

Farewell to the SHARP Project?

Nairobi, Kenya, played host to a bittersweet gathering of the Solutions for Supporting Healthy Adolescents & Rights Protection ([SHARP Project](#)) this April. Sweet because it was an opportunity to once again see our partners in the SHARP Project and catch-up with colleagues with whom we have developed strong bonds. Bitter because (for now at least) this would be the last such meeting as the project, funded by the European Union (EU), draws to a close after four marvellous years.

Over the course of three days the group, which included partners from the six SHARP countries (Kenya, Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia), were able to share successes and impact from the last 12 months but also reflect on the previous four years of implementation. And in this sense, there was a lot to look back on, and do so with pride.

The tone was set early on the opening day, when we were joined by representatives of the Kenyan Ministry of Health and the EU Delegation in Kenya. To hear from these distinguished guests at our meeting talk about the successes and the difference the project has made helped reinforce that the efforts we have made have been worthwhile. For instance, the SHARP contribution to a groundbreaking new sexual and reproductive health (SRH) law in Rwanda that allows 15-year-olds to access SRH services without parental consent for the first time. Or the 30% increase in budget allocation for health in Zambia. These things matter because, as the EU representative put very well, SRH is not an optional add-on, it comes down to a fundamental human right. Investing in these rights saves lives, and the SHARP partners could not agree more.

As we moved to the core sessions of the meeting, we heard how, in the face of many social, political and logistical challenges, the partnership persevered in building a strong network of allies from across stakeholder groups. Our champions were drawn from adolescents themselves, politicians, the media, opinion leaders and, importantly, faith leaders. Through sensitisation and training, these stakeholders formed the backbone of the SHARP approach that allowed us to change narratives, laws, and tackle deep-rooted taboos at all levels of society from classrooms, churches and mosques, on social media, and even the halls of power.



Representatives from Zambia, Burundi, Kenya & Rwanda during a group exercise



Sonia from Burundi talks impact

On day two, we focused on youth participation, with members of the SHARP Youth Group well represented. In a moving testimony, **Didace**, a youth representative from Burundi, shared how SHARP empowered young people in his country by giving them a voice. Because of that, youths now have the courage to speak up and take their place at the table alongside their elders. Those trained by SHARP are now seen as educators in the community and are passing their knowledge on to others, independently perpetuating the work that was begun by the project. According to Didace, because of SHARP, young people in Burundi are now more able use their voice. We also heard from another youth representative, **Brenda** from Kenya, who has registered her own Civil Society Organisation, [My Body My Body](#), doing fabulous work supported by SHARP, and learning how to mobilise resources for themselves.



Brenda (on the left) in discussion with fellow delegates



Didace shares his experiences

Sadly, things aren't all rosy, and these stories of impact come against a backdrop of worsening cuts to official development assistance from major donors, which we already see having a negative impact on the ground. Our [latest research](#), for example, revealed a troubling drop in the availability of essential SRH commodities in rural Kenya, a trend that was replicated in DRC and elsewhere. Therefore, as the Final Reflection Meeting entered its last day, project sustainability and the future of our common commitment to improving adolescent SRH became the focus. It was clear that we could not let all that we have worked so hard to build go to waste. Our

network of Champions, be it youths, journalists, faith-leaders or decision makers, is essential to ensuring this sustainability and momentum.

As individual organisations, we continue working with governments and other stakeholders to advance the adolescent SRH agenda. However, there remains much more that we can achieve as a partnership. We will continue to collaborate, looking for new sources of funding and ways of working to ensure adolescents are able to enjoy their right to health.

So, actually, this is not farewell, it's "see you soon".

To explore the latest research from the SHARP Project, [click here](#).

Find out more about the in-country implementing partners:

- [Twitezimbere](#) (Burundi)
- [CAFCO](#) (DRC)
- [Access to Medicines Platform](#) (Kenya)
- [RNGOF](#) (Rwanda)
- [EANNASO](#) (Tanzania & Regional)
- [MedRAP](#) (Zambia)
- [NANHRI](#) (Regional)