



# Strengthening Education and Training Capacity in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Uganda Project



## Project Overview

By Auma Okwany, Overall Project Director

SET-SRHR is a € 3.7 million project over 4-years (2016-2020) funded by the Netherlands Universities' Foundation for International Cooperation' (EP-Nuffic) under the Netherlands Initiative for Capacity development in Higher Education programme (NICHE). The project, which aims to strengthen the SRHR education and training capacity in Uganda, is being implemented by a consortium led by ISS-EUR in collaboration with Rutgers in the Netherlands, and Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH) and Nsamizi Training Institute for Social Development (NTISD) in Uganda.

## Project Context

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The project is set within the context of Uganda's challenging demographics. Despite the drop in the fertility rate from 6.8 to 6, the country has one of the highest fertility rates and the second youngest population in the world, with 78 per cent below 30 years of age and 52 per cent below 15 years. Such a population structure creates a high dependency on the small active labour force. Additionally, high (youth) unemployment intersects with significant sexual and reproductive health challenges. Over 62 per cent of young women and 48 per cent of young men have had their first sexual encounter by the age of 18 and, according to the Uganda Demographic Health Survey, compared to other age groups, adolescents are the only group with rising HIV/AIDS infection rates. The high growth in population is driven by high rates of unwanted births, currently at 52 per cent with teenage pregnancies accounting for 25 per cent of over one million pregnancies recorded annually. These challenging demographic features underscore the importance of SRH policy and programmes, which secure rights to inclusive, accessible, quality information and services including ample sexuality education and freedom from violence and disease.

Despite the range of state and non-state interventions responding to these challenges, there remain significant gaps and weaknesses in the SRHR landscape. Health care and other social services are limited, particularly in rural areas and, where available, the capacity of services and providers to respond to the diversity of needs in terms of gender, age, spatial location and ability is constrained. Women, including female youth, are disadvantaged in social relations, but are often perceived as having a say in sexual decision-making without attention to the dominant gendered and generational structural and cultural forces that

define and influence the context of (sexual) decision-making. There are also significant capacity gaps in terms of the competencies of service providers. Additionally, there is a large gap between research and policy, as SRHR policies are not sufficiently informed by research evidence. To address these challenges, the SET-SRHR project proposes a coordinated, standardized, and accredited sustainable pre and in-service gender and age-sensitive education and training programme supported by a research community of practice. SET-SRHR project outcomes

The project has a broad overall outcome of: increasing access to and improving quality of SRHR services that contribute to sustainable demographic and human capital development and inclusive economic growth. This broad policy priority is consistent with both Uganda's Vision 2020 that aims, among others, to reduce the fertility rate by half, as well as Sustainable Development Goals 3 - to promote healthy lives for all, and goal 5 - to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.

The project has two specific interlinked project level outcomes. The first outcome is *to coordinate and collaborate in the development, maintenance and implementation of a gender and age sensitive pre-service and in-service SRHR education and training programme*. The second outcome is *to organize and sustain a national SRHR training, outreach and research community of practice network*. Dubbed Utafiti na Kutenda (Research and Action) the platform facilitates collaboration between diverse SRHR stakeholders and enables and translation of research evidence into policy and practice action and training through a variety of in-reach and outreach programmes.

# Project implementation strategies

Project outcomes and outputs are tracked around five key strategies:

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## 1. Organizational Capacity Enhancement

This involves strengthening the institutional capacity of MakSPH and NTISD specifically and the broader SRHR landscape generally to deliver evidence-based and innovative SRHR education and training. This is being achieved through:

- Leadership and management support and training to enhance the organizational and financial management skills of project staff;
- Strengthening human resource capacity including six Master's degree and five PhDs fellowships;
- Infrastructural support in terms of upgrading, renovation, construction of facilities for education, training, research and outreach.

## 2. Curriculum Revision and Development

Curriculum review and development started with a training needs assessment (TNA) to identify the needs and competencies of service providers. The TNA drew on existing SRHR education training curricula and packages from educational institutions and civil society organizations. A curriculum framework was then developed with quality checks via a series of validation workshops and peer review. This framework guided the review and development of modules for the gender and age sensitive, education and training curricula. The education and training programme has two major tracks: (i) a professional track and (ii) an academic track targeting diverse pre and in-service SRHR professionals at various levels.

The professional track aims to increase the availability of skilled SRHR service providers and improve practice through a professional certificate trainer of trainers course offered jointly by MakSPH and NTISD and awarded by MakSPH to 400 diverse SRHR service providers over 10 cohorts.

The course which started in May 2017 has a modular structure covering key SRHR aspects including: gender, adolescence, sexuality and reproductive health services rights, sexual violence, and delivery of inclusive services; community-based participatory approaches in SRHR interventions; advocacy and policy engagement in SRHR. The

modular structure of the training programme allows participants to combine classroom training with their work experience and includes an internship (fieldwork) structured around their work. The transition between classroom and workplace enriches work experience and classroom discussions with wide-ranging practical issues encountered by service providers in diverse contexts while also providing leads for advocacy and networking possibilities. The training programme takes a practical approach in recognizing that promoting SRHR is more effective when linked with livelihood support.

The academic track is structured around the institutional strengthening activities of MakSPH and NTISD and will involve:

- Reviewing the Master's curriculum at the MakSPH and integrating two gender and age-sensitive SRHR modules;
- Reviewing the BA in Social Development curriculum at NTISD and integrating five gender and age-sensitive SRHR modules;
- Integrating two core SRHR modules in four select diploma courses at NTISD;

These academic and professional programmes will expand SRHR training and higher education opportunities and further improve the professionalism of SRHR service provision in Uganda. They will also strengthen outreach activities given the role that both institutions play in education and training of public health and social development professionals in the country.



### 3. Delivery of training and education programmes

The proposed twin-track education and training systems are mutually reinforcing as both are designed to strengthen SRHR capacity gaps by providing standardized, accredited flexible pre and in-service training and higher education opportunities. The professional training programme commenced in March 2018 with a tailor-made course for 34 diverse, highly experienced master trainers. By the end of the four-years, these master trainers will cascade training to the 400 SRHR professionals who will in turn cascade training and disseminate knowledge and services through their institutions and networks.

### 4. Research and Documentation

The project is pursuing high-quality academic and policy relevant SRHR research. Academic research will lead to an award of a PhD by ISS-EUR (three fellows) and MakSPH (2 fellows). Additionally, 8 commissioned studies have been completed under the project research agenda. These will provide data and information that will be used for the policy advocacy work of the SRHR Community of Practice and for the education and training. Findings will be disseminated in the form of working papers, two edited books and five articles in internationally peer-reviewed journals. Research findings will also be disseminated via non-academic avenues including newspaper articles, policy briefs; audio-visual materials; campaigns (theatre for

development), social media platforms including the SET-SRHR blog, Facebook page and Twitter handle.

### 5. A sustainable SRHR Research Community of Practice - Utafiti na Kutenda

The project is facilitating the Utafiti na Kutenda (research - community of practice). Launched in November 2017, this is a broad-based platform for diverse stakeholders (public, private, academia, development partners, youth groups, etc.) to network and engage in evidence-based SRHR policy, discourse and action. Utafiti na Kutenda is co-hosted by the two requesting institutions.

The project, commenced with the unpacking of the five thematic strategies in the form of operational concept notes per strategy. A series of meetings and workshops were held with partners and key SRHR stakeholders in Uganda culminating in the official launch of the project on the 23rd of February 2017. The key implementation strategies were subsequently successfully launched and project implementation is on going.



## Project Management Team

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Dr. Auma Okwany (ISS-EUR) - Overall Project Director  
Dr. Elizabeth Nabiwemba (MakSPH) - Project Director Uganda  
Dr. Nicholas Awortwi (ISS-EUR) - Project Advisor  
Dr. Veronika Goussatchenko (ISS-EUR) - Project Manager  
Ms. Linette Belo (Rutgers) - Project Manager, Administration  
Mr. Camilo Antillon (Rutgers) - Project Manager, Operations  
Dr. Christine Nalwadda (MakSPH) - Project Manager  
Dr. Lynn Atuyambe (MakSPH) - Research Coordinator  
Mr. Charles Otim (NTISD) - Project Manager  
Ms. Olivia Nakisita (MakSPH) - Project Officer

*For more information about the project please contact:*

Dr. Auma Okwany, Overall Project Director.  
International Institute of Social Studies of  
Erasmus University Rotterdam, (ISS-EUR) in the  
Netherlands. Email: [okwany@iss.nl](mailto:okwany@iss.nl)

Dr. Elizabeth Nabiwemba, Project Director  
Uganda. Makerere University School of Public  
Health (MakSPH) in Uganda. Email:  
[enabiwem@musph.ac.ug](mailto:enabiwem@musph.ac.ug)

