

Action brief

Youth-led advocacy in promoting healthy eating and lifestyles in Zimbabwe schools

Country: Zimbabwe**Topics:** Social Mobilization,
Advocacy and
Communication**Sub-topics:** Engaging youth**Date:** 2023

Overview



Great gains can be made in health and nutrition when youth are able to engage their peers in adopting healthy eating habits and lifestyles. While a focus on

adolescent nutrition programming is lacking globally, there is a window of opportunity for economic growth if the right social and economic investments and policies are made in health, education, governance and the economy.

In its drive to lift the voices of young people on key matters affecting their growth and development, the Zimbabwe Civil Society Organizations Scaling Up Nutrition Alliance (ZCSOSUNA) launched a youth-led advocacy campaign in 2019 on physical well-being and nutrition.



Objectives of the action brief

This action brief aims to share the network's experience in engaging youth in nutrition advocacy at Zimbabwe schools.



Period covered

The annual Kick Out Stunting Campaign is implemented during the second term of the school calendar, which runs from May to August. It was officially launched for the first time on 26 July 2019 in one of the high-density suburbs of Kuwadzana in the capital city of Harare.



What action was taken?

The campaign aimed to raise awareness among school-going adolescents regarding nutrition issues affecting youth, using sports and outdoor recreation activities to bring them together, educate them on nutrition basics and essentials while promoting physical activity. Dialogues, debates, poems and songs were also used to communicate to decision-makers and journalists.

The programme took inspiration from Nelson Mandela, one of Africa's greatest icons, who once said: "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair."

ZCSOSUNA engaged youth in shaping new narratives on healthy eating and lifestyles within school environments. Adolescents seldom have been engaged in the design of school nutrition interventions. Involving youth in the design, co-creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions allows them to voice their opinions on effective youth engagement, raises their awareness on matters affecting them,

and provides a safe space for discussing, analysing, strategizing and reimagining sustainable interventions.

Officials from the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the Ministry of Education supported the messaging and safeguarded the participants. The media played a critical role in amplifying youth voices and in calling other civil society organizations to adopt and adapt similar strategies in the design and implementation of school health interventions. The campaign was financed by the Scaling Up Nutrition Secretariat through the pooled fund.

The campaign was rolled out in Chipinge and Mutasa districts and adopted by other civil society organizations. Nutrition clubs and orchards were established in schools. The initiative received financial support from a local partner and was implemented at a larger scale in six districts in Zimbabwe. Recognizing the importance of engaging youth in programme design, the Government involved them in the development of school nutrition guidelines and a communication strategy to inspire nutrition-related social behaviour change among adolescents.



What would the country do differently?

School youth should not be treated as a homogeneous group; their needs can be different depending on geographical location and other factors.

It would be interesting to engage young people in secondary cities to generate more evidence and compare findings with results from the major urban areas.

The project faced competition from other school events and projects. In the future, the network could engage with other partners supporting the Government in the implementation of the school health policy and plan together on how to effectively collaborate.





Adaptation and Applicability

It is advisable to be flexible to adapt to unforeseen circumstances that may arise during the execution of campaigns. To avoid overlooking the unique demands of youth during the budgeting stage, it will be important to have contingency plans in place and be prepared to adjust schedules and activities. The success of school campaigns largely depends on planning, and it is advisable to allocate adequate time to this activity.

Engaging young people in the early stages of project design is key to the success and sustainability of school campaigns. It also is crucial to provide safe spaces and opportunities for youth to effectively contribute towards campaign implementation and monitoring. Feedback should be collected from participants and stakeholders and used to improve future events.



Further information



<https://healthtimes.co.zw/2019/07/26/kick-out-stunting-campaign-starts-on-high-note/>



<https://healthtimes.co.zw/2020/11/24/kick-out-stunting-campaign-to-raise-awareness-on-micro-nutrients-deficiencies-in-children/>



<https://www.pressreader.com/zimbabwe/the-herald-zimbabwe/20190729/281779925730492>



<https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/stories/unicefzimbabwe-rolls-out-youth-led-advocacy-program-nutrition>



Next steps

The networks plan to engage the Zimbabwe Junior Parliament and Youth Council in developing a youth-centered nutrition and advocacy toolkit to be used by the Zimbabwe Youth Council in empowering youth change agents. The toolkit also will be used in developing work plans aimed at addressing the school food environment challenges the nation is facing.



This Good Practice was developed in collaboration with the SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN). For more information about the SUN CSN, please visit their website: <https://www.suncivilsociety.com/>

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