

## EpiC Spotlight on Adolescent Girls and Young Women

### Background

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) are a population at the crossroads of the global response to HIV. At an historic time when controlling the epidemic is within reach, AGYW continue to face a complex set of risks that make them up to 14 times more likely to be HIV infected than males of the same age.<sup>1</sup> With girls accounting for two-thirds of new infections in sub-Saharan Africa and the population of young females in the region expected to reach 200 million this year,<sup>2</sup> the level of urgency in effectively reaching this priority group has never been higher.

Since 2014, the PEPFAR- and private-sector-funded DREAMS Partnership has taken a comprehensive, multisectoral approach to addressing the complex, interlocking factors that place AGYW at such a marked risk for HIV. The goal of DREAMS is to reduce new HIV infections among AGYW in the geographic areas of 15 countries with the highest HIV burden. A key feature of DREAMS is the evidence-based approach of “layering” of services—delivering a combination of interventions to address health issues with a complex set of structural drivers that directly and indirectly affect AGYW’s risk of HIV.<sup>3</sup> Such approaches require strong coordination, contextual adaptation, local ownership, and a continuous cycle of assessment and improvement.

All PEPFAR DREAMS countries will be mandated to build upon previous investments in AGYW. The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) consortium, funded by USAID/PEPFAR and led by FHI 360, has extensive experience supporting countries to reach DREAMS target goals and prevent HIV among AGYW: DREAMS reduced new HIV diagnoses among AGYW by over 25% in more than 60% of its intervention regions.

### Innovative solutions

To mirror the constellation of factors that influence AGYW’s risk for HIV, the DREAMS core package of interventions reflects an integrated approach encompassing the health, education, psychosocial, economic, and civil society/community sectors.<sup>4</sup> Our consortium brings proven and innovative solutions to each component of the DREAMS core package.

<sup>1</sup> The United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. [2019 Annual Report to Congress](#).

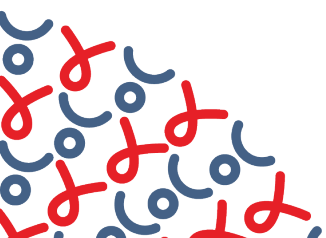
<sup>2</sup> Saul J, Bachman G, Allen S, Toiv NF, Cooney C, Beamon T. [The DREAMS core package of interventions: a comprehensive approach to preventing HIV among adolescent girls and young women](#). PLoS One. 2018;13(12):e0208167.

<sup>3</sup> N. Chimbindi, I. Birdthistle, M. Shahmanesh, et al. [Translating DREAMS into practice: Early lessons from implementation in six settings](#). PLoS One, 13 (2018), p. e0208243

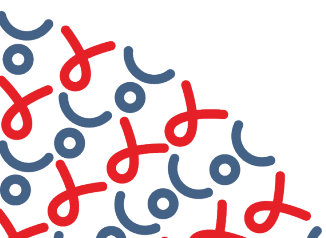
<sup>4</sup> Saul et al, 2018.

For more information about EpiC, including the areas in which we offer technical assistance, click [here](#).

DREAMS component	Solutions and technical assistance offerings
<p>Empower AGYW and reduce risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p>▪ Under the USAID-funded, FHI 360-led YouthPower Action project, FHI 360 recently developed a multicomponent, group-based mentoring intervention for AGYW. The program incorporates group-based mentoring; curricula covering reproductive health (RH), financial capabilities, soft skills, and gender content; activities designed to improve participants' social connectedness; optional onsite STI, HIV, and pregnancy testing along with STI treatment and links to HIV care and treatment; group-based savings; and links to RH services. Results from the pilot program in Uganda demonstrated statistically significant improvements in comprehensive HIV knowledge and savings behavior, and during the 6-month intervention period the program provided approximately 200 human papillomavirus (HPV), pelvic inflammatory disease, and cervical cancer screenings, and participants saved a total of 9.2 million UGX (around 25,000 USD). We are currently adapting the approach for implementation and scaling up in Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Nigeria where we will reach more than 40,000 AGYW.</p> </li> <li> <p>▪ In Zimbabwe, FHI 360 supported delivery of GBV services in health facilities through DREAMS. As part of the LINKAGES gender integration approach, FHI 360 took global normative guidance and best practices for addressing violence against key populations and developed flexible programmatic guidelines that have been rolled out across more than 20 countries. Tools for operationalization include protocols, standard operating procedures, and trainings on violence prevention and response for project staff and partners, health care workers, peer educators, and law enforcement. This has translated into increased detection of cases of violence; provision of first-line support to victims of violence; and links to health services, psychosocial support, and legal support.</p> </li> <li> <p>▪ The FHI 360-led OPTIONS consortium, which supports country-level policy development, program planning and innovations for PrEP introduction, has developed tools and resources to support scale-up. OPTIONS helps countries move from PrEP potential to PrEP impact, so AGYW have HIV prevention options that meet their needs. The <a href="#">OPTIONS HIV Prevention Ambassador Training Package</a> is a resource for civil society organizations to train AGYW on the skills and information they need to become agents of change for PrEP in their communities. The training package consists of a <a href="#">training manual</a> for CSOs and a <a href="#">toolkit</a> for AGYW. The toolkit is also available in Shona and Kiswahili. The training package has been implemented with more than 10 organizations and 150 HIV Prevention Ambassadors in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe. It was referenced in the draft PEPFAR COP 2020 guidance as a best practice, particularly as it relates to responding to gender-based violence experienced by AGYW.</p> </li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Under YouthPower Action, FHI 360 developed a youth engagement training developed to better prepare implementing partners of the DREAMS initiative and U.S .Government staff, including USAID, working in five countries (Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Zambia), to meaningfully include youth in development initiatives. Drawing from Restless Development’s expertise and experience in youth engagement over three decades of delivering youth-led programming in Africa and Asia, this training was designed in collaboration with DREAMS Youth Ambassadors</li> <li>▪ Through the innovative “Copain-Copine” strategy, with DREAMS funding, the YouthPower Action project worked to increase the identification of AGYW at risk of HIV and to connect those who are living with HIV to appropriate services. Building upon Copain-Copine, our experience with index testing under LINKAGES, and our knowledge of new evidence, EpiC can offer technical assistance related to index testing for AGYW that mitigates the risks of social harm.</li> <li>▪ The DREAMS initiative in Mozambique being implemented as part of the Clinical and Community HIV/AIDS Service Strengthening (CHASS) project is reducing HIV incidence by 40% among AGYW between the ages of 15 and 25 in Beira District of Sofala Province. The project provides services to adolescent girls and boys through youth-friendly health service centers located in health facilities.</li> </ul>
<p>Social protection for AGYW and their families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhancing Outcomes for Adolescent Girls &amp; Young Women in Burundi (YouthPower Action Burundi) is a program implemented by FHI 360 to mitigate the risk of HIV infection, unintended pregnancies, transactional sex, and gender-based violence among vulnerable adolescent girls (ages 10–18) in three districts. The activity was guided by PEPFAR OVC programming principles including household-level case management; strengthening families as primary caregivers of children; strengthening systems to support country ownership, including community ownership; ensuring prioritized and focused interventions that address children’s most critical care needs; and working within the continuum of response to achieve an AIDS-free generation. Additional activities included development of village savings and loan associations and approaches for keeping girls in school. The program collaborated closely with the national program working with key populations at risk of HIV to connect AGYW children of key population members to critical HIV prevention, treatment, and care activities.</li> <li>▪ DREAMS Malawi Innovation Challenge improved AGYW’s access to, retention in, and completion of secondary education. Program activities included providing scholastic support and opportunities for mentorship to girls from public secondary schools. The program raised community awareness about the importance of girls’ education, strengthened youth-friendly health services for adolescent girls so they can stay in school,</li> </ul>



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	<p>advanced women’s rights to reproductive health, and addressed the issues of school-related gender-based violence, gender norms, and cultural practices.</p>
<p>Reduce risk among male partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ YouthPower Action developed a mentoring program for adolescent boys and young men (ages 15–24) called Young Emanzi. Young Emanzi covers the following technical areas: gender, soft skills, financial literacy, puberty and reproductive health, addiction and alcohol abuse, and violence prevention. Overall, the program addresses harmful gender norms that contribute to disparities in boys’ access to and use of health services, including HIV prevention, care, and treatment.</li> <li>▪ In Zambia, FHI 360 facilitated collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to leverage the school calendar and engage school authorities to champion uptake of voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) services during school holidays. Between June 2016 and May 2017, this collaboration yielded 75% of VMMC acceptors during nonschool months as compared with 25% when schools were open.</li> </ul>
<p>Mobilize communities for change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In South Africa, FHI 360 is implementing DREAMS activities as part of the Capacity Development and Support project. The two primary activities that we are undertaking are school-based HIV prevention and community mobilization around prevention of HIV.</li> <li>▪ Implemented in 14 sites in Beira District, Mozambique, the DREAMS Initiative complements the work of the CHASS project in order to reduce new HIV infections among AGYW. CHASS/DREAMS has prioritized transforming harmful gender norms among adolescents through dialogues in <i>Servicios Amigos dos Adolescentes (SAAJs)</i> located in health facilities as well as community spaces (schools, universities, and other safe sites identified by the community). CHASS/DREAMS and partners prevent gender-based violence by promoting safe sexual behavior, partner disclosure, adherence to treatment, STI prevention, responsible pregnancy/family planning, responsible alcohol consumption, and links with other community support systems. In the SAAJs, adolescents are also offered the variety of services such as HIV testing and counseling, condom provision, family planning, and referrals. In FY18, 7,566 AGYW were reached with interventions designed to promote the adoption of HIV prevention behaviors and service uptake. In the 15–19 age group category, the project reached 113% of its target. 37,262 AGYW received HIV testing and counseling. In the 10–14 age group, the project reached 200% of its target; in the 15–19 age group, the project reached 105% of its target; and in the 20–24 age group, it reached 103% of its target.</li> </ul>

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