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| Danish organisation | 100% for Børnene |
| Title of the intervention | Poetic empowerment of marginalized mothers in Kenya |
| Partner name(s) | Positive Life Kenya |
| Amount applied for | 99.834 kr. |
| Country(ies) | Kenya |
| Period (# of months) | 9 months |

1. **Objective and relevance (the world around us)**

Adolescent girls becoming mothers at a young age limits future opportunities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Young girls getting pregnant is an even bigger problem now after covid-19 leaving many young girls to take care of themselves and their newborns on their own. These girls face stigma and rejection in their local communities pushing them to live on the street or depend on others to survive. Interventions have been put in place in Machakos County in Kenya by Positive Life Kenya and 100% for the Children to protect some of these girls (20-3200-CSP). During the intervention 15 young mothers have been living in a halfway house where they have learned to take care of their newborn. They have also received education and PLK have worked intensely on reuniting the girls with their families and local communities and supporting them in staying in school. The girls have grown in self-esteem and are now able to put into words how it is to be a young woman and a mother. The marginalized young mothers are characterized by vulnerability, poverty, and low education levels, but equally, they are industrial, creative, and strong survivors who manage to find ways to navigate massive challenges. Their rights are routinely ignored, and the girls and women are consistently dehumanized by government actors and duty-bearers as well as the public. The voices of young mothers have the potential to humanize this group in society and among stakeholders. The overall objective of this small-scale intervention therefore is to secure equal rights and opportunities for vulnerable and socially marginalized women, specifically young mothers living in Kenya.

This project has three immediate objectives:

1. Empower 15 vulnerable young mothers from Faraja halfway house in Machakos, Kenya through establishing a foundation for expressing their voices and demands for rights through artistic expression, namely poetry.
2. Build capacity of our local partner Positive Life Kenya and selected representatives from like-minded NGO’s, educational institutions, and key government workers to be able to undertake future poetry workshops, where poetry become a means for advocacy for vulnerable and marginalized groups in society
3. This small-scale intervention will contribute to a synergy between three other joined interventions between 100% and PLK both regarding capacity building and the opportunities to advocate for young mothers’ humanity and rights.

By the end of this 9-month intervention we expect to see a change in the following areas: 1) the 15 adolescent mothers are capable of expressing their voices through artistic means and are using this new skill to de-stigmatize and humanize this group in their local communities and towards stakeholders in this intervention, 2) Positive Life Kenya are capable of planning and carrying out poetry workshops for vulnerable target groups and to put the artistic outputs into use in networking and advocacy efforts both in this intervention and in others. PLK are also capable of passing on this knowledge to other like-minded NGO’s, relevant educational institutions, and government actors, and 3) PLK and 100% together have three existing projects in Kenya; ‘*Protection of vulnerable adolescent girls during COVID-19*’ (20-3200-CSP), ‘*Preventing separation and institutionalization of street youth in Machakos*’ (20-3259-CSP) and ‘*Breaking the Silence: Youth advocates for the right to sexuality and civic engagement*’ (19-2448-UI-sep). Both target groups and methodologies overlap between these interventions and the one described in this application since the pregnant adolescent girls (20-3200) are the young mothers included in this project. They are forced to live on the streets or in institutions if not helped by PLK to be reunited with their families (the focus of 20-3259). These young girls used to attend the schools where PLK and 100% are strengthening SRHR-education (19-2448) and where there will also be included poetry writing as a way for youth the express their voices. These synergies will be reinforced by the methodologies and advocacy outputs (anthology) of this intervention.

**Context**

Teenage pregnancy limits the opportunities for future employment and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Besides the direct consequences such as unfinished education and health issues, teenage mothers frequently suffer from social stigma, facing rejections from their families, peers, and communities. The pregnant adolescents are expressing feelings of stigma, fear, shame, pity, confusion, and rejection and are further at risk of ending up in violent relationships. This may lead to a vicious cycle of mental stress, depression and suicidal thoughts among pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers. It is crucial to empower young mothers through processes that will enable them to express their voices and demand their rights.

There has been a rise in teenage pregnancies in Machakos County in Kenya during covid-19. This is caused by the restrictions put in place by the Government to defeat covid-19. Vulnerable families struggled to earn for living and young girls were forced to find new ways of earning money to the family. Unfortunately, prostitution is an easy way to make quick money, and this leads to unplanned pregnancies among very young girls. Also, movement restrictions and closing of schools have made the adolescent girls spending more time at home which in some families has led to sexual abuse. Pregnant adolescent girls are often treated badly by their family and in their local communities because of the way they got pregnant excluding them from their home and forcing them to find another place to stay or live on the streets.

The project site, Mlolongo town slums is a fragile context. Mlolongo town is located along the busy Mombasa highway – 19 Kilometers from the Capital city of Nairobi. The town is the main stop over for long distance trucks transporting goods and cargo from the port of Mombasa to the greater East Africa countries e.g., Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Rwanda and DRC Congo. Poverty rates in Mlolongo are approx. 61% and continue to be aggravated by pressure on land due to the high population of in-migrants, who come to look for work. Most of the inhabitants in the area are unemployed and those that manage to find work generally earn less than US $2-3 a day selling fruits and vegetables or working as casual unskilled laborers. In the absence of viable income activities, theft, child prostitution, illiteracy and diseases fuel the cycle of poverty. The high demand for sex from the truck drivers facilitate a fast track for young teenage girls into commercial sex work to supplement their family’s income. During COVID-19, the adolescent girls living in the area are extremely exposed and vulnerable due to high pressure on the household income.

Young mothers with limited incomes often lack basic nutritional and housing needs for themselves and their children and they have also been found to experience higher levels of stress that are associated with parenting, be less responsive and sensitive in interactions with their children and offer lower stimulation at home. The children of these young mothers grow up with little or no education and no family network to support them as they are born and raised on the streets. They do not have the means necessary to create a better future for themselves and will, therefore, often end up in the same or an even more marginalized situation compared with their mothers. Reports mention that these children easily get involved in crimes, drug abuse, and prostitution.

1. The partnership/collaborators (our starting point)

There are two partners in this project: 100% for the Children (Denmark) and Positive Life Kenya (Kenya). Besides these two partners, an external expert on poetry workshops will be involved.

**100% for Børnene / 100% for the Children**

100% was established in Denmark in 2008 to work towards improving the living conditions and strengthening the rights of the most vulnerable children and youth in Kenya and Ghana. 100% does not only work with providing access to basic services like health and education but increasingly to give youth influence through advocacy and capacity building. In recent years,100% has moved from a focus on children to a strengthened youth perspective, with a focus on empowering young people to actively shape their societies through youth leadership, capacity building, campaigning and advocacy work, peer to peer efforts, etc.

100% also have experience with the use of arts, such as pictures, poems, and music as educational tools for educating children and youth about active citizenship and critical independent thinking. Poetic Empowerment (Oplysningspuljen) and youth portraits from the dumping grounds (with CAS, Frame, Voice, Report) are projects that reflect this. Together with local partners 100% have worked with capacity building and awareness-raising activities targeted at local authorities (Department of Social Welfare for instance), students and social workers to support and fight for access to health, education, and basic rights. We have worked intensely with strengthening the voices of vulnerable children and young people and have used creative products as advocative tools to create awareness and push for equal rights (projects that reflect this: Unheard Voices, I AM campaign). In this project 100% will build on the experiences collected in previous projects about poetic or artistic empowerment to succeed in raising the voices of vulnerable adolescent mothers in Kenyan society.

We will especially build on our experiences from a project in Ghana with our partner Catholic Action for Street children called ‘Poetic Empowerment Youth in Dialogue’ (468), where we also did a poetry workshop, but for street children in Ghana. From this project we know, that even if the target group are illiterate, it is possible to help them create powerful poems and express their voices in artistic ways.

**Positive Life Kenya**

Positive Life Kenya (PLK)’s offices are in Machakos County, Mlolongo town. Project activities and service delivery is fused in the 7 forgotten slums of Mlolongo. They are huge slums with a population of over 3 million people. PLK will be the Kenyan partner overseeing the intervention implementation and overall financial management in Kenya. PLK will facilitate all the activities in the urban slum environment of Mlolongo, Nairobi.

Initially called Living Positive Mlolongo, the organization began as a Community Based Organization (CBO) in 2010. Since 2010, the organization has expanded its support services to many slums of the Machakos. This organization was renamed to Positive Life Kenya in 2015. Today Positive Life Kenya works with a long variety of empowering and sustaining efforts. The organization creates awareness, works with skill-based programs for children and women, supports the local community through communication and advocacy about the prevention of HIV. PLK’s vision is to see families living with dignity and free of poverty. Their mission is to break the cycle of poverty by educating and empowering marginalized families to build healthy environments for their children to thrive and create lasting change. Positive Life Kenya has worked with rescuing children and youth through a rescue center in the past. Raped, molested and girls rescued from prostitution have a safe place here, where they are provided with education, feeding and counselling. PLK builds on years of experience of working with youth skills, increasing reproductive knowledge among vulnerable women, and providing guidance for youth from the slum areas.

In 2020, PLK and 100% started a small-scale intervention seeking to protect vulnerable adolescent girls during covid-19 (20-3200-CSP). The girls got pregnant during the crisis and were forced to live on the streets without family, food or any other support system. 15 girls have been rescued through the project and it is these 15 girls that will be included in this intervention. We also work together on the intervention ‘Preventing separation and institutionalization of street youth in Machakos’ (20-3259-CSP). Lots of children leave their families because of poverty and poverty-related issues, child abuse and harmful cultural practices and this intervention seeks to prevent children from leaving their families and reunite families. Further, PLK is a part of the larger intervention ‘Breaking the silence’ together with 100% for the Children, Help Mission Development Service and Periamma where inclusive SRHR-education and raising young voices are the center of the intervention. During covid-19 a large part of the target group in Breaking the Silence project (adolescent girls) got pregnant and are now a part of a vulnerable group of young mothers. The synergy between these three projects will be utilized in this project regarding advocacy initiatives.

**Karen Siercke / Poesiens Hus**

Karen Siercke is an experienced leader, entrepreneur, storyteller, author, and network builder. Since June 1, 2020, she has been the head of ‘Poesiens Hus’ in Copenhagen. A house of literature driven by passion for poetry, its play with language and its ability to convey both the easy and the difficult. Here she holds writing and reading workshops, poetry readings, author events, concerts, and debate evenings with a focus on disseminating poetry. Most recently Karen’s organization Ordskælv has published ‘Da Døden Blev Aflyst – 40 år med aids’. Karen is used to international collaboration and enjoys getting diverse groups to work together despite differences. Karen will work closely together with the two partners in this project around the poetry workshops and the Facilitator’s Guide. As an external expert, Karen will be involved in this project as she has years of experience with developing and carrying out poetry workshops with different target groups. Karen’s input will help develop PLK’s skills in facilitating poetry workshops, where the two partners will bring in expert knowledge on the vulnerable target group in Kenya to make sure that the guidelines developed in this project are sensitive to the context and can be used by other actors working with vulnerable women and mothers.

**Roles and responsibilities**

In this project, both PLK and 100% will be the implementing body since both will be participating in the poetry workshops in Kenya. PLK will be responsible for any advocacy activities in Kenya including a launch of an anthology with poems written by young mothers. Karen will be responsible for capacity building of PLK and together all three (PLK, 100% and Karen) will develop the Facilitators Guide. Camilla from 100% for the Children will be responsible for the ongoing project monitoring including monthly status meetings, securing the collaboration around the Facilitators Guide, economic monitoring, and final evaluation.

1. Target groups, objectives, and expected results (our intervention)

Primary target groups:

1) 15 young mothers from Faraja halfway house taking part in the poetry workshops

2) Capacity builds Positive Life Kenya to undertake poetic empowerment: capacity building as facilitators and Trainer of Trainers in poetry and art: 2-3 from PLK will be trained in poetry workshops to incorporate this into the organization’s methodological approach when working with vulnerable groups.

3) Representatives from NGO’s who all work with vulnerable and/or street girls and mothers, representatives for selected educational institutions and government ground staff interested in doing poetry workshops with vulnerable groups – estimated 9-16 trained in this project in Kenya. In Kenya: 9-16 representatives from APDK, Ministry of health, Kenya Institute of Social Work and Centre for Study of Adolescence to offer them the possibility to integrate poetry workshops and the guide into their methods.

Secondary target groups:

1) Government staff and local communities – estimated 50 through direct visitation at launch. We especially want to target Ministry of Gender and Youth Services and Ministry of Health, Kenya National Association of Social Workers, Centre for Study of Adolescence, and members of local communities (to secure ownership and sustainability), through the launch of the anthology with the aim of increasing awareness on human rights, anti-stigma, and mental health and specially to increase awareness and social support of marginalized women’s rights and inclusion in society.

**Intervention**

***Poetry workshop***

This CISU project is a new and innovative way to advocate for vulnerable women’s rights and holds significant potential to raise institutional and public awareness of the humanity and human rights of this group of women. The project will entail a community for 15 adolescent mothers, where they can transform their experiences, thoughts, and feelings into a creative product through a 5-day poetry workshop at PLK. The poetry workshops for the women will form a foundation for not only processing emotions but voicing their own stories and what is important to them. The program for the 5 days will be developed by Karen in collaboration with PLK and 100%. The workshop program will center around 5 themes – one for each day: The Power of Your Story, The Power of Your Senses, The Power of Poetry, The Power of Your Heritage and The Power of Your Voice. In similar projects, we have seen how poetry can have an empowering effect in the longer term. It will also create an important community in a social environment characterized by stress, exclusion, and social isolation.

**Launch of anthology**

Advocacy initiatives aimed at promoting equal rights and better conditions for mothers in vulnerable positions in Kenya are a strong part of this project and the Government including ground staff will be targeted through an anthology with poems written by young mothers. The anthology will be launched at an event hosted by PLK. This will create a space for dialogue for government staff and selected key persons from educational institutions and local communities where they can address the routine ignoration of rights and the harsh treatment of vulnerable adolescent mothers and their children. The anthology will also be made available online so that it can be used as an advocative tool for many years to come.

**Facilitator’s guide and experience sharing workshop**

By the end of May 2022, we plan to have a finished facilitator’s guide for poetry workshops for vulnerable groups. The guide is intended as an overall inspirational and hands-on guide with practical exercises. The guide will include the following chapters: Introduction to human rights, anti-stigma, and the importance of facilitating the voices of the vulnerable in society. There will also be a chapter on the benefits of using poetry as a therapeutic and empowering tool, as well as a tool for advocacy. The main emphasis, however, will be placed on describing tools for poetry-writing workshops (‘how-to’ establish mutual trust and motivation in the group, ‘how to’ encourage those who struggle, concrete writing exercises, ‘how to’ reach the final goal of a finished poem, closing of workshop and evaluation exercises). The facilitator’s guide will make it easy for like-minded NGOs, government staff and educational institutions to implement these methods into their own work. The poetry workshops are cheap to implement and hence it will be easy to get started once they participated in the training and got the guide. The guide and the experiences collected in this intervention will be shared with representatives from like-minded NGO’s, selected educational institutions and government ground staff in a workshop hosted by PLK to enable other important actors working in some way with vulnerable young mothers and/or vulnerable targets groups to undertake similar methods or participate in raising the voices expressed in the anthology develop in this intervention.

The approach is innovative and bold. With this partnership, we hope to create a foundation for experience-sharing, methods development, and a foundation for advocacy, where the anthology, as well as the facilitator’s guide, would bring out a stronger voice of the vulnerable, which would be taken more seriously by stakeholders, be it the public or government actors.

**Time plan**

**January:** Planning of the intervention, development of first draft program and guidelines for poetry workshops (based on previous experience and existing draft produced by Karen and with input from Kenyan partner).

Poetry workshops in Machakos, Kenya carried out by Karen. Evaluation of workshops. Lessons learned report (by Camilla Legendre / 100%) to be made to be incorporated in the facilitator’s guide.

**February - March**: Selection of poems, graphic design, production, and printing of the anthology in both English and local language to reach as broad an audience as possible.

**April - May**: Further development of guidelines (facilitator’s guides) in online consultations between partners and with the support from Karen.

**June**: Launch in Kenya of the anthology. The launch will include not only readings from the anthology by adolescent mothers, high-level keynote speakers but also presentations on human rights and anti-stigma with an aim of creating a room for discussion of the role of duty bearers. Further, a presentation of the importance of mental health will be made with an emphasis on ‘busting the myths’ and the importance of recognition of the basic humanity of all.

**July**: Experience sharing workshop for NGOs, the selected educational institutions, as well as carefully selected government ground staff interested in implementing poetry workshops. The workshop will include an introduction to the manual developed in this project along with training in how to use creative products as advocacy tools. All participants from the workshops will be supported with materials to undertake their own low-cost budget workshops.

**September:** Evaluation.

1. Intervention-related information work in Denmark

This project is independent, but there is a strong link in terms of communication in Denmark, where we have obtained a grant from ‘Danida Oplysningspuljen’ for publication and marketing in Denmark, especially to cover the costs of events around Denmark to promote an anthology. With the information work, we plan to expand and challenge the general Danish public’s (especially elderly people aged 65+ who are interested in literature) understanding of the conditions mothers live under on the street of Machakos and to add to their knowledge of SDG 3, 5, 10 and 17. In particular, we wish to challenge the perception that partners - individuals or organizations – from the South do not make an active effort to change the conditions under which they live.