

# VIVA GIRLS NEWSLETTER



**EMPOWERING THE INDIGENOUS  
GIRL CHILD**





*Girls having a discussion during group work*

The Viva Girl project from MADRE was one of the key activities for Indigenous Information Network and MADRE in 2019. Through this project, girls are recognized as leaders in their communities, and were organized together to create a dedicated programming by and for girls. We envision a future where girls can be free from violence, be healthy and dream. This project was implemented in 5 Counties in Kenya (Narok, Baringo, Marsabit, Samburu, and West Pokot), in Longindo Tanzania and in Douala, Cameroon. A number of mentors who were going to lead the training with the girls met and planned for the trainings that were to take place and what were the best approaches to be used. All the activities were carried out during school

holidays as it was not possible to have it done during the learning period when schools are in session. The 2019 trainings began in August and were completed in December. This initial meeting was important because through this, priority issues for each community was mapped out and this enable better designing of the programs that would be carried out in each area. And out of this, four main objectives towards the empowerment of indigenous girls emerged:

- i. To sensitize Women and girls on the negative effects of early marriages, pregnancy, FGM and other harmful cultural practices.
- ii. To increase literacy levels among girls.
- iii. To empower women and girls economically.
- iv. To sensitize women and girls on sexual and reproductive health.



*Members of the Viva girl planning committee meeting*

## *What is Happening to the Girls?*

Indigenous girls and young women in Kenya, Tanzania and Cameroon are affected by several issues that include early forced marriages, early pregnancies, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) school drop outs, and other harmful cultural practices, lack of access to education, health services and sexual reproductive health education. This has caused the indigenous girl to regress instead of progress in a world that continues to become more challenging with the onset of climate change, which further affects and threatens their livelihoods. During the workshops the girls were put into groups to discuss the different issues they were facing.

During the group discussion girls were more open to share their issues and insecurities because there was familiarity, similarity and comfort within the group of girls who were the same age and facing the same issues. The facilitators were also able to lead the discussions in a way that encouraged the students to speak out. In the 5 areas where the workshops were held, there was approximately of 719 girls who attended the workshops and they were between the age of 9-16 years. These girls were from different communities namely the Samburu, Ichamus, Rendille, Turkana and Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania and Mbororo of Cameroon .

Based on the issues affecting the girls, these are some of the topics that were covered in the trainings: Sex, sexuality and sexual reproductive health, Adolescence and relationships, Drugs and substance abused, FGM and its impacts, Stress management, Education and good performance and self-image and self-esteem.

During the workshops the girls expressed themselves in various ways. This included singing, dancing and reciting Poems. Some of the issues that were talked about were highlighted in the songs and poems that they presented.

The **challenges** were common among all the girls and they included the following:

- Parents giving them a lot of work to do and not giving them time to study or socializing with other girls in the village. The parents also do not talk to them.
- Peer pressure from those whose parents are able and give them enough pocket money, and buy them their requirements without struggling (poverty).
- Teachers are very demanding and especially male teachers.

- The community is not supportive of girl child education. They want the girls to get married especially those in remote areas.

- FGM and early marriages are still being done secretly. So if one is not alert, they will do it forcefully and without the knowledge of the authorities.

- Drugs came up as a major issue in Wamba and Marsabit. Students as young as 10 year olds take t hard drugs without knowing and sometimes end up with rape cases and other consequences. For this particular case, the facilitator informed them that a research was being done to know exactly where these people are coming from.

- Most of the families of the girls are poor – and are involved in activities such as charcoal burnerng and illicit brewing. Some of the parents to are alcoholic which further contributes to the poverty.

- Most of the girls do not have access to or cannot afford sanitary materials, which further makes it more difficult for them to attend school during their menstrual period and makes them more vulnerable to dropping out of school.



*Girls having an energy boosting session during the viva girl training in Kilgoris*

# 'Inter-generational Dialogues with the women and men participating in the workshops.'



In Wamba and Marsabit there were intergenerational dialogues where the women had an open and candid conversation with the girls on issues affecting them. This was an opportunity for the girls to share what they had learned during the workshops and for the women to learn about some of the retrogressive cultures practiced in their communities and finding ways and solutions on how to support the girls. Both the women and the girls have a lot to learn before they are able to do away with some of these practices but having this dialogue was a starting point for them both.

In the Cameroon activities, there was a large presence of men. This was a very significant participation especially in the Mbororo community because like many other African indigenous communities, the men are the decision makers in the home and the community. This was an opportunity to share with the men the negative impacts of harmful cultural practices and the effect it has on not only the girl but on the community as well. Having this dialogue opens the door for girls to have open conversations about the issues affecting them.

**1019 girls** between the age of **9-16 years**  
**Reached** during the **Viva** workshops.

# Pictorial



# Viva Girl Trainings





# Pictorial



# Pictorial



# Health and Sanitation



*Girls showing their care package items during the viva girl training*

During the Viva girl programme more than a thousand indigenous girls across Kenya and Tanzania have been reached. All these girls face the challenges when it comes to sexual reproductive health. This in terms of access to health services, sanitary materials and access to water both in quality and quantity because most of them come from dry areas. This has put the girls into circle of poverty, powerlessness, exposure to domestic violence, mistreatment which can endanger their lives and abusive sexual practices. During the discussions, some of the girls opened up and said that because of their poor background where even getting food is also a problem, they are forced to engage in activities such as relationships with boda-boda(Motorcycle) boys or older men. They pick based on who can give them some money to either get food,

sanitary products or other items. As a result of this, some get pregnant and because the men do not want to take responsibility, they end up either performing illegal abortions or having the child on their own. Some of them are afraid of what would happen to them if their parents found out they were pregnant and opt to elope.

Some of them engage in other activities that are illegal because it is considered child labour. These include carrying sand and gravel to construction sites. They do this because of poverty and irresponsible parents some of whom are engaged in illicit businesses such as brewing of alcohol, in these places, these children are exposed to sexual violence. This is a hard way for them to make easy money.

They were told that child labour is illegal

and that if they are forced to do what they are not able to do, they should report the matter to the area chief or the children's department so that they can get assistance. The girls were taught personal hygiene that is how they can keep their bodies clean especially when they are in their menses, cleaning their bodies and changing pads regularly so that they can avoid infections. This involves general body cleanliness, health healthy food and doing physical exercises. To avoid bad odor which can lower one's self esteem, the girls were encouraged to always brush their teeth and wash their inner cloths. This will help them avoid infections such as Urinal tract infections.

At the end of the discussions the girls were given sanitary care packages that would be of use to them during their next cycle. The care package included a packet of sanitary towels, a bar of soap and body oil. They were also taught on alternative ways of helping themselves especially over long holidays and now during the pandemic. They could for instance having small kitchen gardens around their homes where they could grow vegetables,

keeping poultry and also engage more with their parents more so that they can continue to build a better relationships with their parents. The parents have also been asked to speak with their children and to provide support for them. This was especially necessary for the girls in terms of providing them with sanitary materials so that they avoid instances where the girl will be tempted to go out to look for means to get the products herself.

**Empower the Indigenous girl child and make her gain Confidence and claim her place in the community and the society.**



*Group photo during the viva girl training in West Pokot*

## RECOMMENDATIONS



*Girl presenting their group work after discussions*

- Parents were very happy for the program and engagement of their girls in the training. Parents should be willing to help the girls because they are either perpetrators of such practices, encourage it or turn a blind eye to what is happening with girls. The intergenerational dialogues provide the girls with a platform to discuss with their parents and express themselves. This builds parent-child relationship and the parents can support the girls more.
- We ask for trainings on this nature to continue because we need to have more girls invited to these meetings. The trainings should also be taken to other places so that you can reach some of the girls like us who are far more remote areas where harmful practices are deeper rooted.
- The trainings should be increased to be three or more days so that many girls can get a chance to attend the meetings and benefit from the lessons and interactions.
- We need you to come and have the meeting in our villages so that you may talk to more of us and our parents. This way our Fathers, uncles and brother can also get the messages.
- Boys should also be given the training because most of the problems the girls are facing are contributed to by the boys. Boys should also have their workshop so that they learn what their actions do to the girls and they can also be taught how to relate to girls more responsibly and be champions for girls rights.
- We recommend that there should be videos during the training because through this we are able to learn and retain even more content.

- The workshop should have uniform like a shirt and a cap written something like 'Viva-girls empowerment' so that the girls can identify with the program and they can also publicize it so that the other community members know that.

- The girls should have more group activities to be able to discuss amongst themselves the issues that affect them and share their experiences more openly than they can in plenary. This will encourage them to come up with more recommendations and actions that that help solve or reduce the challenges that they face.

- Register activities which will bring the girls together during the weekends or the holidays like games such as volleyball or a craft activity that the girls can participate in and have time to come together to encourage each other, to update each

other on their progress in school and academic performance and their personal lives and also to monitor if the they are implementing the teachings they were taught during the trainings. This will be something like accountability groups. • Have mentorship programs during the holidays for both secondary and primary school students. The mentors should be other girls who can set a good example for the others and encourage them. Part of this mentorship program can also include women groups who can take the girls under their wing and involve them in the different activities. The girls can also trust the women enough to go to them if they have any problems. The women groups provide a place where the girls can get mentorship and advice also.

- Creation of more awareness on drug abuse among the youths and young women is highly recommended.



The Viva Girl Project participants from the different project areas pose for group photos during their trainings.



*Viva girl participants in Kimokowa, Tanzania.*



*Viva girl participants in Wamba, Samburu- Kenya.*



*Viva girl participants in Marsabit, Kenya.*



*Viva girl participants in Poroko, Kilgoris -Kenya.*



*Viva girl participants in Douala, Cameroon.*



*Viva girl participants in Enoretet/ Enosaen, Kenya.*

**Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.**

**UNDRIP 14 (2)**

**States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.**

**Convention on the Rights of the Child 32 (1)**