

HIV Prevention Ambassador Training for Adolescent Girls and Young Women: *Ambassador Follow-up Activity, Kenya*

MARCH-SEPTEMBER 2023





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INTRODUCTION

Background

- In October 2022, LVCT Health trained a **cadre of DREAMS Champions** using the 3rd edition of the HIV Prevention Ambassador Training (HPAT) for Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW)
- LVCT Health will offer **technical assistance to DREAMS project personnel** on using the HPAT for training and equipping DREAMS Champions
- In 2023, we **followed up with the trained Champions (Ambassadors)** to assess how the HPAT has impacted their work, and understand their needs and challenges





Goal

To assess how Ambassadors have **applied knowledge and skills** from the HPAT, **gather their feedback** to **identify best practices** for using the HPAT with this population, and **offer guidance and recommendations** for future Ambassador programming.

Objectives

- Explore how **Ambassadors have used learnings** from the training and the changes they have noticed, including their contribution to PrEP uptake
- Understand how **Ambassadors use training and toolkit** to provide their peers with information on HIV prevention
- Learn about **best practices that Ambassadors have developed** for using the knowledge and skills from the HPAT in their work
- **Explore challenges** Ambassadors are experiencing
- Outline **tips for improving future Ambassador trainings** and adaptations

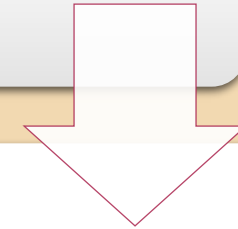


Methods



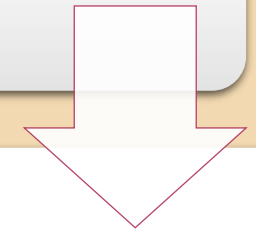
Sample Selection

In collaboration with DREAMS program staff, we selected 6 DREAMS Champions who were serving actively as Ambassadors with the DREAMS Project.



Interview Process

A consent form was administered and completed by each Ambassador before the interview. Each interview was conducted using a standard set of questions. Interviews were conducted in English, recorded, and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes.



Analysis

Interview responses were analyzed in a two-step process. First, key points for identified topics were documented. Next, themes were identified through review of key points. In addition, illustrative quotes were selected throughout to support themes.

Ambassador Demographics

We interviewed **6 cisgender young women** who had been working as **DREAMS Ambassadors** for about **8 months**.

Ambassadors were between the **ages of 21–26**. The average age was 23. While all Ambassadors live in Kiambu county, there was a **split between urban and rural areas**.

All Ambassadors work with the **LVCT Health DREAMS Program**.





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RESULTS



Number of Peers Supported to Access PrEP

Ambassadors reported supporting their peers to access PrEP – with numbers **supported ranging from 12 to 100**. In total, Ambassadors shared that they had **supported approximately 266 peers to access PrEP** in the five months since the training.

Support to access PrEP includes **clinic accompaniment, sharing information** on PrEP, and **disclosing their own PrEP journey**.

WORKSHEET 4

Removing Barriers to PrEP

What would make it easier for your peers to **find out** about PrEP?

What would make it easier for your peers to **get** PrEP?

What would make it easier for your peers to **use** PrEP?

What would make it easier for your peers to **talk** to their parents/partners about using PrEP?

WORKSHEET 3

My Circles of Influence

Who can you influence?

LOW/NO INFLUENCE

MEDIUM INFLUENCE

HIGH INFLUENCE

High influence

Medium influence

Low/no influence

Supporting Peers to Access PrEP

*In the time since training, half of the Ambassadors noticed an increase in the **numbers of peers that they supported to access PrEP***, while the other half reported a decrease.*

- **Reasons for decrease:**

- Peer discontinuation due to relocation for school or work
- Peer discontinuation due to pill burden
- Peer fears of intimate partner violence

- **Reasons for increase:**

- Support from the DREAMS program and Ambassadors for DREAMS participants
- Ambassador advocacy for PrEP use in the community
- Ambassadors sharing correct information about PrEP and HIV prevention
- Increased Ambassador confidence
- Successful linkages and follow-up by Ambassadors

*This applies to support to access PrEP only. Peers who discontinued PrEP or relocated no longer receive support to access PrEP but continue to receive general support from Ambassadors.



Helping Peers Continue or Restart PrEP

4 of the 6 Ambassadors reported helping AGYW continue or restart PrEP.

Support strategies:

- Sharing their own PrEP journey
- Using peer support skills
- Providing reminders
- Building rapport
- Using the Ambassador toolkit to counsel peers on PrEP use



[I] used the toolkit by counseling my peers and when they see the stories of other girls in the toolkit using PrEP and see how they adhere for it to work, they felt motivated.



Use of Training Tools & Skills

All Ambassadors reported applying skills and tools acquired during the training. Participants mentioned using the LIVES approach and the Ambassador toolkit as a reference for PrEP information during their engagement with peers.

TOOL 18

Safety Planning Tool

Making a safety plan can help someone take steps to increase their safety at home or in other places where they may feel unsafe. Remember that a safety plan does not guarantee that someone will not experience violence. **Violence is always the fault of the person who commits violence — never the survivor!** These questions



planning.

LIVES Response

TOOL 17

STEP	How do I do this?
L isten closely with empathy and without judgement.	Make sure you are somewhere private, where they feel physically and mentally safe. Explain the boundaries of confidentiality that you can uphold. Show them you are listening deeply and with empathy. Use your body language to communicate that you are paying attention. Give them a safe space to talk. Acknowledge and validate their feelings.
I nquire about their needs and concerns.	Let them know they are in control of what happens next. Help them to identify their needs and consider their options.
V alidate their experiences.	Validate their experiences by letting them know they are not alone, you are there for them, and their feelings matter. Explain that you are just there to listen — you will not judge them or tell them what to do. If they have shared an experience of violence, let them know that you believe them, and it is not their fault.
E nhance their safety.	Help them think about their situation and things they may be able to do to increase safety. If someone is in an especially dangerous situation, let them know that you are concerned for their safety and that their safety is important. Talk through the safety planning questions with them. Remind them that a safety plan is not a guarantee that violence will not happen and that violence is never their fault.
S upport them to connect to more resources.	Ask if they would like to hear information on local resources. If they say yes, provide them with information about local resources that might help, such as referral for PEP or emergency contraception, counselling, or legal support. Remember that not everyone wants to take up a referral right away, and that is okay. Some people may return for a referral, but others may not want to be referred. Returning control to the survivor means respecting their wishes, and a survivor who knows you respect their choices is more likely to return to you for additional support.

Remember, Ambassadors are not counsellors!
It is not your role to provide counselling to your peers or tell them what to do.

SELF-CARE FOR AMBASSADORS

Remember to take care of yourself!

What does this look like in practice?

Take a few deep breaths and ask yourself: 'How am I feeling right now?' 'Do I need to rest, or spend time with a friend, or reach out for support?'

Give yourself at least a few moments to listen to yourself and plan how to respond to what you need. Think about how you can slow down or take a break if you need one. Reach out to your contact(s) in your Ambassador programme if you need support.

If I need support or assistance in an emergency, I can contact: _____

Planning for an emergency

Packing an emergency bag and keeping it hidden can help you stay prepared.

- If you have to leave school, work, or home in an emergency, what is the best way to get to a safe place? Could you use public transportation, get a ride, or get there in another way?
- If you have to leave school, work, or home in an emergency, what will you need to take with you?
 - Medications? - Items that are special to you?
 - Money? - Identity documents? - A change of clothes?
 - Keys?
- If you have children, what will you need for them if you have to leave your home in an emergency?
 - Diapers? - Formula? - Special toys?

Special considerations if you have children

- If they are old enough to ask for help, who can your children contact in an emergency? Do they know who to contact and how to get in touch with them?
- If they are old enough, do your children know to get away from a violent situation and not to try to intervene?

Staying safe emotionally

Remembering things that make you happy can help with your mental health.

- What are some things that you like about yourself or that you are proud of?
- What are some activities you enjoy that you can do when you feel down?
- Are there any clubs or groups you can join that might be fun for you?
- Who are the people in your life who make you smile or remind you of your value?

PrEP Methods



Oral PrEP

Pill taken daily

Whole body (systemic)

User initiated; use can be private

Over 90%, when used correctly and consistently



PrEP Ring

Vaginal ring replaced each month

Vaginal area (localised)

User initiated; use can be private

About 50%, or more when used correctly and consistently



CAB PrEP

Injection given every 2 months

Whole body (systemic)

User initiated; use can be private

More than 90% effective. With regular injections, CAB PrEP is the most effective PrEP method.

Peer Response to Tools

Ambassador peers' response to the toolkit and information from the training was positive. **Shared information, supplemented by the toolkit, brought out inquisitiveness to learn about oral PrEP and other new HIV technologies such as CAB PrEP and the PrEP ring.**

All Ambassadors noted feeling empowered by the training.

- **Boosted self esteem** in terms of conveying prevention messages to their peers
- **Improved communication skills**
- **Increased knowledge on new HIV prevention technologies** that will be available via CATALYST and, eventually, national rollout

“ *It helped build confidence because with the right information, you're able to answer most of the questions. And also, you're able to mobilize the people and actually refer them and also know your roles specifically.* ”

Half of the Ambassadors reported that the training improved their ability to support others.

- By increasing their knowledge of PrEP methods
- By challenging them to be more open about prevention matters
- By inspiring them to support peers to take charge of their individual HIV prevention journey



My Personal Action Plan

Ambassadors reported cross-cutting challenges impacting their action plans and their work in general.

Many barriers facing their peers are outside of their control and impact their ability to complete their action plans.

Our goal

What are you most passionate about doing as an Ambassador?

What are your strengths that will help you in your role as an Ambassador?

What types of activities are you most interested in doing to contribute towards the goal?

Where do you have the most influence?

What is one thing you can achieve that will contribute towards the goal (your objective)?



Challenges to completing action plans

- Fear of judgment, stigma, and discrimination around PrEP use
- Pill burden
- Misconceptions, incorrect information, and negative perceptions about PrEP in the community
- Missed appointments for follow up visits for some peers
- Negative influence from their peers
- Fear of intimate partner violence if PrEP use is discovered
- Financial challenges impacting the ability to focus on HIV prevention
- Lack of respect towards some ambassadors from some HIV counseling and testing providers and peers' parents

Although most Ambassadors noted good relationships with people in the community and in the clinics they support, some described multiple challenges from parents and service providers.

“

You can maybe share to HTS how girls are not listening to you out there, **the insults you are receiving from their parents** so the HTS provider is like that's a must to encounter, this job is not easy... So, the HTS [provider] does not help that much. The following day you call and get insulted you are afraid to tell them [the HTS provider] yet they are insisting you follow up with the girls continuing with PrEP, but **she is not ready to listen to your predicament.**

They do not respect me. There was a time I took an AGYW to HTS for PrEP after talking to her. **Her mother followed me to my place and accused me of giving her daughter abortion pills** and I can't tell her what kind of medicine she was taking.

”

Action Plan Progress

4 of the 6 Ambassadors reported ongoing progress towards achieving the goals set during the action planning session of the training.

They frequently reported conducting meetings and support groups with peers to disseminate accurate information about HIV prevention.

“ “ In my action plan I had said that I will mobilize and advocate for PrEP use in most areas, especially the ones in this site, so I can say I've gone to all of them, even multiple times to others, and even those ones who have been newly enrolled, I made sure I have gone to tell them more about PrEP. ” ”



Ambassadors reported proactively responding to the challenges they face.

- **Building awareness about PrEP** in one-on-one conversations and vocational training
- **Collaborating with the HIV testing service provider** at the DREAMS site to define the right eligibility criteria for PrEP initiation, improving continuation rates in subsequent months
- **Physical tracing** of AGYW PrEP users for follow-up visits
- Seeking **support from fellow Ambassadors** for follow-up
- **Forming support groups** to address adherence issues, myths, and misconceptions
- **Sometimes using personal resources** to facilitate PrEP mobilization across different areas
- Making **phone calls to partners or parents** of PrEP clients who miss appointments (per peer request)



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SELF-CARE AND AMBASSADOR SUPPORT

“*I usually make sure that I have enough sleep. And sometimes I listen to myself when I need to go out for a walk. I love nature. I love listening to birds. Sometimes, when I need someone to talk to, I actually look for our counsellors. And I usually make sure that I also listen to a lot of music.*”

“*Since these girls can really call you anytime, sometimes if it's eight you switch off the phone, and tomorrow get back at work.*”

Ambassador comments showed an understanding of burnout and reflected their efforts to prevent it.

- Attending quarterly supportive supervision sessions with supervisors
- Employing a work-life balance
- Referring cases that they are not able to handle to service providers
- During their free time, **socializing with friends and listening to music**
- **Seeking therapy** to deal with burn out
- Attending **debriefing sessions** with other Ambassadors
- **Asking for support** from supervisors

Despite their efforts to resolve challenges, Ambassadors shared opportunities for additional support.

- Quarterly PrEP support groups and knowledge sharing forums for Ambassadors from different areas, supported by LVCT/DREAMS coordinators
- **Transport reimbursement** to access distant locations for follow-up and awareness raising
- **Airtime** to facilitate communication between Ambassadors and their peers
- **Factsheets** with information about PrEP
- **T-shirts** with key messages about PrEP



I feel like we don't meet as much as PrEP ambassadors from other sites, like maybe there should be a meeting once in a while, to be able to join our minds and tell each other what has been working, what has not been working on the other side, maybe it might help in a larger scale.



Ambassadors shared that access to new HIV prevention methods could improve PrEP uptake and use and make their jobs easier.

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...[New] prevention methods **like an injectable** to be made available because it can be a better option for most of the AGYW who think that **oral PrEP is a big burden for them.**

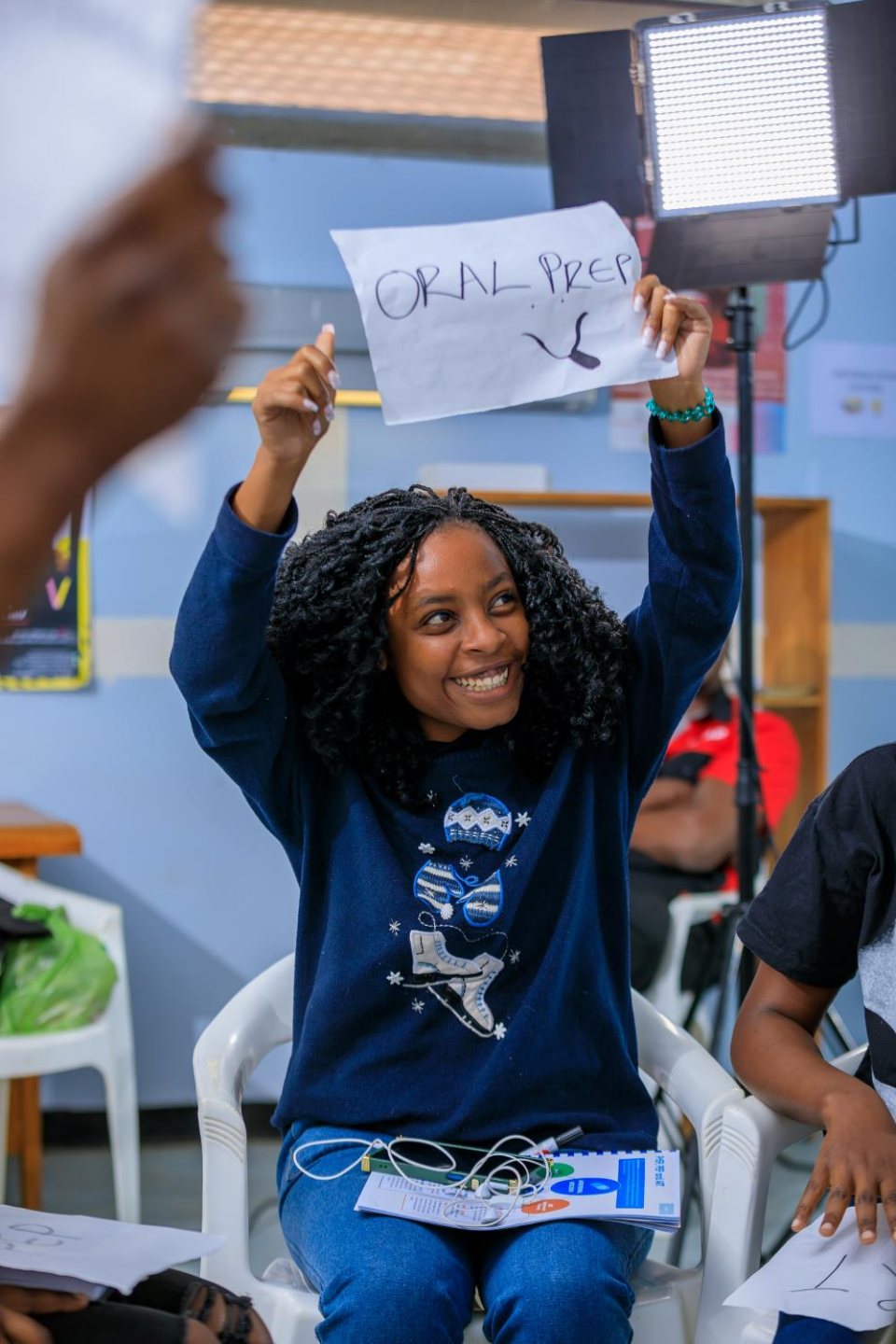
There is a type of PrEP called the ring PrEP, so many girls want that and it's not available. They **prefer to have the ring more than the oral PrEP** because maybe someone's not at home and needs the pill or is just tired of taking the meds. Also, stigma because most of the people don't know the difference between PrEP and ARVs. **I don't know if those rings can be available this year, I know they've been studied, they can really improve the uptake.**

”

Ambassadors were eager for additional training and requested a variety of topics.

- More training on GBV & the LIVES approach
- Trainings with scenarios and solutions brainstorming
- Refresher training focused on strategies to improve PrEP continuation
- Sharing and learning events to foster cross-learning among Ambassadors from different parts of the country
- Reflective sessions with trainers
- Sensitization on interaction of drugs and substances with PrEP to improve support for peers who use drugs





Conclusions & Recommendations

- Findings suggest that the **training was practical** and gave Ambassadors important knowledge and skills.
- **Ambassadors are enthusiastic** about their roles and **provide individual support** to large numbers of their peers while **raising awareness** about PrEP in their communities.
- Ambassadors noted a **variety of challenges** that can be addressed by DREAMS programs, such as transportation support, targeted training, group support, and debriefing sessions with HTS providers.
- **Listening and responding to Ambassador needs can reveal gaps in programming**, improve the effectiveness of HIV prevention efforts and empower Ambassadors to make a greater impact in their communities.

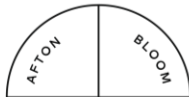
The HIV Prevention Ambassador Training is a useful tool and training more Ambassadors may improve PrEP uptake and use in communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nelius Ruiru, Janet Mugambi and Naumy Mumo (LVCT Health)

Morgan Garcia and Shyla Napier (FHI 360)

We would also like to share our appreciation for the DREAMS Management Team, DREAMS Program Officers, site in-charges, and all the Ambassadors who contribute to this work!



MOSAIC is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) cooperative agreement 7200AA21CA00011. The contents of this presentation are the responsibility of MOSAIC and do not necessarily reflect the views of PEPFAR, USAID, or the U.S. Government.

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