



Young Women LEARN - Year 1

It's been a busy, productive and exciting Year 1 for our Young Women LEARN Project. We are pleased to share our efforts and amazing progress we've achieved together with the incredible adolescent girls and young women we work with. Read below for highlights of the project this year, links to LEARN reports, to see what to expect for Year 2, and to read an update on PrEP research.

Young Women Lead, Evidence, Advocate, Research, Network (LEARN) project is a two-year project funded by a grant from the United States Department of State as part of the DREAMS Innovation Challenge, managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI). LEARN, led by the ATHENA Initiative and our community partners PIPE and ICWEA, aims to promote an HIV prevention agenda informed by meaningful participation of adolescent girls and young women in research. By doing this, the project is filling a gap in the evidence base that is critical to the success of PrEP as an HIV prevention tool for adolescent girls and young women.

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LEARN is a tremendously vital and timely project given the HIV epidemiological and PrEP context in Kenya and Uganda as it will develop a robust, relevant knowledge base to inform PrEP roll-out and implementation while also partnering with

adolescent girls and young women as change agents and leaders in their communities.



Participants show off their personalized 'report card' with personal messages that were meant to affirm the Ambassadors as leaders.

LEARN Materials

We want to be sure you didn't miss our last project update. Read our latest [project update](#) and [workshop report](#) to find out more about our training workshop and launch event held in Nairobi in May 2017.

We have developed a PrEP factsheet designed for adolescent girls and young women that is being used by LEARN and its partner organizations. If you are interested in also using the factsheet for AGYW please get in touch with ATHENA (kristenldegraaf@gmail.com).

We conducted a desk review of PrEP research, advocacy and implementation in relation to adolescent girls and young women, and roll-out in Kenya and Uganda - [A Review of the PrEP Research and Evidence Landscape in Kenya and Uganda for](#)

Determined Resilient Empowered AIDS-Free Mentored Safe



LEARN Year 1 Review

[AGYW](#). This is updated regularly as new research emerges for PrEP and adolescent girls and young women.

Highlights of Year 1

Successes:

39 policy makers, decision makers and service providers engaged in dialogue with LEARN Ambassadors.

5 publications

5 civil society engagements by LEARN Ambassadors

78 AGYW applying skills through advocacy, mentoring and peer education

10 Ambassadors recruited, active, and reported strengthened skills and improved knowledge

103 stakeholders engaged through LEARN activities

1 event held

1081 AGYW reached and participating in mobilization activities

48 safe spaces used or created for mobilization

106 Peer Mobilizers recruited and actively engaged in their communities *

LEARN Ambassadors and Peer Mobilizers - we have recruited 10 LEARN Ambassadors to lead the project. In May 2017, the LEARN Ambassadors came together to be trained in advocacy, research, HIV prevention, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The LEARN Ambassadors have identified 100 Peer Mobilizers who are adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 years in their communities. The Peer Mobilizers receive ongoing education and support from the LEARN Ambassadors. The Peer Mobilizers in turn share information about PrEP and HIV prevention with their own networks and communities.

The best way to reach other young women to understand their needs, desires, and preferences for PrEP, is through the people who understand them better than anyone else – other young women like themselves. The LEARN Ambassadors embody this principle and have done an incredible job reaching other young women in their community.

Advocacy is a big part of the role of the LEARN Ambassadors. LEARN Ambassadors have been able to attend meetings and events to advocate for changes or issues that are important to adolescent girls and young women and HIV prevention and to better understand processes that affect their lives.

LEARN Workshop and Project Launch in Nairobi -

LEARN Ambassadors had the opportunity to articulate their HIV prevention priorities at a launch event attended by partners, donors and governments. We welcomed partners from PEPFAR, DREAMS, JSI, UNAIDS, and community based partners to also reaffirm their commitment to young women's leadership in HIV prevention strategies and tools.

The LEARN Ambassadors used this opportunity to call for:

- Commitment to put adolescent girls and young women at the center and forefront of research and policy enactment
- Investment in leadership opportunities for adolescent girls and young women
- HIV prevention agenda centered on the holistic needs of adolescent girls and young women

Mobilization activities – community mobilization by the LEARN Ambassadors includes a goal of recruiting 10 Peer Mobilizers each which the LEARN Ambassadors are currently working towards. We developed two Factsheets for mobilization activities, a Young Women LEARN Project Factsheet and a PrEP Factsheet. The Factsheets have been well received and continue to be used beyond the LEARN Project. University of Washington's DREAMS-IC project PriYA printed 1000 of the pamphlets and

*NB total recruited, some have dropped out and been replaced but we count each AGYW that gets involved

circulated them to the nurses who are conducting PrEP counseling and delivery at 11 facilities in Kisumu.



Nurses from PrIYA with LEARN PrEP pamphlets.

Where is PrEP Research?

We are entering a new landscape of HIV prevention where PrEP has been marketed and celebrated as a new and promising HIV prevention tool for ‘high-risk’ populations including adolescent girls and young women. With strong evidence for the efficacy and effectiveness of PrEP, **it is essential to understand the context from the perspective and lived reality of adolescent girls and young women.**

There continues to be important questions to ask around PrEP and AGYW and more importantly, questions to be answered. Our PrEP desk review summarizes the latest research and discussions around PrEP for adolescent girls and young women.

Facing Challenges

Adherence challenges, failure to adequately account for young women’s priorities, the recent debate around combination ART safety in pregnancy, and high drop off rates of young women started on PrEP are all challenges that require urgent attention and action. Stakeholders are working to strengthen and exploring better strategies to promote access and adherence, and to provide effective HIV prevention for adolescent girls and young women

It is vital that as PrEP guidelines are developed, and access rolled out in different settings, the voices, needs and priorities of adolescent girls and young women are heard and influential. PrEP has the potential to be a powerful new tool for adolescent

girls and young women, but only if it is delivered in a way that is accessible, supported and respectful. As a new tool, ongoing research is essential to answer remaining questions, and all adolescent girls and young women have the right to access full, understandable and accurate information about PrEP.

PrEP readiness and literacy - there is continued need for clear, accurate, and non-stigmatizing language on PrEP for adolescent girls and young women.

Combination ART recommendations – in light of a new British Medical Journal article, there are questions to be answered around PrEP safety among pregnant women. ATHENA is tracking the debate and research around this as it relates to PrEP for adolescent girls and young women.

Research - the global evidence base around adolescent girls and young women’s knowledge and preferences regarding PrEP is limited, and our LEARN research study, starting soon, will work to address this gap.

Adherence and drop off - these continue to be recognized as a significant challenge particularly with adolescent girls and young women.

What’s to Come

We eagerly anticipate Year 2 of LEARN, where LEARN Ambassadors will lead research to gather data through community dialogues, use research to develop advocacy priorities and strategies and advocate through disseminating research findings, attending meetings and conferences, engaging with stakeholders and using social media. LEARN Peer Mobilizers will continue to raise awareness around PrEP and sexual and reproductive health and rights in their communities.