



Empowering Adolescents Through Digital Innovation: A Path to Potential Success

The USAID ARH Project: An Overview

In Nepal, where nearly a quarter of the population comprises young people aged 10-19, the need for targeted interventions supporting their growth and development is more critical than ever. Recognizing this, the USAID Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH) Project, a five-year initiative funded by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and led by CARE Nepal and its consortium partners Howard Delafield International (HDI), Association of Youth Organization Nepal (AYON), JHPIEGO and Nepal CRS Company, has embarked on a mission to help Nepali adolescents realize their full potential. The USAID ARH Project aims to empower adolescents in 60 municipalities in 11 districts across Madhesh, Lumbini and Karnali provinces by promoting healthy family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) behaviors.



The primary goal of USAID ARH is to support adolescents to reach their full potential and strengthen public systems and private entities to create an enabling environment for healthy ARH behaviors through its three objectives:

1. Provide accurate, relevant FP/RH information and behavior change support to adolescents and educate their parents, teachers, and communities, addressing current social norms for adoption of healthy reproductive health behaviors.
2. Improve availability and accessibility of quality FP/RH services for adolescents by identifying and addressing key gaps in current services and in systems that determine effective access and utilization of adolescent-friendly services and products.
3. Institutionalize successful data-driven approaches and mechanisms addressing adolescent reproductive health through the public

and private sectors by improving health system governance.

The Adolescent Reproductive Health message will be delivered through multiple channels and models such as:

Interpersonal Communication: To provide adolescents and families with ARH information while training near peers and health service providers to improve counseling and access to adolescent-friendly services. The strategy focuses on overcoming barriers to reproductive health through targeted behavior change interventions, ensuring adolescents receive respectful, non-judgmental care.

Group based engagement and community dialogue: This approach uses group-based interventions, including Social Action and Analysis (SAA) modules, to promote social norm changes and tailored family planning and reproductive health education for adolescents. The strategy targets diverse groups such as adolescent girls, boys, married young mothers, LGBTQI+ individuals, and adolescents with disabilities to ensure inclusive and effective communication and empowerment.

Community mobilization: To engage key influencers like parents, community, and religious leaders in promoting healthy reproductive behaviors through group discussions and intergenerational dialogues. Additionally, adolescent girls will lead community campaigns to challenge harmful social norms, with support from boys' groups, advocating for better reproductive health resources and policy changes.

Mass and social Media engagement: Leveraging social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, along with local influencers and mass communication methods, to spread educational messages on adolescent reproductive health. These efforts aim to promote positive behaviors, challenge taboos, and reach a wide audience.

The project's focus on digital empowerment is particularly significant in Nepal, where access to information and services can be limited, especially in rural and remote areas. By providing adolescents with the tools and resources they need to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, USAID Adolescent Reproductive Health is helping to create a brighter, healthier future for the nation. A vital component of this mission is the innovative use of digital interventions, designed and developed in partnership with Howard Delafield International (HDI), a global behavioral insights firm.

Digital Interventions: Bridging Gaps and Building Futures

With the primary role of HDI, the project is managing the design, development, and launch of several key digital initiatives, each tailored to address Nepalese adolescents' unique needs and challenges. These interventions include:

- **kikikuka.com Web Portal:** This comprehensive web portal provides essential information on safety, relationships, sex, career, and lifestyle. More than just a resource, kikikuka.com connects adolescents with quality-assured, adolescent-friendly products and services, including counseling, pharmacies, and online and offline shops. By providing easy access

to accurate and relevant information, the portal empowers young people to make informed decisions that positively impact their lives.

- **Girls' Hostel Interactive Digital Game:** Gamification is a powerful tool for education and empowerment. The Girls' Hostel game offers a virtual world where adolescent girls can explore real-life situations, practice decision-making, and enhance their knowledge on FP/RH. The game's engaging format is designed to build self-efficacy and encourage healthy behaviors, making it an effective educational tool that resonates with young audiences.



- **@ThatGirlEkta Virtual Influencer Campaign:** Hosted on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, this campaign leverages the popularity of virtual influencers to inform about FP/RH messages. Ekta, the game's protagonist, is a relatable and influential figure for adolescents, guiding them toward positive health behaviors. The campaign's strategic use of social media ensures widespread engagement, drawing more young people to the project's digital platforms.

- **Digit on Wheels (DoW):** The initiative uses the project's digital platforms for adolescents to bridge the digital divide, especially in rural areas. This mobile outreach program engages communities through interactive demos, entertainment, and educational activities. By combining digital tools with in-person engagement, Digit on Wheels raises awareness and fosters a sense of connection and involvement among adolescents and their families.



One of the critical components of this intervention is the public-private partnership; it is designed, developed, and implemented with the active participation of various private and public entities. These include the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN), Nepal CRS Company, and various other non-government, private and business entities at the field level. This

collaborative approach ensures sustainability and maximizes its impact.

Public-private partnerships play a critical role in enhancing the effectiveness of digital interventions. By leveraging the expertise and resources of the private sector, these partnerships facilitate the sharing of knowledge, technology, and best practices, ensuring that digital solutions are implemented efficiently and sustainably. Furthermore, these collaborations help build trust and credibility among stakeholders, which is essential for the project's long-term success.

Moreover, the potential success of these interventions lies in their ability to adapt to adolescents' evolving needs. As these digital platforms grow and expand, they will be crucial in shaping a generation of empowered, informed, and healthy young people in Nepal.

Anticipated Challenges and Bottlenecks

Despite the promising outlook, Nepal's digital transformation is challenging. The need for a comprehensive public policy framework presents significant obstacles to successfully implementing digital interventions. Clear regulations and guidelines are crucial to avoid legal ambiguities, compliance issues, and potential misuse of technology. The absence of data protection laws, for instance, raises privacy concerns, which can undermine public trust, particularly in platforms dealing with sensitive information like adolescent reproductive health.

To effectively address these challenges, a multi-faceted approach is necessary:

- **Policy Development:** Robust public policies that provide clear guidelines for implementing digital interventions are needed. This includes creating laws that protect data privacy, ensure cybersecurity, and promote equitable access to digital services. Collaboration between the government, private sector, and international partners is key to drafting comprehensive and forward-looking policies.
- **Capacity Building:** To bridge the knowledge gap, concerned officials need training and exposure to various best practices. Establishing specialized units within government bodies dedicated to digital transformation can ensure a focused approach to implementing digital initiatives.
- **Public-private** partnerships can help share knowledge, resources, and technology, ensuring the effective and sustainable implementation of digital interventions.
- **Awareness and Advocacy:** Raising awareness about the benefits of digital interventions among policymakers and the public is essential to building a supportive environment for these initiatives.

By addressing these bottlenecks through strategic planning and collaboration, Nepal can enhance public services and empower its citizens, particularly the younger generation, to thrive in the digital age.

In conclusion, the USAID ARH Project, through its digital interventions, is not just empowering adolescents—it is laying the foundation for a brighter, healthier future for Nepal. As we look ahead, the continued support and expansion of such initiatives will be vital in ensuring that every young person in Nepal has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. By embracing digital innovation

and fostering collaboration between public and private entities, Nepal can overcome its challenges and create a more inclusive and prosperous society for all.

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