

Safer Pathways through Life:

Cash Plus in Tanzania

written by Elizabeth Coleman

When Neema* was 15 years old, she left her home in the mountains of south-central Tanzania to find work in the coastal capital of Dar es Salaam, hoping to ease her family's economic hardship. She put her trust in a man who promised to help her. "Seeing that I had left the village to go to the city – I knew totally nothing – he deceived me," she says. "I got pregnant after only one encounter, and after that I returned home with my pregnancy."

Three years later, Neema is glad to be part of a pilot project that aims to help young people make a safe transition to adulthood. A central focus, funded in part by Oak Foundation, is to reduce the risks that make adolescents particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence.

Such violence can take a heavy toll, including low self-esteem, depression, and risky sexual behaviours like early sexual debut and more sexual partners. It can

affect young people's health and hinder their performance in school and on the job, limiting their earning power.

What is unique about the project is that it not only recognises the role that poverty plays in making adolescents vulnerable, it takes steps to strengthen their economic prospects. It does this through one-on-one mentoring and small cash stipends they can use to start small businesses or get job training. This follows intensive training aimed at preventing sexual violence and promoting healthy relationships.

A collaboration between the Tanzanian government, UNICEF and others, the project is based on the Tanzania's cash transfer programme (Productive Social Safety Net), a social safety net that has improved the food security, health and education status of more than one million of the country's poorest households. The adolescents taking part in the pilot project – over 1'600 youth aged 15-24 – were selected from some of these households in the Southern Highlands region.



A rigorous study is measuring the following outcomes in the lives of the participating adolescents and youth:

- ✓ Economic productivity
- ✓ Knowledge of and increased access to sexual and reproductive health services
- ✓ Knowledge of and increased access to HIV prevention and treatment
- ✓ Delayed sexual debut, marriage and pregnancy
- ✓ Reduction of violence, exploitation, victimization and violence perpetration
- ✓ Improved mental health, hope, aspirations and risk preferences

Source: Cash Plus Project Brief, available at https://www.unicef.org/tanzania/Cash_Plus_Project_Brief_ST3.pdf

Because the project involves sexual reproductive health (SRH), HIV, and livelihood training and a small grant in addition to the cash transfers that the families receive, it's known as a "cash plus" model. For the adolescents, the "plus" components began in early 2018 with 10 weeks of intensive training on basic skills, and, importantly, training in sexual and reproductive health, violence protection, and gender equality. "It's important to view adolescents' lives in a holistic way when looking to prevent child sexual abuse and reduce vulnerability," says Tia Palermo, a UNICEF social policy specialist. She is leading a rigorous, three-year evaluation of the project which is measuring the outcomes in adolescents' lives, from economic productivity to reductions in sexual violence (see box).

Lusajo Kajula is a UNICEF researcher who is supervising the qualitative research. They are observing changes in attitudes and behaviours in young people's knowledge about keeping safe from HIV and violence, what SRH services they can access and some improvements in gender equitable attitudes. It's too early to see changes in behaviours and experiences – this will be measured next year.

But Lusajo is observing a sense of optimism among many of the participants. Many girls, like Neema, were forced or tricked into having sex, including transactional sex to pay for school fees. Quite a few, like Neema, ended up pregnant. Now many are envisioning a more expansive future. "This project is life changing," says Lusajo.

"It gives young people skills to protect themselves and to take care of themselves in terms of livelihoods."

At this point, the young people are in biweekly meetings with their mentors, working through their business plans or other training options so they will be able to put their stipends to good use.

If the project is successful, the government plans to expand it across Tanzania through its existing social safety net using the project's training-of-trainers model. "Because the pilot project involves the government, it's got great potential to be scaled up across the country," says Tia. In the future, fewer children will be forced to face Neema's dilemma. Instead of risking their own safety to make ends meet, they will have safe pathways to adulthood, including viable ways to support themselves and their families.

** Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.*