

MY RIGHTS MY VOICE

MALI PROJECT OVERVIEW



OXFAM

MY RIGHTS, MY VOICE IN MALI

- Children and young people in Mali have huge potential to transform their lives and communities. With the right skills and support, they can be a driving force to break the cycle of poverty so many are born into.
- To help them achieve their potential, their rights to health and education must be fulfilled. That is why Oxfam is running a three-year project in Mali as part of the international My Rights, My Voice programme, to empower children and young people to claim their rights to education and to sexual and reproductive health (SRH).
- The project teaches young people about SRH, and advocates for improved national education policies and their implementation.
- Working with children and young people, and those who influence their lives, My Rights, My Voice is empowering them to achieve lasting changes in policies, practices and beliefs, so their health and education needs are met – now and in the future.

THE CHALLENGE

Although 80 per cent of Mali's children enrolled in primary school in 2010-11, the system struggles to give them a quality education. Almost half abandon their schooling early, while many complete school without basic reading, writing and mathematical skills. They face a shortage of teachers (only one per 100 pupils in some areas), poor teacher-training, a lack of classroom materials and an outdated curriculum. The education authorities' lack of accountability and transparency in financial management means legal standards are not upheld and policies such as the national girls' education policy are not properly implemented.

There are still 15 per cent more boys than girls in school. Although many more girls are now enrolling, there are still huge socio-economic barriers to their completing their education. These include traditional domestic

roles, a lack of economic choices for women, the inadequacy of SRH education, and early marriage leading to early pregnancy or vice versa. Many taboos surround SRH issues, making accurate information unavailable to most young people, who grow up ignorant of their sexual and gender rights.

With the average age for becoming sexually active in West Africa reported as 13-14, young people – unaware of the risks – face a devastating range of threats to their life chances, from unwanted pregnancy to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Girls can legally be married aged 15, but many become wives far younger and are forced to abandon their schooling. Meanwhile the poor quality of education leads to education itself being undervalued. Mali's school system is failing to create 'active citizens' able to take informed decisions about their lives and contribute to the development of their societies.

OUR SOLUTION

My Rights, My Voice aims to empower Malian children and young people to claim their rights to education and SRH, so they can complete school and contribute actively to the development of their societies. The project aims to improve the quality of education and tackle some of the major social and cultural constraints preventing children and young people – especially girls – from attending and completing school. We are working with our local partners Coalition COSC-EPT and One World UK both at national level and in the regions of Segou and Bamako. The project will reach more than 110,000 people directly and many more indirectly, via a two-pronged approach combining youth empowerment, social change and advocacy:

Empowering individual young people

Through an innovative use of technology, we are enabling young people to understand their SRH rights, so they can take control of their health and avoid HIV and unwanted pregnancy. *Learning about Living (Info Ado Mali)* is an e-learning programme about SRH rights, delivered via computers, radio and mobile phone. Available online, on CD and in hard copy (for remote areas), the programme is delivered by teachers in schools, and in training sessions for young people out of school. It is backed by a confidential free-to-user text messaging service, *Youth Call (Weleli Ado Mali)*. Children and young people send questions about SRH rights and receive an answer from trained counsellors within 24 hours. A monthly prize of free airtime encourages adolescents to use the service.



PHOTO: AMI VITALE

Issues raised will be explored in community radio programmes developed by young people to inform their peers and help change social attitudes.

Driving national change

Working with partners in Mali such as the Education for All coalition, My Rights, My Voice is advocating for an improved national curriculum – including life skills and SRH rights. This must be well-taught by adequate numbers of properly-trained female and male teachers. We are also training youth groups to monitor policy implementation so they can hold the government to account over its commitments to provide quality education to all Malian children and to promote girls' schooling in particular.

LASTING CHANGE

By developing a sustainable information service on gender and SRH rights, My Rights, My Voice will equip young people in and out of schools with the knowledge and skills to manage their health, and make informed choices about their futures. Backed by community support and sustainable policy change, the project empowers Mali's children and young people to grow up with the skills they need to make the most of their lives and help transform their country.

FIND OUT MORE

My Rights, My Voice is a three-year programme which aims to engage marginalised children and youth in their rights to health and education services. It is being jointly implemented by Oxfam GB and Oxfam Novib, and involves Oxfam Quebec in Niger. Working through our local partners in eight countries, My Rights, My Voice has significant funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

To find out more about the programme please mail us at: mrmv@oxfam.org.uk or visit us at www.oxfam.org.uk/myrightsmymyvoice

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