clubs recognize that the situation of children who are expelled from school because of drugs get worse. They have therefore advocate for policy reform in their schools that demands that school children on drugs are rehabilitated, instead of expelled. This also encourages Focal Persons /Counsellors to support children that are on alcohol and drugs to withdraw from abuse, instead of reporting them to the school authorities. They also lobby and advocate for increased commitment and action from the Sierra Leone Police to ensure that unlicensed sales points for both alcohol and drugs are closed.

Project activities have also increased police commitment to fighting illicit drug trade and substance abuse, and violence among youth in schools and communities. Police have arrested a number of petty traders who continue to sell alcohol and drugs around school environments which to a large extent has contributed to alcohol and drug free environment around targeted schools. There is reduction in incidents and reported cases of violence among young people in schools and communities especially during sport meets and other social events. CYP sensitization on nonviolent, and drug and alcohol free sports activities, complemented by joint monitoring of sports activities with the police are actions that are placing restrictions on alcohol and drug use and their consequences in events.