ActionAid Rwanda (AAR) and Faith Victory Association (FVA), the implementing organisations of a two-year project codenamed “Empowering Young People to prevent and Fight SGBV in Rwanda” held a consultative workshop on February 17, 2023 aimed at advocating for the issues identified by the Youth and civil society organisations (CSOs) after a year since the project was launched.

Ines Mwungavu, the Country Director for ActionAid Rwanda, welcomed about 50 participants to the workshop in the capital, Kigali and thanked them for honouring the invitation, and announced that the objective of the workshop was to consult one another and share knowledge and experiences exclusively on the “Empowering Young People to prevent and fight SGBV in Rwanda”.

This project that cost 222, 222,22 Euros is funded by the European Union to empower CSOs and young people to promote and protect their sexual and reproductive health rights, combat teenage pregnancies and support the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Rwanda.

It targets some1,200 young people (800 Girls and 400 boys) aged 10-18 who are members of 40 SRHR clubs in schools and 600 out of school aged 18-24 (400 girls, 200 boys) in 20 groups.

In essence, the project aims at empowering CSOs and young people to promote and protect their sexual and reproductive health rights, combat teenage pregnancies and support the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Rwanda.

“This project is located in Karongi and Gasabo districts in two sectors of Rugabaro and Gitesi, Kinyinya and Rusororo sectors respectively. ActionAid Rwanda is working with Faith Victory Association to implement the project,” revealed Ines Mwangavu.

“It aims at building capacity in young people in regard to sexual reproductive health through creating awareness with the assistance of health providers and other partners charged with mobilization of the youth in order to enhance the responsiveness of the target groups,” said Mwangavu during her opening remarks.

“We are hopeful the efforts will lead to the reduction of teenage pregnancies that are some of the consequences of rape and gender based violence in general,” she added. She said that SGBV was a global problem that was more pronounced in the developing countries and blamed cultures and negative masculine practices that present a woman as an inferior sex to man. She disclosed that one out of 3 women

are victims of sexual gender based violence

Mwangavu highlighted the status of SGBV in Rwanda according to the research done by DHS 20/21 which stands at 37% for women that face SGBV whereas SGBV against men stands at 30%.

Violence among married Rwandan couples stands at 46% for women and only 18% for men.

She said that although the project operated in only two districts, the problem of SGBV is nationwide.

“According to a report released covering incidents of sexual gender based violence of female youths aged 18 and below between 2016-2021, a total of 17,849 (2016) were impregnated. The number of teenage pregnancies rose to 23,111 in 2021, altogether totaling up to 121,458 victims of SGBV,” said Mwangavu.

Gasabo District had 5,808 child mothers while Karongi recorded 2,726 between 2016-2021. Mwangavu decried the increasing rate of SGBV in the country.

The project that started on February 1, 2022 is building the knowledge and understanding of young people and youth around SRHR, causes and measures to end Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) as well as empowering the target groups to make informed choices about their health and reproductive rights and increase demand for quality reproductive health services.

“The project builds the knowledge and understanding of young people and youth around SRHR and of the underlying causes of and ways to combat SGBV. It empowers young people to make informed choices about their health and reproductive rights and increase demand for quality reproductive health services,” said a statement released by the two implementing bodies.

“This is being done through training, and weekly meetings in their clubs and participation in youth networks. ‘We strongly believe that our communications and advocacy work with communities, local leadership and local authorities will build a more supportive context for young people to challenge SGBV and bring about attitude and behaviour change,” added the statement.

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One year later, advocacy has impacted lives of about 10,000 young people up from 1,800 members who form the outreach structure in Karongi and Gasabo Districts.

The concluded workshop was attended by youths from schools, Youth Connect (Faith Victory Association), representatives of Rwanda Investigative Bureau (RIB), health centres, the media and ActionAid Rwanda staff.